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# Canned Food Carcerality:

# Prisoner and Refugee Foodways and Memories of Camp

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in Asian American Studies

by

Christine Van Alyson Yamasaki

2021

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Canned Food Carcerality:

Prisoner and Refugee Foodways and Memories of Camp

by

Christine Van Alyson Yamasaki

Master of Arts in Asian American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2021

Professor Valerie J. Matsumoto, Co-Chair

Professor Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ, Co-Chair

Although scholars have documented the experiences of Japanese Americans during World War II and Vietnamese refugees following the Vietnam War, there is no existing research that looks at the intersections between the two. Inspired by my own family's history, this project investigates the carceral connections between two groups—Japanese Americans incarcerated in U.S. concentration camps during World War II and Vietnamese refugees following the end of the Vietnam War. By looking at how the wartime logic of these U.S. racialized wars in Asia extend domestically to impact the Japanese American incarcerees and Vietnamese refugees, my research analyzes the ways in which the camps function as transitional spaces of racialization. I use the

lens of food and foodways to show that the foods served in the camps encoded the dehumanization of these racialized groups of people.

Centering the stories of those who survived these camps helps to elucidate the lasting impact of the carceral experience and the ways that memories of food can become tied to traumatic experiences. By serving as a counternarrative to linear progressive narratives of history, memories of food and foodways retain the potency of these alienating experiences and demonstrate how incarcerees and refugees asserted their agency through food inventiveness and protests to maintain their humanity. Their stories help us to stay attuned to the methods by which people find ways to survive under abject circumstances and demand to be recognized as humans.

The thesis of Christine Van Alyson Yamasaki is approved.

Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi

Letritia Rae Miyake

Valerie J. Matsumoto, Committee Co-Chair

Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2021

For my family,

with special dedications to my grandfather, James Yamasaki,

and my bà ngoại, Trà Bùi.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As this project comes to close, I find myself struggling to find the right words to adequately express how grateful I feel for everyone who has helped me reach this point. I apologize to anyone I have inadvertently omitted.

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# INTRODUCTION

**(I was not a missed steak)**

I owe my life to a steak. My Japanese American father, who was born in Chicago, happened to meet my Vietnamese mother, who was born in Paris, because they were neighbors in Newport Beach, California. One day upon arriving home from work, my mother heard a commotion coming from one of the townhome patios overhead: "Excuse me, what are you doing making all that noise?" My father yelled down, "I'm barbequing up some steaks! Would you like to join me for dinner?" She agreed, and as they say, the rest was history!

Both this project and I were born from the collisions of multiple histories. My family's history is a unique example of an entanglement that occurred due to the interference of the U.S., Japanese, and French empires in Asia: France's colonization of Indochina; the United States' relationship with Japan through World War II, and U.S. intervention in Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Being able to trace my existence with regards to the collision of empires and discovering that I am a product of foodways spurred me to begin making connections among food, history, and memory. Beyond food itself, foodways—"the whole pattern of what is eaten, when, how, and what it means,"—provide a way to study family, community, and societal relations.[1] Thus, the study of food and foodways—ideas and practices related to food—offers a method to revisit memory with all the complexities that entails.

Using my own family's history as a jumping-off point, this research argues that food and foodways have the potential to provide a lens through which to analyze the effects of U.S. imperialism and the carceral spaces integral to this modern empire. Specifically, I investigate the

[1] Susan Kalčik, "Ethnic Foodways in America: Symbol and the Performance of Identity," in Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell, *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States: The Performance of Group Identity* (University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 38.

connections between two groups—Japanese Americans incarcerated in U.S. prison camps during World War II and Vietnamese in refugee camps following the end of the Vietnam War. American racialized wars in Asia connect these two camp spaces as "transitional spaces of racialization," created to hold these groups of people outside the protection of the nation until the government decided how to (re)incorporate them.[2] By linking these two carceral spaces, I analyze the connection between the global context of American war-making abroad and the repercussions of these overseas relations within the domestic borders of the United States. Further, I argue that by linking history and memory with foodways we can analyze the ways in which incarcerated people experienced trauma that informed how they understand their own identity and sense of belonging. This trauma stems in part from the experiences of dehumanization through food deprivation and alienation in the camp spaces that were in effect an extension of the racialized logic of American wars in the Pacific. Hence, the ways in which people were treated at the site of food provision makes visible the logic of racialization and thus dehumanization in these carceral spaces.

Unfortunately, by the time I became interested in history and then subsequently my own family's history, all of my grandparents had already passed. My paternal Japanese American grandfather and my maternal Vietnamese grandmother were both greatly impacted by wars involving the United States in Asia. During World War II, my grandfather, James Noboru Yamasaki, was pulled out of his freshman year at UC Berkeley to go with his family to the Gila River incarceration camp in Arizona because they were Japanese. Eventually, he was drafted into the U.S. Army and served overseas as a second lieutenant in the Counter Intelligence Corps, in Allied occupied Japan.

[2] In conversation with Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ.

My Vietnamese grandmother, Trà Bùi, was in Vietnam during World War II when the Allies were bombing Saigon. In order to avoid the bombs, she, alongside other families, would flee from the city to the countryside at night. During the Vietnam War, my grandmother was able to make it out of Vietnam on one of the last helicopters leaving for Guam in 1975. From Guam she went to Camp Pendleton in California, to Texas, and then to Canada, before finally settling in Paris to reunite with her husband, who was a Vietnamese diplomat living in France.

Since I could not directly ask my grandparents about their life experiences, I turned to the next closest source—my parents—to help fill these gaps in my understanding. My parents recount the life stories of their parents with very different tones—my third-generation Japanese American father speaks of his father's life experiences calmly with a sense of pride, while my Vietnamese mother recounts with bitterness and vehement resentment the struggles her mother had to endure. I have had to rely on the fragmentary recollections of my parents and several family documents to search for the answers to questions I will never be able to ask my grandparents. Thus, as my parents recounted their memories of their own parents, I listened "for unsaid things by relying on other senses such as feelings and emotions."[3]

As I engage with my family's history, I am utilizing a method that some might consider "me-search." In his article, "Mẹ-Search, Hauntings, and Critical Distance," Vinh Nguyen emphasizes the "value and necessity of subjective experience in the process of critical, academic scholarship" in order to dispute dismissive comments from his colleagues and members of his department who attacked his work because he is "the 'refugee' Vietnamese who studies Vietnamese refugees."[4] He wrote, "A frustrated (writer-blocked) but well meaning colleague

[3] Yến Lê Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(Es)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 21.

[4] Vinh Nguyen, "Mẹ-Search, Hauntings, and Critical Distance," *Life Writing* 12, no. 4 (October 2, 2015): 470, https://doi.org/10.1080/14484528.2014.915285.

tells me that it must be 'easy' to study something I am so close to: that is to say, it does not take any form of psychic, emotional or intellectual 'labour' for me to, essentially, write about 'myself.'"[5]

Nguyen shines a spotlight on the fact that "[t]he underlying assumption is that when a *racialized*—because, more often than not it *is* a problem of skin colour—scholar like myself researches and writes about topics closely related to him or herself, he or she inevitably indulges in 'me-search' rather than 'research.'"[6] By countering the ways in which some academics might patronizingly refer to this kind of work as "me-search," he reclaims the term and emphasizes the important academic contributions of personal narratives. Nguyen says: "What I intuitively know is that personal experiences and histories can become frames of analysis that are valuable to intellectual and academic work, frames that are just as illuminating, generative, and rigorous as any that rely upon 'scientific' methodologies, high theory, or forms of systemic, 'objective' analysis."[7] Recognizing the ways in which my family's history has become my own "frame of analysis," Nguyen's method of me-search has helped me to work backward from myself to find the inter-ethnic historical connections between the two sides of my family. Thus, my personal ties to this subject have motivated me to pursue a comparative project that demonstrates the lasting impacts of two racialized American wars in Asia—World War II and the Vietnam War—by using the lens of food and foodways to link the carceral spaces of the Japanese American prison camps and the Vietnamese refugee camps.

**Methodology**

For this project, I have conducted six oral history interviews with second-generation

[5] Nguyen, "Mẹ-Search, Hauntings, and Critical Distance," 469.
[6] Nguyen, "Mẹ-Search, Hauntings, and Critical Distance," 470.
[7] Nguyen, "Mẹ-Search, Hauntings, and Critical Distance," 470

Japanese Americans (Nisei) and Vietnamese refugees and will analyze textual memoire and cultural works in order to supplement my interviews and better understand the social aspects of food as they demonstrate the impact of the carceral experience on identity.[8] Cultural works and oral history interviews can deliver life stories in different ways, such that memories in interviews must conform to spoken storytelling while memories in literature adapt to the form of literary genre conventions. Nevertheless, both kinds of memory allow me to position the ways in which Japanese American incarcerees and Vietnamese refugees used creative expressions of agency through food inventiveness to resist and counteract their dehumanization via food provision while in the camps.[9]

By centering the stories of my interviewees, I follow the way that Yến Lê Espiritu, "Emphasiz[es] the range of Vietnamese perspectives both before and after the war, [and] critically examines the relationship between history and memory, not as facts but as narratives."[10] In focusing on the narratives of both Japanese Americans and Vietnamese Americans, my goal is to highlight their stories and show the lasting impact of their carceral experiences. Although they are two disparate social groups created by differing political events, foodways function as a channel through which to draw comparisons and connections between these carceral spaces by analyzing the ways in which trauma becomes tied to memories of food and thus impacts the formation of individual and communal identity. Recognizing the ways in which food memories become tied to the trauma of the carceral experience, helps elucidate how these traumatic memories becomes a sort of embodied condition that can resurface in various

[8] I also conducted oral history interviews with my parents, Craig Yamasaki and Van Bui. Although I do not directly quote from the interviews, the stories that they shared with me have informed my understanding of family history.

[9] In conversation with Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ.

[10] Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 3.

forms within the everyday life of the camp survivors.[11] Their stories help us to stay attuned to the methods by which people find ways to survive under abject circumstances and demand to be recognized as humans.

I had the opportunity to conduct oral history interviews with two Japanese American Nisei men who experienced camp when they were young boys. Minoru "Min" Tonai had just entered into his teenage years when he was incarcerated with his family at the Amache camp in Colorado. Kiyo Yoshida, on the other hand, was a bit younger at seven years old when he was incarcerated at the Poston camp in Arizona. Due to the advanced age of the Nisei generation, it is very difficult to find those still alive to tell their stories.

In Japanese American history, generational identity is very important because the majority of Japanese Americans residing in the United States today are descendants of the Japanese who immigrated to the United States between the mid-1880s and 1924 when the Johnson-Reed Act prevented further immigration from Asia.[12] The restriction of further Japanese immigrants due to "nativist discrimination, legal restrictions, and tense U.S.-Japan diplomatic relations,"[13] created cohorts of Japanese Americans that corresponded with distinctive historical generations who "were born and grew up around the same time and have similar historical experiences." Thus, ethnologist Takeyuki Tsuda explains that "the nisei of the second immigrant generation were born between 1915 and the 1940s (Spickard 1996:68) and correspond with either the Greatest Generation who fought in World War II or what is called the 'Silent Generation' (born between 1925 to 1942)." Subsequently, the third generation (sansei) are

[11] In conversation with Tritia Toyota.

[12] Takeyuki Tsuda, *Japanese American Ethnicity: In Search of Heritage and Homeland Across Generations*, Reprint edition (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 7; After the passing of the Immigration Act of 1924, the only group that was able to immigrate after were Filipinos due to their status as US nationals.

[13] Valerie J. Matsumoto, *City Girls: The Nisei Social World in Los Angeles, 1920-1950*, Reprint edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2.

generally of the Baby-Boomer generation, and the fourth generation (yonsei) are of the Generation X or Millennial Generation.[14]

Given that more than seventy-five years have passed since World War II, I feel very fortunate to have been able to speak with Yoshida and Tonai, who are in their late eighties and early nineties respectively. Besides having a hard time finding Nisei to interview, trying to conduct interviews in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic added an additional layer of difficulty to this interview process because it was not safe to interact with elders who are the most susceptible to the virus. For the safety of everyone involved, I conducted all of my interviews remotely over the phone or on Zoom.[15] Advanced age can also bring about another set of challenges. Yoshida, who is now in his late eighties, has Alzheimer's so I had a very interesting conversation with him over the phone mediated by his wife, Janet Yoshida. At one point during the interview, Kiyo joked, "I told you, my wife knows more about me than I do!" To which Janet countered, "Actually, he does know but he can't remember." She patiently helped Kiyo to navigate through my questions and completed the stories that were lost to him.[16] It was clear to me through our conversation that Janet knew Kiyo's stories as if they were her own. Before he developed Alzheimer's they must have discussed his life experiences often for her to have gained this level of understanding and fluency with his life stories.[17]

To supplement the Japanese American oral history interviews that I conducted, I turned to the archive of oral history interviews conducted by Densho, as well as a range of archival and

[14] Tsuda, *Japanese American Ethnicity*, 9.

[15] I conducted all my interviews over the phone except for the Zoom interview I had with Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ.

[16] Janet Yoshida has a great sense of humor. She told me, "I said to a group of friends…'next time when I come back, I'm marrying a Chinese man!' Chinese men know how to cook. Japanese men are hopeless! [Kiyo laughs]."

[17] Although I do not cite from Kiyo Yoshida's interviews directly, speaking with him and Janet have informed the way I think about the lasting impact of memory.

documentary materials, including memoirs written by Japanese Americans such as *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and *Desert Exile* by Yoshiko Uchida, to resurrect their voices.[18] Although I could not interview my grandfather, I am lucky to have his annotated camp journal from when he was at the Gila River camp.[19] Thus, I engage in a posthumous dialogue with my grandfather and refer to his camp journal to include his experiences in my study.

Whereas generations are easily definable for Japanese Americans because of their restricted period of immigration, in the case of Vietnamese Americans this is not as clear because the majority of Vietnamese entered the United States as refugees in various waves that spanned two decades. The first wave, occurring in 1975, comprised of "130,000 exiles of war, most of them government officials, relatives of U.S. citizens, or skilled professionals evacuated en masse within the span of a few days."[20] The following waves began when "[i]n 1978 and 1979, the image of the 'boat person' emerged on the world stage as Vietnamese fled in both small rickety boats and large merchant ships," followed by a third steady wave initiated by the Orderly Departure Program through the 1980s; the fourth wave catalyzed by the American Homecoming Act of 1987 preceded the fifth and final wave that occurred around 1990 with the Humanitarian Operation program.[21]

The Vietnamese refugees that I interviewed left Vietnam in the first or second waves and arrived in the United States between 1975 and 1982. I interviewed three Vietnamese women (Bình-Minh Trần, Mỹ-Châu Lê, and Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ) and one Vietnamese man (Phù Sa)

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[18] https://www.densho.org/about-densho/

[19] What I mean here by "annotated camp journal" is that my grandfather typed up the original version of his journal written on the papers of his father's business accounting journals and then went back in and annotated his memories in bold font to distinguish between the original text and his additions. My father has my grandfather's original hand-written camp journal tucked away safely in his garage.

[20] Phuong Tran Nguyen, *Becoming Refugee American: The Politics of Rescue in Little Saigon*, Illustrated edition (University of Illinois Press, 2017), "Introduction," Kindle.

[21] Jana K. Lipman, *In Camps: Vietnamese Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Repatriates* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020), 12; Nguyen, *Becoming Refugee American*, "Introduction," Kindle.

who are currently in their mid-fifties to early sixties. Most of my Vietnamese interviewees preferred to keep their names private, so the names Phù Sa, Bình-Minh Trần, and Mỹ-Châu Lê are pseudonyms.[22] Besides leaving at different times, each of my interviewees also arrived at different refugee camps in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Guam. Of these four locations, the camps in Guam were the only ones run by the United States because Guam was, and still is, a U.S. territory. Anthropologist Liisa H. Malkki explains: "As far as has been possible to determine, it is in the Europe emerging from World War II, that certain key techniques for managing mass displacements of people first became standardized and then globalized."[23] Thus, although I am primarily focusing on American-run carceral spaces, applying her concept of refugee camps "as a standardized, generalizable technology of power" allows me to draw connections between all the refugee camps to elucidate the conditions and inner workings of these carceral spaces.[24]

To further illustrate the experiences from within the refugee camps, I reference archival sources like government documents and newspapers as well as several cultural works by Vietnamese refugees like Thanhha Lai's book*, Inside Out and Back Again,* and Timothy Bui's film, *Green Dragon*. The carefully crafted memories delivered through the film and memoirs help bring into focus several details from the stories of my Vietnamese interviewees. By using these works together in conjunction with the oral history interviews, a clearer image of Vietnamese resilience emerges.

The conversational structure of an oral history interview requires the interviewee to

[22] Phù Sa is the pen name of my interviewee. Although by English naming convention it would appears that Phù is his first name and Sa is his last name, my mother explained to me that this is actually a compound name—Phù Sa. Thus, I will refer to him by his preferred pen name throughout the paper.

[23] Liisa H. Malkki, "Refugees and Exile: From 'Refugee Studies' to the National Order of Things," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24, no. 1 (1995): 497, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.24.100195.002431.

[24] Malkki, "Refugees and Exile," 498.

(re)construct their memories into a narrative so that they can remember and their listener can understand. Vinh Nguyen explains, "The peril of telling one's story, of turning one's gaze inward, is that any sense or semblance of a unified coherent self begins to crack, to fissure, to break. The simple fact is that one's 'life' is not simple."[25] Memories are constantly changing as one tries to piece together a narrative, so the act of revisiting a memory places individuals in a very vulnerable state. Because speaking about one's life experiences and revisiting past memories is not an easy task and does not come without risks, I am grateful and feel very honored that my interviewees have entrusted me with their stories.

**Historical Background**

Analyzing the carceral spaces occupied by Japanese Americans and Vietnamese refugees can reveal the hidden narratives of war that the United States conceals by showcasing only stories that cast the nation in a positive light. The incarceration of Japanese Americans and the U.S. defeat in the Vietnam War are two blemishes on the United States' nationalistic historical narrative that are constantly being hidden by tales of victory and benevolence. Although the outcomes of World War II and the Vietnam War were very different for the United States, there are important similarities worth noting. For one thing, each of these wars produced a particular kind of empire and carceral space. The U.S. empire emerging from World War II was at its zenith. Through victory, the "'good war' master narrative of World War II" emerged, overshadowing the creation of the Japanese Americans concentration camps.[26] In contrast, the status of the U.S. empire following its defeat in the Vietnam war was shaken although remained intact. Arguably at "its imperial nadir," the carceral spaces of the refugee camps become zones

[25] Nguyen, "Mẹ-Search, Hauntings, and Critical Distance," 474.
[26] Espiritu, *Body Counts,* 1.

of recuperation for the U.S.'s tarnished imperial reputation.[27]

These carceral spaces are a paradoxical zone of exclusion and inclusion. The very existence of these spaces simultaneously highlights the failings of the United States, while operating as a site to recuperate the reputation of the nation.[28] In these camps, Japanese Americans and Vietnamese refugees existed outside of what Malkki calls "the national order of things."[29] Stripped of the protections of citizenship and national belonging while isolated in these transitional spaces, both of these populations existed as problems to be solved until they could be dealt with and (re)integrated into the nation.

Long before the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese during World War II, growing prejudice against and suspicion of Asian immigrants within the United States had led to the "Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Supreme Court ruling against Japanese naturalization four decades later. Accusations of Japanese immigrant communities being 'outposts of [the Japanese] empire' were not uncommon in the public discourse."[30] Ultimately, the bombing of Pearl Harbor became justification for Executive Order 9066 and the removal of 120,000 people of Japanese descent from the west coast of the United States and their confinement in prison camps. Although these camps were once referred to euphemistically as "relocation centers" or the widely used term "internment camp," a more accurate name for these confinement sites is "concentration camp" or "prison camp."[31] It is important to change the language by which we

[27] Lipman, *In Camps*, 6.
[28] Fujitani, *Race for Empire,* 109; Nguyễn-võ "Almost Futures"; Malkki, "Refugees and Exile."
[29] Malkki, "Refugees and Exile," 516.
[30] Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America*, *Between Two Empires* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 4.
[31] Roger Daniels, "Words Do Matter: A Note on Inappropriate Terminology and the Incarceration of the Japanese Americans," in *Nikkei in the Pacific Northwest: Japanese Americans & Japanese Canadians in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Louis Fiset and Gail Nomura (Seattle: Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest and University of Washington Press, 2005), pp. 183–207; see also "The Power of Words Handbook: A Guide to Language about Japanese Americans in World War II," https://jacl.org/power-of-words.

discuss these historical injustices, because "[c]ontinued use of these misnomers would distort history...The choice of term must reflect the fact that the inmates were not free to walk out without getting shot."[32] Included in this group of Japanese descendants placed in prison camps were the first-generation Japanese immigrants who were ineligible for citizenship, referred to as "Issei," and their U.S.-born children, the second-generation Japanese American "Nisei."

The incarceration of Japanese Americans created what might be called a global public relations nightmare for the United States because as historian T. Fujitani explains, following the incarceration of Japanese Americans, there was concern "that Japan was attempting to run the war into a 'holy crusade of the yellow and brown people for freedom from the white race,' and [Edwin O. Reischauer] feared that 'the Japanese might well be able to transform the struggle in Asia in reality into a full-scale racial war."[33] Nazi racial extermination camps, Japanese American concentration camps, and the Japanese propaganda campaign "that represented the Allies as racist," show how World War II was a racialized war on a global scale.[34] Therefore, the reputation of the United States and "[t]he fate of all U.S. minorities, including the Japanese Americans, was tied to a larger propaganda campaign that tried to represent the United States as a nation that did not discriminate against any racial or ethnic minority."[35]

Thus, in order to clean up its reputation and reverse its recognizably racist policy, the U.S. government formulated a plan to reincorporate the confined Japanese back into society. A poorly devised loyalty questionnaire became the mechanism by which Japanese Americans

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[32] National Japanese American Historical Society (U.S.). 1995. *Due process: Americans of Japanese ancestry and the United States Constitution, 1787-1994*. San Francisco (1855 Folsom St., Suite 161, San Francisco, CA 94103-4232): National Japanese American Historical Society, 48, quoted in Civil Liberties Public Education Fund (CLPEF), "CLPEF Resolution Regarding Terminology," http://www.momomedia.com/CLPEF/backgrnd.html#Link%20to%20terminology.

[33] Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 104.

[34] Fujitani, *Race for Empire,* 104; In conversation with Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ.

[35] Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 13.

would be allowed to prove their allegiance to the nation via military service, and then reintegrate into the United States.[36] The success of the all-Japanese troops overseas ultimately served to strengthen the reputation of the United States at home and abroad. Their journey, from outside back to the inside of American society, was finalized when the nisei troops were solidified into American memory as "model soldiers and Americans."[37] Within a few years, Nisei were able to transition from "enemy alien" to "war hero," and the United States successfully elided the incarceration of Japanese Americans by highlighting their successes as *American* war heroes.[38] While the Nisei soldiers are remembered positively in the light of U.S. victory, the historical erasure of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, in the wake of U.S. defeat represent the ways in which racialized populations are remembered or intentionally forgotten in national historic narratives in order to design a narrative spotlighting only the most flattering events.

When Saigon fell to communist North Vietnam on April 30, 1975, South Vietnam ceased to exist, and the United States lost the Vietnam War. As the first major military loss of the U.S. Empire, the Vietnam War became a stain on the nationalistic narrative of progress. Thus, the Vietnam War exists in the nation's consciousness as "the war with the difficult memory."[39] As Yến Lê Espiritu states, to maintain control of the national historical narrative "in the absence of a liberated Vietnam and people, the U.S. government, academy, and mainstream media have produced a substitute: the freed and reformed Vietnamese refugees."[40] By shifting the focus to the refugees "as passive objects of sympathy that suffered not only the trauma of forced departure but also the boredom, uncertainty, despair, and helplessness induced by camp life,"[41]

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[36] Fujitani, *Race for Empire,* 6.
[37] Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 210.
[38] Fujitani, *Race for Empire.*
[39] Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 122 quoted in Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 1.
[40] Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 1.
[41] Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 50.

the general understanding of this population became "fixat[ed] on the refugees' purported fragile psychosocial and emotional state, discursively construct[ing] Vietnamese as 'passive, immobilized and pathetic.'"[42] Thus, by placing emphasis on the Vietnamese refugees as victims, the United States established itself as savior to bury the lost war under a humanitarian triumph.

The label of "refugee" has a complicated history. Espiritu explains: "In 1951…the U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugee officially defined 'refugee' as a person who 'is outside the country of his nationality' and who harbors a 'well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.'"[43] However "[i]n 1975, when the United States accepted more than 125,000 Vietnamese, the Ford administration"[44] was utilizing a method that the Eisenhower administration had found in the past to circumvent the quota system upheld by the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act—"Until the Refugee Act of 1980 was passed, 'The Executive Branch admitted Vietnamese not as refugees, but as 'parolees.'"[45] Thus, "[w]hile the media, popular culture, government records, and the men and women themselves commonly and repeatedly referred to the Hungarians, Cubans, and Vietnamese as refugees, legally they were parolees."[46] The mass acceptance of the political refugees and parolees into the country placed them in a precarious condition where they were accepted into the country but unwanted and thus vulnerable to incarceration and criminalization.[47]

Parolees are most vulnerable to criminalization and thus deportation until they attain full

[42] Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 50.
[43] Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 8.
[44] Lipman, *In Camps*, 16.
[45] Jana K. Lipman, "A Refugee Camp in America: Fort Chaffee and Vietnamese and Cuban Refugees, 1975-1982," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 33, no. 2 (2014): 60, https://doi.org/10.5406/jamerethnhist.33.2.0057.
[46] Lipman, *In Camps*, 17.
[47] In conversation with Valerie Matsumoto and Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ.

citizenship status. Becoming "permanent alien residents" does not provide the same levels of protection as citizenship as all the Southeast Asian deportation cases are of green card holders.[48] Nguyễn-võ explains that "while parolee status marked them immediately for special attention and possible criminalization, this condition is continued into their permanent resident status."[49] Unfortunately, opportunities to apply for citizenship become nullified if one commits a crime and "several thousand committed crimes or came in contact with the law before they had applied for or gained citizenship."[50] Thus, "[i]n 2017, [when] Donald Trump's Department of Homeland Security changed course" away from a 2008 memorandum signed between the U.S. and Vietnamese governments preventing the deportation of Vietnamese refugees and parolees, this vulnerability was exploited to deport the Vietnamese who "were in Southeast Asian camps or transited through the Orderly Departure Program."[51] It is important to keep in mind that, like the incarcerated Japanese Americans, the refugees had no choice but to stay in refugee camps, unable to leave unless permitted: "once in camps, Vietnamese were often confined behind barbed wire and eventually engaged in legalistic asylum proceedings, needing to prove that they faced political persecution in Vietnam."[52] Prior to being "processed," Vietnamese parolees were required to stay on the U.S. military bases or else they would be "subject to prosecution as an illegal alien."[53] Thus, Jana Lipman emphasized that "their legal identity as parolees rested on their detention on the base and willingness to wait for sponsorship, rather than their fear of political persecution."[54] Although they qualified as "refugees" under the basic legal definition of

[48] Lipman, "A Refugee Camp in America," 64-65; In conversation with Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ.
[49] In conversation with Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ.
[50] Lipman, *In Camps*, 233.
[51] Lipman, *In Camps,* 233-234.
[52] Lipman, *In Camps*, 10.
[53] "720 MP Bn. Keeps the Peace," *Helping Hand*, May 22, 1975: 3 [base newspaper located at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville] quoted in Lipman, "A Refugee Camp in America," 60.
[54] Lipman, "A Refugee Camp in America," 60.

refugee status, the terminology of "parolee" used in the Vietnamese context demonstrates the start of the criminalization of these Vietnamese within the carceral spaces of the camps.[55]

**Connecting across the gap in the literature**

Within the fields of Asian American Studies and Asian Studies, a great deal of research has been done to document the history and experiences of Japanese Americans during World War II and Vietnamese refugees following the Vietnam War. Scholars such as Yến Lê Espiritu (2014) and Eiichiro Azuma have paved the way for critical refugee studies and studies of transpacific migration.[56] However, because the histories of these ethnic groups are so different, there has yet to be research done examining the intersection between Japanese American and Vietnamese American experiences. I argue that the carceral spaces of the Japanese American concentration camps and the Vietnamese refugee camps can be connected by analyzing the domestic impact of the racialized wars fought by the United States in Asia—World War II and the Vietnam War.[57]

To make my argument comparing the experiences of two ethnic populations during two different wars, I turn towards the scholars who have opened up ways to connect the experiences of different groups in relation to one another.[58] In his book, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Koreans during World War II,* T. Fujitani takes a "comparative and transnational" approach to analyze the ways in which these populations were racialized during a time of total war. His work has opened up discussions about what happens to populations racialized as a result of the collisions of empire. Similarly, Lisa Lowe's concept of "intimacies" from her book, *The Intimacies of Four Continents,* has also helped me to hone my interests in

[55] Malkki, "Refugees and Exile," 501.
[56] Azuma, *Between Two Empires*; Espiritu, *Body Counts.*
[57] Fujitani, *Race for Empire;* Nguyễn-võ*, Almost Futures*.
[58] In conversation with Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ.

"reckon[ing] with the violence of affirmation and forgetting."[59] Affirmation and forgetting are powerful tools used by empires to reaffirm a less contradictory narrative of progress that allows them to maintain political power. Her work highlights the necessity of doing comparative work by analyzing the connections across the Americas, Asia, Africa, and Europe, to reveal the elisions of inequality exposed by reading across multiple areas of history. Focusing on these inequalities erased by historical narratives or at the mercy of multiple empires has helped me to formulate my comparative project focusing on Japanese Americans and Vietnamese refugees within the carceral spaces of camp.

Additionally, I am able to do this comparative project across multiple ethnic groups thanks to the deliberate and careful documentation done by previous scholars on the racialization, migration, and history of each Asian ethnic group.[60] In my comparative project, the carceral spaces established as extensions of the racialized wars abroad function as transitional zones of racialization. Within these transitional spaces, the experiences of incarcerees and refugees can be connected through their shared experiences of dehumanizing and alienating treatment in camp. Further, I look at the connections between food and memory to home in on the experiences retained by the incarcerees and refugees and demonstrate the cruelty of government policy towards these racialized and thus dehumanized populations.[61]

**Chapter Overview**

In Chapter 1, I foreground the connections between the global and the domestic impacts of war, to show the ways in which Japanese Americans and Vietnamese Refugees become

[59] Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), 41.

[60] Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2015); Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004); Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics of Race in San Francisco's Chinatown,* (University of California Press, 2001).

[61] Kalčik, Allen, Nguyễn-võ

racialized and thus dehumanized in relation to the wars being fought abroad. Once I establish this basis of comparison between the Japanese American incarcerees and the Vietnamese refugees, I then draw comparisons between the two carceral spaces by using the lens of food and foodways to highlight how people experienced varying modes of alienation at the site of food provision. In order to discuss the experiences of the Japanese American incarcerees and Vietnamese refugees in camp, I organized my chapter around the three modes of alienation that emerged in my research: social, physiological, and cultural alienation via deprivation in these carceral spaces. By looking at social alienation I focus on the ways in which incarcerees and refugees were distanced from American society through a narrative of unworthiness revolving around assumptions of unequal treatment with regard to food. Physiological alienation highlights how food recollections demonstrate the ways in which unfamiliar foods and feelings of disgust impacted the bodies of incarcerees and refugees at a visceral level. Lastly, in the section on cultural alienation, I discuss the impact of the deprivation of ethnic ingredients central to Japanese American and Vietnamese cultural identity within the camps. By depicting the conditions of camps as they were experienced through the eyes of survivors against the portrayals of national propaganda and common misunderstandings of these two groups of people, I hope to humanize their experiences and close the distance between dismissive dehumanization and the reality of an individual's recollections. I analyze the way that food is interpreted by people surrounded by barbed wire fences and how it depicts the hierarchical structures of the camps.

In Chapter 2, I focus on the ways in which Vietnamese refugees and the Japanese American incarcerees used food and memories about food to boost their morale and elevate their spirits while subjected to the abject conditions of the camps. By analyzing a combination of oral

history interviews and literary memoirs, I utilize these two forms of memory recall to illustrate the impact of these food memories from their times in camp. I organize this chapter based on increasing intensity of resistance from the inventiveness of creative recipes enabling the camp inmates to alter the monotony of their existence to outright protests against the inhumane food conditions. The Japanese American incarcerees and Vietnamese refugees exercised as much agency as they could within the camps to make their lives more livable. Refusing to accept the camp food and demanding more palatable accommodations demonstrate how both Japanese Americans and Vietnamese Refugees actively fought to improve their living conditions while in camp.

Overall, in drawing connections between the global and domestic impacts of U.S. war-making in Asia, I hope to show how the lens of food and foodways can function as a tool to see through the facade of nationalistic narratives of progress. By serving as a counternarrative to the national versions of history that sanitize accounts of dehumanization, memories of food and foodways retain the potency of these alienating experiences and demonstrate the ways in which incarcerees and refugees asserted their agency through food inventiveness and protests, while incarcerated, to maintain their humanity.

## CHAPTER 1: Food Alienation via Racialized Dehumanization

To set up a discussion of alienation and deprivation within the carceral spaces of the WRA prison camps and the Vietnamese refugee camps, I will first discuss the dehumanization of Asians during World War II and the Vietnam war through modes of racialization. The logic of these racialized wars abroad reflected domestically, and thus led to the dehumanizing treatment of the racialized Japanese Americans and Vietnamese refugees within the camp spaces. By connecting the carceral experiences of these two seemingly disparate groups, I establish a link between the global context of American war-making abroad and what was happening within the U.S. domestic context. These modes of racialization catalyzed the existence of the dehumanizing camp spaces and justified the poor treatment of incarcerees and refugees.

In this chapter, I make the first part of my argument depicting the ways in which Japanese American incarcerees and Vietnamese refugees, who were dehumanized via racialization and excluded from the protection of the nation, experienced social, physiological, and cultural alienation through various forms of deprivation at the sites of food provision within the carceral spaces of camp. By analyzing official government documents and archival sources, I juxtapose official government narratives with the lived experiences of my interviewees to highlight the discrepancy between the wording of government policy versus its implementation, which contrast starkly with the reality experienced by the Japanese American and Vietnamese refugees in the camps. Foregrounding the abject camp conditions experienced by my interviewees and survivors of these camp spaces, establishes what kinds of conditions and foods that the incarcerees and refugees are reacting to. In the following chapter, I will discuss how the incarcerees and refugees responded to these poor food provisions and adapted to their carceral settings.

**Carceral Connections: The Domestic Impact of Racialized Wars Abroad**

The Japanese American prison camps and Vietnamese refugee camps are connected by the American racialized wars in Asia. During those times of war, the camps acted as "transitional spaces of racialization," a kind of holding cell suspending these groups outside of the nation until the government could figure out how to best (re)incorporate them into it.[62] These carceral spaces bridge American war-making abroad with the domestic interior of the United States.

During World War II, Japanese Americans were most clearly dehumanized through their racialization as the Japanese enemy. In a speech that my grandfather, James Yamasaki, wrote in 1972, he said, "the international relationship of the United States and Japan play a significant role in how [Japanese Americans were] looked upon by the white majority."[63] Within the span of three years, my grandfather underwent multiple iterations of wartime identity as defined by U.S. policy during World War II. Despite being an American citizen, he was incarcerated at Gila River solely for being Japanese, then drafted into the U.S. military, and eventually received his officer's commission to serve as a second lieutenant in the Counter Intelligence Corps in Allied occupied Japan. Having experienced this rapid transition from "enemy alien" to "war hero," he observed: "During pre-war and war-years when US-Japan relations was at its worst, life was unbearable for us Nisei. During the fifties and sixties, with a new dawn of friendship between the two countries life has indeed been beautiful for me, my family, and my Nisei friends."[64] In

[62] In conversation with Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ, November 5, 2021.

[63] James Yamasaki, "From Jap to Japanese-A Period in American History," 1972, 13. This is the script of a speech from an unpublished file that I found on my grandfather's computer after his passing. He explains in the document that it is one of the speeches he used to give through a local business men's club when he lived "about 90 miles from Chicago where no Nisei lived." He said his talks were well accepted, so he also began giving them at Rotary Clubs in the New York area and Southern California. He wrote, that as the only Nisei in the community, he felt "it was up to us to make the community understand who we were and what our background was." Thus, he briefly discusses his experience incarcerated at Gila River, put focuses primarily on his parents' generation, the Issei and what he perceives are their "contributions to American society."

[64] Yamasaki, "From Jap to Japanese," 13.

having experienced ebbs and flows of good and bad relations with Japan, my grandfather was aware of how easily the situation of Japanese Americans could change, so he was concerned that these good relations built up over the years might sour, placing them once again in jeopardy of being negatively perceived by "the white majority."

For a war to gain traction and be sustained, the cause must be supported by public opinion. One tactic used to situate popular consciousness in favor of war making is to establish the image and understanding of a common enemy or untrustworthy ally. Take, for example, the caricatured images from World War II and the Vietnam War of cunning "Jap" spies or barbaric "Vietcong," often used in propaganda materials to distort public perceptions of entire populations. These racialized images obstruct life stories that might serve to disrupt the villainizing narratives that spur the nation towards war. It is much easier to fear the idea of an enemy when the lives of individual humans are abstracted into a homogenized mass of people. Thus, dehumanization goes hand in hand with how wars are fought and the connection between global relations and the domestic reality reveal who is valued more or less as human.

Historian T. Fujitani demonstrates how the general public developed an understanding of Japanese Americans as less than human or "not completely human" citing the well-known example from "the *Los Angeles Times* [that] famously opined that 'a viper is a viper wherever the egg is hatched—so a Japanese American, born of Japanese parents—grows up to be a Japanese, not an American.'" The viper analogy rationalized an understanding that Japanese Americans were biologically prone to treachery and were inherently dangerous. This fear-based logic racialized Japanese Americans as forever foreigners and established the grounds for their expulsion from the nation into the concentration camps based on the assumptions that "they were racially different, that they were unassimilable, and that no individual determinations of loyalty

to the United States could be made." However, almost as quickly as they were moved out of the national body and into the camps, plans were made to bring them back into it.[65]

Strategically during a period of total war, the government quickly realized that "the wartime situation required total manpower utilization and that to prevent Japanese Americans serving in the military was 'a total waste of a very considerable and potentially valuable manpower.'"[66] The government's emphasis on the usefulness of Japanese Americans was not based on their value as human beings but on their value as "manpower." Throughout history the United States not only racializes their enemies but their allies as well.[67] By examining the racialization of Japanese Americans at the site of soldiering, it becomes clear how the United States begins to racialize their allies as well as their enemies. Fujitani explains that Colonel Pettigrew, chief of the Far Eastern Group within the War Department's Military Intelligence Service (MIS) argued that even more important than having the Japanese Americans as manpower, "an all-Japanese American unit would have great propaganda value at home and abroad and would also facilitate the return of Japanese Americans back into mainstream society."[68] Thus, the government established a channel for them to reenter the nation by concocting the controversial loyalty questionnaires.[69] After passing this test of loyalty on paper, Japanese Americans were also given the opportunity to demonstrate the full extent of their loyalty as patriotic American citizens by enlisting in the U.S. Army in segregated divisions.

Those demonstrations of loyalty by the racialized Japanese American allies came at a costly price. Fujitani points out the ways in which the mass casualties taken by the all-Japanese

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[65] Fujitani, *Race for Empire,* 109.
[66] Fujitani, *Race for Empire,* 98.
[67] Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ, "Almost Futures: Vietnamese and Refugee Elusion of Humanist Sovereignty." (unpublished manuscript, August 2021), typescript, 25.
[68] Fujitani, *Race for Empire,* 98.
[69] Fujitani. *Race for Empire*, 132. The infamous questions 27 and 28.

divisions—the 100th Battalion and 442nd Infantry Regiment—"undoubtedly reveals as much about the low regard in which some high-ranking white officers held the lives of Japanese Americans as it does about the latter's heroism." One of the clearest examples of the racialization of Japanese Americans lives was when "the 442nd took 800 casualties in order to save 211 men of a Texas battalion that had been trapped behind enemy lines in the Vosges Mountains."[70] My grandmother, Betty Suyama Yamasaki, lost her eldest brother, George Suyama, in this rescue mission. Since his body was never found, his "name is etched on the Wall of the Missing at the nearby military cemetery in Epinal." The fact that this mission was "deemed successful" demonstrates the prioritized worth of white lives over Japanese American lives.[71]

In the Vietnamese case, the United States' racialization of its allies during the Vietnam War further demonstrated their prioritization of white lives. In her forthcoming book, *Almost Futures: Vietnamese and Refugee Elusion of Humanist Sovereignty,* Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ discusses how this idea of racializing American allies happens repeatedly in imperial practices, resulting in racialized groups within the United States, and in the Vietnam War context, "Racialized allies in the extension of empire become racialized refugees who can hardly become citizens in humanist sovereignty."[72] She explains this racialization as an understanding of less-than-human worth conflated with a kind of barbarity in terms of the perceived lack of civilization attained by these countries, who have "fallen behind on that progressive trajectory towards human mastery at the end of history."[73] By underscoring the ways in which "[r]ace enabled the identification of these spaces and people who not only had to pay for modern humanism but

[70] Fujitani, *Race for Empire,* 207-208.
[71] Nakadate, *Looking After Minidoka,* 135.
[72] Long T. Bui, *Returns of War: South Vietnam and the Price of Refugee Memory* (NY: New York University Press, 2018), 36-46, cited in Nguyễn-võ, "Almost Futures," 25. Although she does not quote him here, she references Bui on Vietnamization and racializing allies, producing racialized refugees in the US.
[73] In conversation with Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ; "Almost Futures," 16.

would be prevented from entering into such status of the human in a deadly circular logic," Nguyễn-võ demonstrates how race becomes the grounds for rationalizing a hierarchical "scale of human worth based on civilizational progress."[74]

To make her argument about the American racialized wars in Indochina, Nguyễn-võ cites Davorn Sisavath who "draws our attention to American remote killing through bombing campaigns in a secret war that turned Laos into a racialized 'wasteland.'"[75] In order to diminish the statistical loss of American lives, the U.S. military resorted to remote killing by dropping hundreds of thousands of bombs and using their racialized and thus disposable Vietnamese allies to engage where remote killings were not enough. Thus, the United States laid waste to racialized populations deemed lacking in their progress towards civilization and as such classified as lesser humans deserving of annihilation and undeserving of life. Additionally, Nguyễn-võ depicts how within the U.S. Military the protection of white "life force" was prioritized over the lives of racialized soldiers.[76] She wrote that, at the height of the Vietnam War, "41% of those recruited into the U.S. Military [from Johnson's 'Project 100,000'] were African Americans, with a disproportionate combat presence at the height of the war in 1966 and 1969. Not only were African Americans overrepresented among those killed in action, Chicano fatal casualty rates in the war were also disproportionate to their percentage in the population at the time." This is similar to the disproportionate Japanese American casualties during World War II and demonstrates that "the lives of American soldiers were already graded in racial biopolitical calculations." Thus, in looking at these modes of racialization that stemmed from World War II and the Vietnam War, it becomes apparent that enemies and allies were racialized in gradations

[74] Nguyễn-võ, "Almost Futures," 23.

[75] Davorn Sisavath, "Wasteland: The Social and Environmental Impact of U.S. Militarism in Laos," dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2015, 89-92 quoted in Nguyễn-võ, "Almost Futures," 23.

[76] Nguyễn-võ, "Almost Futures," 11.

of human worth.[77]

Analyzing the hierarchical ranking of human lives—from enemies to allies based on modes of racialization—elucidates the ways in which people can rationalize the dehumanizing treatment of racialized individuals. The connections between Japanese American incarcerees and Vietnamese refugees based on the ways both groups were racialized and thus excluded from the nation during World War II and the Vietnam War reveals how these carceral spaces replicated wartime logic. In these sites of deprivation devoid of the protection of the nation, the inhumane food conditions within the camps make the logic of racialization and thus dehumanization of the two groups visible. Susan Kalčik cites Mary Douglas, who "tells us that 'if food is treated as a code, the message it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries...Food categories therefore encode social events.'"[78] By utilizing Douglas's concept of food as code, food and foodways become a lens through which to analyze the global hierarchies built into the carceral spaces of camp. Thus, by focusing on the degrading treatment of the camp occupants at the site of food provision, I analyze the ways in which Japanese American incarcerees and Vietnamese refugees experienced dehumanization through food deprivation and alienation in the camp spaces as a continuation of the American racialized wars in the Pacific. The food served in the camps encoded the overt dehumanization of these groups as racialized populations.

**Carceral Dehumanization**

In order to show how the incarcerees and refugees recognized food as a sign of

[77] Nguyễn-võ, *Almost Futures*, 23-24.

[78] Mary Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," *Daedalus* 101, no. 1 (1972), quoted in Susan Kalčik, "Ethnic Foodways in America: Symbol and the Performance of Identity," 47.

dehumanization, I juxtapose the state portrayals of protection and idealized camp spaces against the reality of deprivation and alienation endured by the incarcerees and refugees. The 1943 propaganda film, *Japanese Relocation,* created by the U.S. Office of War Information, explained their reasoning behind the necessity of removing people of Japanese descent and "tells how the mass migration was accomplished."[79] As would be expected in a propaganda film, the removal of Japanese and Japanese Americans was portrayed as an accomplishment. The narrator of the film, Milton S. Eisenhower, was director of the War Relocation Authority (WRA) at the time. Eisenhower explained, "Neither the army nor the War Relocation Authority relished the idea of taking men, women, and children from their homes, their shops, and their farms. So, the military and civilian agencies alike determined to do the job as a democracy should with real consideration for the people involved."[80] As I will show through the stories of the Japanese incarcerees, the government did not, in fact, show "real consideration for the people involved."

These propagandized images contrast starkly with the reality experienced by the Japanese Americans who were deprived of freedom, food, and shelter in camp. One of my interviewees, Minoru "Min" Tonai, talked about how he perceived the government's message before his own removal, first to the Santa Anita Assembly Center and then to the Amache camp in Colorado.[81] He explained, "They'd been telling us that they're putting us into camp to protect us from the American public, because the American public was so upset that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor."[82] However, he soon realized that all evidence pointed to the contrary:

So, they tell us that they're going to protect us, but soon as I came through Santa Anita, I

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[79] *Japanese Relocation,* directed by the Office of War Information (War Activities Committee of the Motion Picture Industry, 1943), 1:25 to 1:29. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/38743.

[80] *Japanese Relocation,* 1:34 to 1:45.

[81] The term "assembly center" is another euphemism. The more accurate term is "temporary detention center" as discussed in the "The Power of Words Handbook: A Guide to Language about Japanese Americans in World War II," https://jacl.org/power-of-words.

[82] Min Tonai, interview by author, telephone, October 28, 2020.

> knew they weren't gonna protect us. Cause I could see there's guard towers with machine guns and searchlights pointing *inward*, not *outward* to protect us. I said, "Uh oh," and I had this cold feeling, I said, "Are they putting us in here to kill us?"[83]

Even at only twelve years old at the time that he entered the Santa Anita camp, Tonai quickly understood the reality of his situation. This was no summer camp; this was a prison camp.

In the film, Eisenhower narrates how the Japanese Americans "were taken to racetracks and fairgrounds where the army almost overnight had built assembly centers…Santa Anita racetrack for example suddenly became a community of about 17,000 persons."[84] Here, he boasts about the speed at which the army was able to construct these "assembly centers" to house the uprooted Japanese, and states, "The army provided housing and plenty of healthful nourishing food for all."[85] This could not have been farther from the truth.

For one thing, to call the living situation at the assembly centers "housing" was a stretch. Artist Miné Okubo in her illustrated memoir, *Citizen 13660,* recalled arriving at the door to her assigned living quarters, Stall 50, at the Tanforan "Assembly Center."[86] She explained that "[b]oth rooms showed signs of a hurried white-washing. Spider webs, horse hair, and hay had been whitewashed with the walls…A two-inch later of dust covered the floor, but on removing it [they] discovered that linoleum the color of red-wood had been placed over the rough manure-covered boards."[87] Since incarcerees were not initially allowed to have cameras in the camps, Okubo's drawings serve to document the everyday experiences of those confined to these barren and hastily assembled spaces. Tonai described his own experience living in a horse stall at the

[83] Tonai, telephone interview by author.
[84] *Japanese Relocation*, 4:58 to 5:02 and 5:11 to 5:17.
[85] *Japanese Relocation,* 5:18 to 5:22.
[86] Miné Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, revised edition (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), 35.
[87] Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 35.

Santa Anita Assembly Center, recalling, "they had put a thin layer of asphalt on the floor, and they whitewashed the walls. So, when we first went in there, you could smell the asphalt. As soon as it got warm out, the stench would come through the thin asphalt."[88]

Okubo's drawings elucidate the reality that the incarcerees suffered while housed in these conditions. In several of her drawings, she depicted incarcerees' attempts to shield themselves from the stench by covering their noses and mouths with their hands. In *Farewell to Manzanar,* Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston describes waking up in their dwelling at Manzanar "shivering and coated with dust that had blown up through the knotholes and in through the slits around the doorway." Wakatsuki Houston notes the Japanese American incarcerees were shuttled into the camps before their completion, with "[s]ixteen blocks left to go." Her mother tells her brother, "Woody, we can't live like this. Animals live like this." By vocalizing that she felt like they were being treated like animals, Wakatsuki Houston's mother notes the ways in which they were being treated as less than human.[89]

When Japanese Americans first arrived at the camps, besides the food being terrible, "[u]ntrained cooks, unsanitary kitchens, and unreasonable food allowances added up to episodes of food poisoning in various camps and increased the misery of the displaced Japanese Americans."[90] Tonai told me about how he and his brother would wake up early to explore the camp and escape the stench of their horse stall dwellings. While talking about his morning routine, he explained, "After a while, they [camp officials] started rationing toilet paper. So, we would take toilet paper with us because we would get diarrhea often since the food wasn't

[88] Tonai, telephone interview by author.
[89] Wakatsuki Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, ch. 3, Apple Books.
[90] "Bad Meat and Missing Sugar: Food in the Japanese American Camps," Densho: Japanese American Incarceration and Japanese Internment, April 7, 2010, https://densho.org/catalyst/bad-meat-and-missing-sugar-food-in/.

always clean." Although the food in camp was never particularly good, the first meals were the worst "because the supplies were poor, [and] the kitchens weren't fully staffed or fully equipped."[91] Jane Dusselier notes, "Plates of canned sausages and an assortment of starches were the most common fares that faced internees as they concluded their first day in captivity."[92] These kinds of foods preserved well and were inexpensive. It was not until the Japanese Americans began growing their own foods in camp that they would begin having better quality food. Dusselier recounts the experience of the Uchida family who had missed lunch because they had been cleaning "the horse stall that was to be their new home. Having missed lunch they were especially hungry by supper time, but as they passed through the mess line they were offered two canned sausages, one boiled potato, and a piece of bread. As Yoshiko Uchida recalled in her memoir, her family 'tried to eat, but the food wouldn't go down.'"[93]

As I will discuss more in the next section, the American government was pressured to keep costs low in the camps, thus the foods given to the incarcerees were cheap and of poor nutritional value. The lack of nutritious food had terrible and lasting impacts on some of the incarcerees. Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga's daughter was born in camp "with an allergy to the powdered milk that they permitted babies to have during that time. She should have what was called at that time, Carnation milk in a can." Although Herzig-Yoshinaga requested this for her newborn, "they said, 'No, that has to go to the army.' And [she] would not be permitted to unless we could afford to send for it from outside." Because she could not afford the canned milk, her daughter was constantly hospitalized. Herzig-Yoshinaga explains, "Most children double their

[91] Hana and Noah Maruyama, speaking with Heidi Kim, "Food," *Campu*, podcast audio transcript (February 3, 2021), 5, https://densho.org/campu/campu-food/.

[92] Jane Dusselier, "Does Food Make Place? Food Protests in Japanese American Concentration Camps," *Food and Foodways* 10, no. 3 (July 1, 2002):140.

[93] Yoshiko Uchida, *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese American Family*, revised edition (Seattle ; London: University of Washington Press, 2015), 71-72, quoted in Dusselier, "Does Food Make Place?" 146.

birth weight, at six months. My child had not doubled her weight in a year, she was so sick… And I think the lack of this important nutrition at this time of her life has affected her whole entire life. She didn't have the basic ingredients to be a healthy person."[94] These first-hand accounts from the Nisei who survived their camp experiences debunk the U.S. Office of War Information's claim that they were providing "plenty of healthful nourishing food for all."

Although I am primarily focusing on the carceral spaces of the Japanese concentration camps and the Vietnamese refugee camps, I believe that the experiences of the Vietnamese on boats are a crucial part of the overall refugee story. This is the leg of their journey that eventually gets them to the refugee camps, and it is often on these boat journeys that the refugees experienced trauma, creating memories that would follow them and the generations after them for years to come.

When she fled from Vietnam with her family in April 1975, Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ was twelve years old, the same age that Min Tonai was in 1943 when he arrived at the Santa Anita Assembly Center. Vietnamese refugees' retellings of their own memories from being at various refugee camps echo the stories told by the Japanese Americans about their camp experiences. Nguyễn-võ describes the American naval ships that carried Vietnamese from the crowded ships to the camps as "refugee camps in transit."[95] Run by military personnel, the space of the ship shared many of the characteristics of the refugee camps on land, including constant surveillance and scarce supplies.

Nguyễn-võ explained that the U.S. naval ship that encountered the boat carrying her family purposefully did not stop to pick them up because they "were afraid for security

[94] Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga, interview by Emiko and Chizu Omori, "Aiko Herzig Interview," Densho, https://ddr.densho.org/interviews/ddr-densho-1002-8-9/, quoted in Maruyama, "Food," *Campu*, transcript, 15.

[95] Conversation with Nguyễn-võ, April 28, 2021.

reasons…They didn't know whether there would be communist operatives amongst the refugees." Additionally, Congress had not authorized an evacuation of Vietnamese refugees, only Americans, so they were not truly equipped to pick them up. Because these naval ships would not stop to pick up the refugees, the refugee boat "would have to attach itself to the ropes on the side of the ship. And then, those people would climb up the rope ladder, and then the next boat…would have to tie themselves to the previous boat." Nguyễn-võ and her family were maybe seven boats away from the ship, so they needed "to jump from boat, to boat, to boat to get to the rope ladder hanging on the side of the ship."[96]

Once aboard the ship, the treatment of the refugees by the naval personnel quickly enforced the hierarchical power structure within the confines of the ship. Not unlike how the Japanese Americans were welcomed to the assembly centers with machine guns pointed into the camps, Nguyễn-võ explains that the refugees were subjected to searches and had gun barrels pointed at them. Although they were only children at the time, Tonai and Nguyễn-võ easily picked up on the ways that they were being treated differently as a potential threat. Her time aboard this first naval ship had a lasting impact on Nguyễn-võ, who commented, "I think that was the first time that I acquired a kind of racial complex—from the treatment that we got on the boat. You know, it was, like, I felt like they were afraid of us, and also very hostile, and they also had a lot of power over us. So…I felt shame."[97] The clear hostility and discomfort of the naval personnel constructed an emotional barrier between the two groups that reinforced the power dynamic aboard this Naval ship. "Obviously, the American forces [had] not prepared to pick up refugees," said Nguyễn-võ, "So, we ended up in the bowels of the cargo hold of the ship. And it

[96] Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ Zoom interview by the author, December 28, 2020.

[97] Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ interview by the author, December 28, 2020. Before arriving at the refugee camp in Guam, Nguyễn-võ traveled aboard two different naval ships. The first was not prepared for refugees, but the second that they were transferred to was better equipped.

was suffocating in there. Like there was no air—we couldn't breathe."[98] The locations of the ship's passengers mirrored the structure of power—U.S. Naval personnel on top and Vietnamese refugees at the bottom.

Since this particular Navy ship was not equipped to feed an unexpected group of refugees, Nguyễn-võ explained that most of them did not eat for days. Although they did not have food, she remembered each family was given one empty can in order to get an allotment of fresh water each day, but they had to get in line. However, there were "a lot of people on that boat, so the line was going all day long." Nguyễn-võ elaborated, "people were anxious, so they kept standing up while they were in line. And American soldiers, they were very afraid of us, they would use a high-pressure hose to like hose us down if we would stand up in the line to get water." In this situation, it appears that the naval personnel's fear of the refugees became justification for their dehumanizing treatment of those that they perceived as other. This is similar to the way in which Japanese Americans were incarcerated because the fear of the West Coast being attacked by the Japanese military was projected onto the Japanese Americans and Japanese living in the United States. On these refugee camps in transit, because the U.S. naval personnel were unable to distinguish between Vietnamese ally or enemy, they treated refugees like the enemy.[99]

Although the naval personnel feared the refugees as a group of enemies, separated from the group individual refugees appeared to pose less of a threat to the naval personnel. During her time on this ship, Nguyễn-võ also mentioned that she had become ill and passed out. Because she was running a fever and had nothing to eat, her mother went and "begged an American GI" for

[98] Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ interview by the author, December 28, 2020.
[99] Nguyễn-võ interview by the author, December 28, 2020.

his apple.[100] Nguyễn-võ observed her mother waiting until he was already half finished before she asked him if he would give her the remaining half of his apple for her sick daughter. Analyzing the ways in which food "can encode the pattern of social relations being expressed," I believe that Nguyễn-võ's mother acted very strategically to secure some food for her daughter.[101] Having come from a well-to-do family, this must have been a very difficult thing for Nguyễn-võ's mother. Perhaps it was significant that she only asked the GI if he would share the apple, after he had eaten some of it. I wonder if she believed that her chances of getting the apple were higher after he had already eaten some. Prior to her asking him for the apple, the GI did not acknowledge the two starving figures. Nguyễn-võ's mother's actions required the GI to acknowledge them as humans. Whereas the mass of refugees frightened the GIs, perhaps this lone GI who shared his apple became more sympathetic to Nguyễn-võ and her mother because, away from the group of refugees, they lost the threatening association of a perceived enemy and crystallized in front of him as simply human in this one-on-one interaction.

Although food conditions improved once they left the boats, these conditions of hunger and food deprivation extended into the refugee camps on land. Historian Phuong Tran Nguyen describes the major food shortage problems that occurred at refugee camps located in the South Pacific when Vietnamese refugees arrived at camps unequipped to handle their numbers. Nguyen explains, "Morale dropped so low that the Guam camp newspaper published a front-page story promising much better living conditions in the United States. But refugees spent an average of twenty-seven days on Guam before departing for the mainland bases; those on Wake Island were even less fortunate, with an average wait of forty-nine days."[102] Nguyen lists several more

[100] Nguyễn-võ interview by the author, December 28, 2020.
[101] Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," quoted in Kalčik, "Ethnic Foodways in America," 47.
[102] Nguyen, *Becoming Refugee American*, chap. 2, Kindle.

examples of hardship endured by refugees in Guam:

> One refugee remembered going hungry after dropping her plate at the mess hall: "When I asked for another one, not only did I not get it, I was almost beaten. That was the most degrading thing for Vietnamese people." One man who had spent nearly two hours waiting in a chow line that extended for nearly a quarter of a mile, exclaimed, "Son-of-a-bitch! If I had known that it would be like this I would not have gotten out of the country. It is just like being a beggar. What do you think when in a civilized world we are received like beggars?"

On such short notice it was very difficult for the army to organize enough food to manage this sudden influx of people. Thus, the refugees felt demoralized by the conditions and treatment they encountered. Although the camps were struggling and unprepared, a government document once again failed to accurately depict the conditions of "tent city."

On June 16, 1975, Elmer B. Staats, the former Comptroller General of the United States, submitted a "Report to the Congress" on behalf of the General Accounting Office (GAO) titled "U.S. Provides Safe Haven for Indochinese Refugees."[103] In one section, the report summarized their observations of the living conditions in Guam: "Food Service varies from good to fair. Again, the more temporary facilities at tent city are the worst. Long lines for food were being shortened with the openings of more field kitchens. Also, the issuance of ration cards should allow one person to obtain food for an entire family. In general, the refugees were getting adequate amounts of food, and the diet was well balanced."[104] Although they mention the bad conditions of the camp at "tent city," the report ultimately summarized the scant food supply as "adequate" and "well balanced." While in the refugee camp in Guam, Nguyễn-võ recounted how people craved vegetables so badly that they would search around the camp in Guam for any type

[103] The document refers to the GAO as the "General Accounting Office." However, after 2004 it was renamed the Government Accountability Office.

[104] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Report to the Congress: U.S. Provides Safe Haven for Indochinese Refugees," Elmer B. Staats, June 16, 1975, ID-75-71, 28, https://www.gao.gov/assets/id-75-71.pdf (accessed November 27, 2021).

of greens, even going so far as searching for any grass or weeds that grew up through the gravelly ground, which were scarce. Nguyễn-võ's intense craving for green vegetables demonstrates that the refugees were not truly receiving a "well balanced" diet. Therefore, the government document distracts from the inadequacies of the camp, by instead focusing on how quickly they acted to get the camps ready for the arrival of the refugees: "The first refugees arrived on Guam on April 23, one day after the local military command was asked to draw up a plan to provide a safe haven for up to 50,000 refugees for 90 days. The effort expended by the military and the scope of its task was enormous."[105] The lack of preparation for their arrival resulted in the Vietnamese refugees being deprived of basic human necessities and essential food items.

The food deprivation experienced by both Japanese American incarcerees and Vietnamese refugees while in camp informed them of their status as racialized others. Despite the ways in which the government described the treatment of these populations within the camps as fair and adequate, in many ways, they were treated more like animals than human beings. This discrepancy exposes the heartlessness of government policies that project a veneer of protection or humanitarianism while subjecting people to the most base form of deprivation at the site of food provision.

**Social Alienation: Food Misconceptions of the Other**

Subjected to the outside opinions of others who did not understand how dire the camp conditions were, Japanese American incarcerees and Vietnamese refugees experienced social alienation based on assumptions that circulated about the foods served in the camps. Although in reality the incarcerees and refugees were suffering from deficient food supplies in the barren

[105] U.S. Government Accountability Office," U.S. Provides Safe Haven for Indochinese Refugees," 28.

spaces of camp, idyllic portrayals of these camps spaces in the media fueled public resentment towards the Japanese Americans incarcerees and Vietnamese refugees because they believed people in the camps were receiving preferential treatment or were undeserving of aid. Thus, the public's perception of the camps and their inhabitants was partially informed by their assumptions about the food. Although these two populations were already set apart from the nation in the camps, misconceptions about Japanese Americans and Vietnamese refugees in connection to this food disparity further alienated them from society.

Although not explicitly focused on food, public perceptions of Vietnamese refugees as undeserving of aid stemmed from the inaccurate portrayal of the majority of refugees as wealthy. In her forthcoming book, *Archipelago of Resettlement: Vietnamese Refugee Settlers and Decolonization across Guam and Israel-Palestine,* Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi explains, "This first wave of Vietnamese refugees upended American stereotypes of the refugee as a poor, destitute, and malnourished figure, prone to recuperation as a passive object of humanitarian aid."[106] Shifting focus away from the poor refugees—representative of American failure—and towards a well-off group of Vietnamese people taking advantage of aid, the "PDN [*Pacific Daily News*] articles fixated on the 'well-dressed' status of the refugees, noting their diamond rings and parasols and obsessing over their unexpected wealth: 'Rumors about refugees carrying 'hundreds of thousands of dollars' are widespread.'"[107] These rumors and hyper-fixation on wealth thus overshadowed the plight of the majority of the refugees who had fled the country with nothing and desperately needed aid. Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ explains: "A very significant portion of refugees in this first wave were from poor fishing villages along the coast who were Catholics

[106] Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi, *Archipelago of Resettlement: Vietnamese Refugee Settlers and Decolonization across Guam and Israel-Palestine*, (University of California Press, forthcoming, 2022), 93.
[107] Gandhi, *Archipelago of Resettlement*, 93.

who fled North [Vietnam] in 1954, and who had the boats to go to the American ships in 1975."[108] Additionally, she reflected on the ways in which the upper and middle class in Vietnam had been greatly impacted by the war and thus were not necessarily doing well despite their class background. She said, "My family, along with many other supposedly well-to-do families had to gingerly ration our food in the last years of the war because we didn't have the money to buy much both because of the intensified war and because the U.S. cut aid to South Vietnam."[109] The hunger and deprivation experienced by the Vietnamese and the existence of refugee camps are directly tied to U.S. intervention in Vietnam. Maintaining focus on the reason why there are refugees in camps instead of the supposed wealth of the refugees breaks through the facade of the altruistic narrative of humanitarianism that attempts to conceal failure and defeat.

Another way that this narrative of the undeserving refugee, saved by generous humanitarian efforts of the United States, gets circulated is through a dangerous conflation of race and civilization. In her article, "Enormous Resiliency Noted," printed on May 27, 1975, journalist Eleanor Hoover discussed the ways in which the Vietnamese refugees were coping very well and described how they are "courteous, kind and neat" and "seem extremely westernized."[110] Although this statement seems innocuous and even complimentary, Nguyễn-võ points out that Hoover's rhetoric is dangerous "because it conflates westernization and civilization with race, [thus] anyone failing to conform to this conflation is rendered less-than-human by default."[111] She recalls, "the constant anxiety in-camp and after" experienced by refugees "terrified into trying to behave as America expected of them."[112] There were high stakes

[108] In conversation with Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ.
[109] In conversation with Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ.
[110] Eleanor Hoover, "Enormous Resiliency Noted: Vietnamese Settlers: Can They Adapt?," *Los Angeles Times (1923-1995),* May 27, 1975.
[111] In conversation, Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ.
[112] In conversation, Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ.

in making sure one could prove their "refugee" status, and then further pressures to conform to American societal expectations once they did arrive in the United States. Anthropologist Aihwa Ong explains, "poor Asian newcomers in particular experience a continuity of policy and practice that promotes 'ethnic cleansing,' in the sense of removing the features of immigrants' supposedly primitive cultures that are socially determined to be undesirable."[113] Ong's discussion of "supposedly primitive cultures" further underscores the dangers of conflating civilization and race and demonstrates the extreme amount of self-reflexive pressure on refugees to try to conform to societal expectations.

Although Hoover tried to praise the refugees for their western qualities, one of her interviewees for this article demonstrates the perspective that the Vietnamese are to be blamed for losing the war precisely because of their privileged westernization. Hoover introduces "Tran Tuong Nhu, a nonrefugee Vietnamese-born Berkeley-educated anthropologist who has many relatives and friends in Camp Pendleton. She has lived most of her life in the United States and Europe."[114] This introduction seems to present Tran as a reliable speaker on behalf of the Vietnamese being held at Camp Pendleton.[115] She is quoted as saying:

> the real truth is that many—or most—of the Vietnamese in Camp Pendleton had fancy villas and color TVs and many servants and fine food, while 90% of the country was dying and suffering. They can face the idea of living without servants in the United States better than they can face the idea of living without servants in Vietnam. The guilt they feel is so great, they feel they cannot be forgiven. All this is disguised as fear of communism.

It seems that Tran is operating on the assumption of a hierarchical relationship between the United States and Vietnam. By saying that "[t]hey can face the idea of living without servants in

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[113] Aihwa Ong, *Buddha Is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, the New America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), xvii.

[114] Hoover, "Enormous Resiliency Noted: Vietnamese Settlers: Can They Adapt?"

[115] By Vietnamese naming convention, surname is written first. So, Tran is the last name of Tran Tuong Nhu. Thus, I will refer to her as Tran.

the United States better than they can face the idea of living without servants in Vietnam," Tran implies that the United States is a better place to be than Vietnam, thus situating Vietnam as below the United States. She also seems to imply that the refugees at Camp Pendleton were not deserving of aid or their refugee status because they came from the upper class. In speaking about guilt, I believe the speaker's assumption of affluence elides the guilt of the United States for losing the war. In thinking about this hierarchically, Americans seem to occupy a higher position than the Vietnamese, but the leveling factor that brings the ranking of the Vietnamese to almost equaling an American is wealth. Thus, Tran transforms American guilt into Vietnamese guilt, by shifting the blame onto the refugees of Camp Pendleton through her depiction of them as rich Vietnamese who watched TV and ate fine food, "while 90% of the country was dying and suffering." Tran's portrayal of the Vietnamese as rich and lazy contributes to the ways in which the South Vietnamese soldiers of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) were established as the scapegoats for the U.S. losing the war.[116] The racialized Vietnamese allies thus become living reminders of American defeat and are alienated by the society that wishes to forget the loss that they symbolize.[117]

This perception of uneven or undeserved treatment while the rest of the population undergoes hardship echoes the accusations of "pampering" and "coddling" that arose regarding the treatment of the Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II. Information circulating about the Japanese American prison camps, like the propaganda film, *Japanese Relocation*, that made life in camp look idyllic, spurred resentment from the general public that suspected the Japanese were being pampered in the camps. The public deduced from rumors that

[116] Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 109; Anthony Morreale, "Abandoned: Reconsidering the Literature of South Vietnam," Los Angeles Review of Books.

[117] In conversation with Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ.

the Japanese Americans were being coddled and treated unnecessarily well for being the "enemy," while in actuality the unequal treatment occurring in the camps was between the white administrators and the Japanese American incarcerees.

My grandfather, James Yamasaki, provided an instance of food supply disparity between the Japanese American incarcerees and the white workers in his camp journal. While at the Gila River camp in Arizona, my grandfather worked "as Senior Clerk in Mess Operations."[118] He explained that his "job was to visit the mess halls of [his] responsibility and take a daily up-to-the minute inventory of the staple goods in the pantry of each mess hall."[119] He only made note of a mess hall's inventory one time in an entry from October 12, 1942 where he came across something out of the ordinary:

> I found that Mess Hall 61 has done some fine storing. They stored a great deal of food in that block manager's office. Two Caucasians found this. The items were: 25 pounds of tea, about 6 packages of cornstarch, about 18 cans of shrimp, 98# of flour, 26 #2 1/2 cans 24 #10 cans of applesauce, 13 of #2 cans of grapefruit, about 120 cans of condensed milk, 4 gal. of salad oil, 600# of rice, 30# of salt, 200# of sugar, 40 cans of corn, 44 cans of tomato, 50# of coffee. I know that they had no intentions of stealing it. They claimed that there was going to be a shortage of food in the near future and by storing the left overs, they could meet a possible and probably, according to them, shortage. I think this is ill-founded logic. No one has yet been dismissed.

While reviewing his old journal entries almost sixty years later, my grandfather's opinion remained unchanged, unsure as to why they had thought that there would be a food shortage. His job as a clerk in Mess Operations gave him the understanding that there was plenty of food in the warehouses so he could not understand the need for stockpiling the food in the way that the block manager had in this situation. The *Campu* episode, "Food," reveals a potential motive behind the stockpiling that my grandfather did not fully comprehend.

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[118] James Yamasaki, Annotate Camp Journal, 3.

[119] Yamasaki, Annotated Camp Journal, 3. In his journal this quote that I am referencing is written in bold font to differentiate his annotations from his original entry.

In the Densho podcast *Campu,* co-produced by Hana and Noah Maruyama, they have pulled audio clips from dozens of Nisei oral history interviews to weave together an aural picture of what was happening in the camps from many different perspectives. Listening to the voices of Japanese Americans who lived through the camps the way that the Maruyamas have arranged the podcast is powerful because they are putting the voices of these people into dialogue with one another. Several times in the "Food" episode there is an emphatic chorus of voices where the Maruyamas have layered the shared response from multiple interviews, such as "A lot of Vienna sausages" and "Apple butter," some of the most remembered and loathed foods of the camp that I will touch upon in the next section.[120]

The podcast episode highlights a problem that occurred at the Manzanar camp when "things [food] started disappearing."[121] The woven together soundbites convey the incarcerees' common understanding that "those government workers, [that] lived in a separate place"[122] were diverting and depleting some of the supplies meant for the incarcerees and channeling them towards the "Caucasian mess hall, block one."[123] Grace Shinoda Nakamura explains, "They lived in barracks, real nice ones that were stucco that had insulation and all that kind of stuff…" Harry Ueno elaborates, "They got a sugar bowl on every table, a couple sugar bowls, every one of them filled up."[124] The bounty afforded white workers and staff in contrast to the rationed goods allotted to the incarcerees, illustrates the deprivation and unequal treatment in the prison camps.[125] In the voiceover, Hana Maruyama interjects "that these anecdotes about the theft of

[120] Maruyama, "Food," *Campu*, podcast audio transcript, 6-7.
[121] Maruyama, "Food," *Campu*, podcast audio transcript, 26.
[122] Grace Shinoda Nakamura quoted in Maruyama, "Food," *Campu, podcast audio transcript,* 26. "Grace Shinoda Nakamura Densho Interview Segment 18," https://ddr.densho.org/interviews/ddr-densho-1003-8-18/.
[123] Harry Ueno quoted in Maruyama, "Food," audio transcript, 26. "Harry Ueno Interview Segment 15," https://ddr.densho.org/interviews/ddr-densho-1002-7-15/.
[124] Ueno quoted in Maruyama, "Food," transcript, 26.
[125] In conversation with Valerie Matsumoto.

camp food supplies have not technically been confirmed."[126] Heidi Kim explains on the podcast that these claims surface in the oral histories, but there are not records of people actually persecuted for food theft.[127] However, she says, "I have no doubt that it happened. It happened everywhere across the United States. There certainly was black marketing from larger or commercial institutions."[128] In the incident of food stockpiling that my grandfather stumbled upon, I wonder if perhaps the block manager wanted to ensure that these foods would be distributed to the incarcerees and because my grandfather never witnessed food theft this explanation may have never crossed his mind. Although it was the white workers who benefitted from the unequal treatment in the prison camps, this misconception of Japanese Americans being pampered in the prison camps further alienated the Japanese Americans from society. The disparity between the food allotted to the white camp administrators and the Japanese American incarcerees exemplifies how societal relations—and hierarchy—are encoded in food.[129]

Newspaper articles fueled this racial enmity by using the degrading racial epithet of "Jap" to advance rumors of unwarranted preferential treatment. An article called "Coddling the Japs" put forth the false statement that "these people have all the coffee they want, as many potatoes as they can eat, a different kind of meat every day and supplies of all kinds in abundance."[130] Frank Kikuchi, who was incarcerated at Manzanar could not believe that people made these claims about camp. Reflecting on the camp food, he said:

> meat was a precious item, you would hardly ever get meat. And what's galling, irritating to me, even now, is when I, I think that even the *Times* but especially *The Herald*, I mean, the Hearst newspapers used to always say that, "Here outside were being rationed,

[126] Maruyama, "Food," *Campu* transcript, 28.
[127] Maruyama, "Food," *Campu* transcript, 28.
[128] Maruyama, "Food," *Campu* transcript, 28.
[129] Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," quoted in Kalčik, "Ethnic Foodways in America," 47; In conversation with Valerie Matsumoto.
[130] "Coddling the Japs," *Mill Valley Record,* June 3, 1943. California Digital Newspaper Collection, https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=MVR19430603.2.87&e=-------en--20--1--txt-txIN--------1 (Accessed November 4, 2021).

> Americans are being rationed, and these Japs are getting steaks and chops and eggs and were eating high off the hog," which was an absolute lie.[131]

In fact, the government was under so much pressure to demonstrate that the Japanese Americans were not given preferential treatment in the camps that "[t]he WRA was very public about keeping costs for each meal no higher than 45 cents per day. And during rationing and during all of the public resentment and the congressional hearings that touched upon this issue, the WRA constantly sought to drive costs down. So they were able to drive them down as far as 35 cents a day."[132] However, Jane Dusselier notes that "as early as 1943, a report issued by the U.S. Army admitted that this meager per diem was 'too conservative' and did not provide adequate nutrition for children and people in need of special diets."[133] Thus, these misconceptions directly contributed to the deprivation experienced by the incarcerees in camps, and caused permanent damage to the health of those who needed better nutrition most.

**Physiological Alienation: Disgust as Disorientation**

At the sites of food provision, the Japanese American incarcerees and Vietnamese refugees experienced alienation at a physiological level because they were given unfamiliar and strange foods that they were unaccustomed to eating. In this section, I include recollections revolving around horrible food experienced by Japanese Americans and Vietnamese refugees to demonstrate how disgust and alienation can impact human bodies at a visceral level.[134]

Before Japanese American cooks were placed in charge of the mess halls, the white servers and cooks had some very odd notions of what Japanese people might like to eat. In a

[131] Frank Isamu Kikuchi, interviewed by John Allen, *Densho Digital Archive*: Manzanar National Historic Site Collection, November 6, 2002, https://ddr.densho.org/media/ddr-manz-1/ddr-manz-1-5-10-transcript-87697975c6.htm.

[132] Maruyama speaking with Heidi Kim, "Food," *Campu* transcript, 13.

[133] Dusselier, "Does Food Make Place?" 142.

[134] In conversation with Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ.

way, the incarcerees were almost given "a different kind of meat every day," like the article, "Coddling the Japs" mentioned.[135] However, they were not typical kinds of meats like good pork, chicken, or beef. Instead "they were constantly being brought these foods they'd never had to cook with before. And there're no recipes or blogs for them. If they've never cooked tripe or beef hearts or horse meat before, they just had to experiment and hope it turned out semi palatable. On top of that, the food supplies were constantly changing."[136] In an episode of the podcast *Look Towards the Mountain*, Rob Buscher explained: "Suzie Sakai couldn't even look at certain foods without feeling nauseous after she left Heart Mountain." Sakai said:

> We had a lot of mutton, I had never tasted mutton before in my life. I can't say that it was my favorite dish. We had horse meat. They did manage to have rice. And of course by that time, things like coffee and sugar were rationed, they were also rationed in camp. Lots of canned food, canned green beans. To this day, I can't stand to look at canned green beans. Oh, the other thing that I remember very vividly was they somehow thought that we'd like squid. Unfortunately at that point in time, they didn't know how to prepare it, so they forgot to take the ink sacks out, and so you got this plate with the rice all black from the black stuff from the squid. I don't think I'll ever forget that.[137]

In her interview, all of these food memories came tumbling out. From her account alone, she experienced mutton, horse meat, and squid—three unfamiliar kinds of meat she was not used to eating regularly.

In *Farewell to Manzanar,* Jeanne Wakatsuki wrote, "The Caucasian servers were thinking that the fruit poured over rice would make a good dessert. Among the Japanese, of course, rice is never eaten with sweet foods, only with salty or savory foods."[138] She recalled

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[135] "Coddling the Japs," *Mill Valley Record,* June 3, 1943.

[136] Maruyama, "Food," *Campu* transcript, 10.

[137] Suzie Sakai interview by Dane Fujimoto, Oregon Nikkei Endowment Collection, Densho Digital Archive, https://ddr.densho.org/media/ddr-one-7/ddr-one-7-4-transcript-6b89bc7858.htm quoted in Rob Buscher, "Prison Food," *Look Toward the Mountain: Stories from Heart Mountain Incarceration Camp*, podcast audio transcript, (March 4, 2021), 5, https://www.heartmountain.org/look-toward-the-mountain-podcast/.

[138] Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, Reprint edition (Clarion Books, 2002), Apple books, 26.

being "horrified when [she] saw apricot syrup seeping through [her] little mound of rice."[139] Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ recognized that "the combination of ingredients here was an afront to how her body became habituated in a particular food culture. Rice and syrup here dis-integrated her body and a whole cultural system."[140] Mary Nomura tells of a similar atrocity that she was served in camp, "Nice cold Jell-O on top of hot rice."[141] The questionable combinations of rice and sweet toppings convey to the incarcerees that the white cooks know nothing about what Japanese people like to eat. Additionally, in analyzing food as code, the apricot syrup and Jell-O slopped onto the rice might also convey the message that the white cooks did not perceive the Japanese Americans as Americans because they were creating dishes based on what they perceived a Japanese might like to eat. Thus, these weird food combinations not only reflect the racialization of the Japanese Americans as the ethnic other but emphasize the dehumanization of this group of people in the creations of these disgusting food combinations hardly fit for human consumption.

Neuro-anthropologist John S. Allen details how our bodies can learn to be repulsed by foods that make us sick. He explains that because memorable bouts of food poisoning are "[a] classical example of conditioned learning, strong food aversions can develop after only a single exposure to a sickness-inducing food."[142] Although food poisoning is the clearest reason for why someone might develop an aversion to a particular type of food, Allen states that "food itself does not necessarily have to be the culprit." He provides the example of someone he knew, "who ate a package of Oreo cookies while on a boat trip, then became seasick and threw up; Oreo

[139] Wakatsuki Houston and Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, Apple books, 26.
[140] In conversation, Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ.
[141] Mary Nomura, "Mary Nomura Interview Segment 4," courtesy of the Manzanar National Historic Site Collection, https://ddr.densho.org/interviews/ddr-manz-1-7-4/, quoted in Maruyama, "Food," *Campu* podcast transcript, 6.
[142] Allen, *The Omnivorous Mind,"* 172.

cookies have no attraction for him now."[143] In this Oreo example, it was the motion sickness that made him ill, but he now associates this feeling with the cookies. Several oral history accounts by Japanese American incarcerees and one of my Vietnamese interviewees similarly developed aversions to various foods that they ate frequently or experienced while they were in the camps. Although the incarcerees did experience food poisoning in the camps, it was not just the spoiled food that gave them particular taste aversions, but also the repetitiveness: "When asked to share their strongest memories of the Japanese American camps, many survivors talk about the food. Life-sustaining but boring is the consensus."[144] Thus, associations with these particularly unappetizing and alienating foods became inseparably tied to memories of the camps.

As I mentioned in the previous section, apple butter was one of the most commonly loathed and remembered foods by Japanese American incarcerees. Although he could not remember everything that he ate in camp, Carl Yoshimine recalled, "we sure ate a lot of apple butter jam. It was in the jar. It was a brown jam, and I think we had squid. [laughter] Squid. I didn't like that. Those were some of the things that I didn't like. So it wasn't that I remember what I liked."[145] The fact that he remembered the foods he did not like, demonstrates the strength of these negative food associations. The first time I heard about squid being served in the camps was when I had the opportunity to speak with Yoshio "Yosh" Nakamura, a 98-year-old Nisei veteran who was incarcerated at Gila River in Arizona. He was surprised when I asked about what kind of food he had in camp. After thinking for a moment, he replied that he thought "the food in camp was pretty good. It was much better than what we got in the army."[146] Then he

[143] Allen, *The Omnivorous Mind*, 170.
[144] Densho, "Bad Meat and Missing Sugar: Food in the Japanese American Camps."
[145] Carl Yoshimine, Japanese American Heritage Project, Jan 3, 2019. https://www.anaheim.net/DocumentCenter/View/28017/Japanese-American-Heritage-Project-Carl-Yoshimine.
[146] In conversation with Yoshio "Yosh" Nakamura, Los Angeles, March 7, 2020.

stunned me by saying, “I just remember that we were fed a lot of squid. I remember never wanting to have squid ever again!” When I asked how they prepared the squid, he could not really remember, but said that the Japanese chefs in camps would try to be creative and prepare it to suit Japanese tastes. For squid to have been served so frequently to the Japanese American incarcerees, it must have been abundant and cheap.

Memorably revolting and alienating food experiences happened in the Vietnamese refugee camps as well. One of the Vietnamese refugees I interviewed, Bình-Minh Trần, ended up at the Pulau Bidong camp in Malaysia. Prior to heading to Pulau Bidong, she stayed at a temporary camp. She remembers being given rations of “sweet rice, a boiled egg in a…plastic bag…and they gave us a ice tea and one of those kiddie drinks with the straw that you poke through the hole in the top.”[147] Here she seemed to get caught up in the retelling of the memory, as if the details were coming back to her. She told me, “I remember it's yellow, and it's iced tea. And until now I cannot drink iced tea. I cannot drink iced tea, I won't ever. Since I got to America for more than 40 years I refuse to drink iced tea!”[148] Her repulsion towards iced tea might demonstrate the strength of association between food and place in one’s memory. Additionally, her refusal to drink tea might also be a kind of protective mechanism against reliving the difficult memories associated with this drink. The plastic bags from her rations play a crucial part in her story in Malaysia.

At that time, they did not have sealable Ziplock bags to keep out the air, humidity, and bugs from their rations; instead, they only had the kind of plastic bag with just a flap. She explained that each month they were given a certain amount of rice and dry salted fish per family

[147] Bình-Minh Trần (pseudonym) telephone interview by the author, December 31, 2020.

[148] Thi Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* (New York: Abrams Comicarts, 2018), 261. Bui actually drew this box of chrysanthemum tea into her illustrated memoir.

group:

> You know, in Asia during that time it rained. It rained and we have no way to store our salted fish. We got maggots on them because they got wet. That's why now, I don't eat salted fish either. Well, maggots, we could not eat it, so I had to help my aunt prepare the food, because I was the oldest of my cousins, because my aunt is the only woman, and then me, the next oldest girl. So, I helped to cook and do all that stuff and I got so grossed out, but I didn't have any choice. So, for months we ate just rice and dried salted fish. That's how we ate.[149]

Japanese American incarcerees also found maggots in some of the fish they were given. Susie "Jinx" Fujii had an experience similar to that of Bình-Minh Trần. She said, "we were all eating, and my neighbor lady would be eating her fish, and all of a sudden, inside the fish there was maggots. [Laughs] And that cured me. I didn't eat fish for the longest time. There's a lot of things I stopped eating after I went to camp."[150] These memories demonstrate the lasting impact of the carceral experience on the bodies of the incarcerees. Some of their food associations were so negative that even years later they experienced a visceral reaction of disgust at the sight of the food.

**Cultural Alienation: Deprivation of Identity-Orienting Food**

In addition to being physiologically alienated through the unfamiliar foods provided to them in camps, Japanese American incarcerees and Vietnamese refugees were also culturally alienated in the camps because they were deprived of ethnic ingredients integral to their cultural identity. Back in March of 2020—at the very beginning of the pandemic—when we were discussing all the empty shelves at the store, my roommate told me about her friend's mother who said, "Without rice we lose our Filipino-ness!" Since rice is a staple in Asian cuisine, many different Asian ethnic groups expressed a very similar sentiment. Nguyễn-võ relayed "similar

[149] Bình-Minh Trần interview by author, December 21, 2020.

[150] Susie "Jinx" Fujii, "Susie 'Jinx' Fujii Interview Segment 8" interview by Betty Jean Harry, Courtesy of the Japanese American Museum of Oregon, https://ddr.densho.org/interviews/ddr-one-7-69-8/, quoted in Maruyama, "Food," *Campu,* podcast transcript, 7.

stories in Vietnamese families during these Covid times!" She explained:

> My friend's mother fretted and fretted over the fact that they had run out of jasmine rice and there is none to buy at the supermarkets in Orange County. Some of my friends had to donate their own rice stash for older folks because rice is so important to their sense of being well-fed. One elderly woman recalled the famine in North Vietnam during World War II to lament the severity of the rice shortage in Orange County at the moment.[151]

The threat of a rice shortage transported this elderly woman back to a different point in her life during which she had experienced this kind of food scarcity, and the donated rice stashes provide comfort. Howard Ikemoto discussed how he and his family felt when they had to go without rice in the mess halls at the Tule Lake camp, "We were very unused to eating potatoes. It's not something that was part of our regular diet. My father and mother ate rice every day of their life. Rice is certainly soul food for Japanese-Americans."[152] Although this interview did not take place during the pandemic, I feel that Ikemoto's description of rice as "soul food" helps to illustrate the importance of these culturally central foods in maintaining ties to ethnic identity and security in one's everyday existence.

Food sustains life and carries the memories of prior identity or belonging. To explain the significance of food and identity, Susan Kalčik writes, "Foodways can be charged with emotion and significance for both old and new Americans because food is potentially a symbol of ethnic identity."[153] These examples suggest much about how important staple foods feature prominently in one's understanding of their ethnic identity and are an important source for comfort during times of uncertainty. In a similar vein, soy sauce (called *shoyu* by the Japanese) and fish sauce (*nuoc mam* in Vietnamese) are central ingredients in Japanese and Vietnamese cuisine

[151] In conversation with Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ, March 23, 2020. This was right at the very beginning of the pandemic. Our last class session was on zoom.

[152] Davia Nelson and Nikki Silva ("The Kitchen Sisters"), "Weenie Royale: Food and the Japanese Internment," *Morning Edition,* NPR, December 20, 2007, https://www.npr.org/transcripts/17335538.

[153] Kalčik, "Ethnic Foodways in America: Symbol and the Performance of Identity," 44.

respectively—shoyu is to Japanese cuisine what nuoc mam is to Vietnamese cuisine. Many oral history accounts demonstrate the significance of these ingredients to the people within the camps, and how they went to great lengths to procure these essential ingredients in order to make the foods they were receiving in camps more palatable.

When the Japanese Americans were forced to leave their homes, they were only allowed to bring a maximum of three travel bags with them.[154] The contents of these bags reveal what the Japanese Americans felt were absolute essentials. Referencing Monica Sone's memoir, *Nisei Daughter,* Jane Dusselier provides an example of the importance of soy sauce to the Japanese:

> On the morning of removal, a friend who was helping the Itoi family with the last minute packing came across a gallon can of soy sauce that was marked for the trip at Puyallup. Puzzled, he asked if the bulky and heavy container was to be left behind to which Mrs. Itoi responded, "It's going with me. I didn't think we'd have shoyu where we are going."[155]

Mrs. Itoi was indeed correct—in the beginning, beyond what people were able to smuggle into camp, there was no shoyu. For months in camp, the Japanese Americans endured unfamiliar meals, until they began growing and producing their own foods. Whereas the Vietnamese were not tasked with producing their own food while in the refugee camps, the Japanese Americans in the incarceration camps were tasked with farming and preparing their own food. Before they were incarcerated, the Japanese were prolific farmers on the West Coast. Min Tonai explained that there was a huge economic incentive to incarcerate Japanese and Japanese American farmers because it would not only remove them as competitors, but also fill the camps with capable farmers who could cultivate the less developed lands on which the prison camps were located. Although I will not discuss this in detail, I would like to acknowledge the complicated history of

[154] Dusselier, "Does Food Make Place?" 140.

[155] Monica Sone, *Nisei Daughter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000, originally published in 1953), 168, quoted in Dusselier "Does Food Make Place," 140.

the Japanese prison camps, established on Native American land.[156]

Not only were they growing their own sustenance, but "[t]he agricultural programs were also a way of preserving the incarcerees' food culture. Some of the camps started growing Japanese vegetables so that they could cook some of the dishes that they loved even in camp."[157] The produce they were able to grow included daikon and "soya beans" so they could begin making tofu and soy sauce in the camps.[158] In his memoir, Noboru Shirai, demonstrated the ability of the Japanese farmers, "The land around the camp had never been farmed before, and the soil was rich. On a 300-acre plot just outside the camp we could grow any vegetable that had a name: sweet potatoes, *nappa, daikon,* carrots, and potatoes. We decorated our dining tables with fresh pickled *daikon* and *nappa.* What wonderful relishes for us internees!"[159]

In a journal entry from October 19, 1942, my grandfather, James Yamasaki, wrote down several notes from the *Gila News Courier*: "More Gila crops for kitchen—fresh peas, beets, turnips, red radish" and "Soy Sauce mill at Manzanar—approximately 5000 gal. of shoyu per month to be produced." This news must have really stood out for him to have thought it important enough to copy into his journal. Reflecting back on his own journal entries, he later wrote, "It was interesting that the Japanese produced soy sauce, a necessary ingredient in the Japanese diet. I'm sure there was real enthusiasm to produce this. Can you imagine living those years without soy sauce? All the camps were thankful that Manzanar was able to produce it."[160]

Similar to the way in which my grandfather explained that soy sauce was a "necessary

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[156] For more on this topic, see Karen J. Leong and Myla Vicenti Carpio, "Carceral States: Converging Indigenous and Asian Experiences in the Americas," *Amerasia Journal 41,* no. 1 (April 1, 2016): vii-xvii, https://doi.org/10.17953/aj.42.1.vii.

[157] Maruyama, "Food," *Campu,* podcast transcript, 38.

[158] Maruyama, "Food," *Campu,* podcast transcript, 39.

[159] Noboru Shirai, *Tule Lake: An Issei Memoir*, ed. Eucaly Shirai and Valerie Samson, trans. Ray Hosoda (Sacramento, CA: Tom's Printing, 2001), 63.

[160] Yamasaki, "Annotated Camp Journal," 33. This annotation in his camp journal is originally in bolded font.

ingredient in the Japanese diet," my Vietnamese interviewee, Phù Sa, explained the importance of fish sauce to the Vietnamese diet. He said, "Vietnamese cannot live without fish sauce. At least for my case, because in most every food you have fish sauce. We don't season with salt; we season with fish sauce."[161] Although nuoc mam is a commonly known ingredient today and widely available in stores across the country, when Vietnamese refugees first arrived in the United States this was not a well-known or easily found ingredient.[162] In 1975, journalist Jonathan Kirsch wrote about the confusion he experienced during his first encounter with "Nuoc Mam" in an article titled, "'Little Saigon'—Another Misperception: 'Vietnamese Refugees Recognize Their Predicament Better Than Their Hosts.'" Kirsch wrote:

> "Our future is dark," a 38-year-old high school teacher from Hue told me as he stood in the doorway of a crowded Quonset hut at Camp Pendleton. His voice rose dramatically: "We cannot forget Nuoc Mam."
>
> *Nuoc Mam?* Is it the name of a Vietnamese national hero, I wondered, or a historic shrine, or perhaps one of the broad boulevards of Saigon? No, he said in mournful tone, *Nuoc Mam* is fish sauce. [163]

When I first read this article, I found this interaction to be quite humorous. Read as if written in the present, this article could almost be part of a satire about the love Vietnamese people have for fish sauce. However, written in 1975, this article preserves a world that has yet to discover the wonderfully pungent goodness of fish sauce and exposes a lack of cultural awareness about the needs of Vietnamese people. Reading this article again keeping in mind the context of this group of people who had to flee from their homes—oftentimes only being able to take with them the clothes they were wearing—the concern of never having fish sauce again and striving to preserve its flavor in memory underscores the ways in which people tie memories of food to cultural

[161] Phù Sa (pen name) interview by author, December 30, 2020.

[162] I was surprised that even Microsoft Word knows "Nuoc Mam," it does not register it as a spelling error.

[163] 'Little Saigon'—Another misperception: 'Vietnamese Refugees Recognize Their Predicament Better Than Their Hosts' by Jonathan Kirsch (Los Angeles Times (1923-1995), June 10, 1975, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times pg. C7.

identity. As Hasia Diner explains, "Foodways include food as material items and symbols of identity, and the history of a group's ways with food goes far beyond an exploration of cooking and consumption. It amounts to a journey to the heart of its collective world."[164] The loss of their home country is reflected in this high school teacher's perceived loss of a quintessential Vietnamese food product. I am sure that, like Mrs. Itoi ensuring that she packed soy sauce to take with her to the Japanese American prison camp, if Vietnamese refugees could have taken bulkier items with them, fish sauce would have made it into their luggage.

In fact, one of my interviewees, Mỹ-Châu Lê, shared with me an experience similar to that of Mrs. Itoi. After leaving Vietnam by boat, Lê and her family arrived in Thailand. They were there for about three months, but before leaving Thailand for Minnesota, her family had the opportunity to go shopping at a mall in Bangkok. She recounted to me their purchasing of a large steamer to bring with them to the United States. She said to me, "Can you imagine? [laughs] I don't know why we didn't think that there will be any there…our family loves sweet rice. That's why I remember. I don't remember anything else, but I remember that steamer." Although bulky, this steamer was an essential item for Lê's family, because it ensured that they would be able to make the Vietnamese foods that they loved in their new home in Minnesota.[165]

As in any ethnic cuisine, Vietnamese food is comprised of certain key characteristics and

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[164] Hasia Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish & Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 10 quoted in Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, "As American as Jackrabbit Adobo," in *Eating Asian America, A Food Studies Reader,* eds. Robert Ji-Song Ki, Martin F. Manalansan IV, and Anita Mannur (NY: New York University Press, 2013), 148.

[165] Mỹ-Châu Lê (pseudonym) telephone interview by the author, September 29, 2020. Lê explained, "my family was lucky because my parents have lived in Europe before and they have worked with WHO (World Health Organization), so they have traveled to different countries especially in the Southeast Asian countries." Thus, they had friends they were able to contact in Thailand. Because they had friends, they were able to stay in the center in Bangkok that was "a temporary base for the refugees who had already been processed to go to the third country." Her family spent two months in the center and one month in a Thai refugee camp. It was while they were in Bangkok that their friends took them shopping at the Thai mall where they purchased some clothes, some suitcases, and that giant steamer.

ingredients. However, the marines overseeing the Vietnamese food in the refugee camps were oblivious to what those essentials were. Kirsch continued with his observations of the culinary needs of the Vietnamese refugees stating:

> A few yards away, I saw a Vietnamese family of three generations clustered around a feast of rice cakes and braised chicken under an open-sided tent ordinarily used as a Protestant chapel. A visiting U.S. Navy lieutenant and his Vietnamese wife had brought a few Vietnamese dishes into camp for their newly arrived relatives. "The marines serve them short-grained rice," the bearded officer said softly. "After all the years in Vietnam, don't they realize the Vietnamese eat only long-grain rice?"[166]

Lack of attention to important details like this are a huge pet peeve of my mother. When I told her that this article reminded me of her, she agreed, stating, "If people don't care, then they don't pay attention. Even if it's right in front of them the whole time they won't see it."[167] Like my mother, Kirsch also recognized what this inattention to detail implied, concluding:

> [f]ar more is involved than culinary taste. Even now—even after the expenditure of 15 years, 50,000 American lives and hundreds of billions of American dollars in Vietnam—we do not fully understand the hunger and appetites of a people whose fate is still bound to ours. The failure of Marine cooks to provide fish sauce and long-grain rice, despite the presence of Vietnamese cooks as advisers to the kitchen detail, is symbolic of a larger failure to see and understand a culture now transplanted to American soil.[168]

In Kirsch's article, food served as a lens through which to understand the conditions and unmet needs of the refugee community. Continuing to apply anthropologist Mary Douglas's concept of food as code to the situation portrayed by Kirsch reveals "the pattern of social relations being expressed."[169] The Marine cooks' inattention to the Vietnamese refugees' food preferences highlights their ambivalence towards this group of people.

In this chapter, I discussed the ways in which the logic of the U.S. racialized wars in Asia extended domestically to impact the Japanese American incarcerees and Vietnamese refugees

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[166] Kirsch, "'Little Saigon'--Another Misperception," C7.
[167] In conversation with Van Bui, February 28, 2020.
[168] Kirsch, "'Little Saigon'--Another Misperception," C7.
[169] Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," quoted in Kalčik, "Ethnic Foodways in America," 47.

who were thus racialized and dehumanized at the site of food provision within the spaces of camp. By examining the ways in which both populations were deprived of basic human needs and cultural necessities because of how they were racialized as less than human, I focused on the ways in which both groups were alienated socially by ways of misconceptions of the other, physiologically alienated through the foods they were provided, and culturally alienated by being deprived of the sauces that make up their ethnic soul foods. Analyzing the experiences of those who survived the camps helps elucidate the ways in which food can be interpreted as code, and how these experiences can become encoded in the food as powerful memories and associations.

In the next chapter I will focus on how incarcerees and refugees used food and foodways to resist the institutional structures of camp and recuperate their individual and communal identities in these carceral spaces. Dusselier makes a crucial point when discussing the importance of food beyond its nutritive properties: "While the nutritional and stomach filling necessity of food was obvious in the camps, the ability to eat foods that were sensually pleasing was also important. Food fulfilled a wide range of needs including satisfying acquired tastes, recalling pleasant memories, and providing comfort."[170] Thus, beyond discussing foods eaten for survival, I will analyze how Japanese American incarcerees and refugees mobilized within the camp spaces in order to secure better food conditions for themselves to sustain their souls and survive the dehumanizing spaces of the camps.

[170] Dusselier, "Does Food Make Place?" 159.

## CHAPTER 2: Creative Resistance and Defiant Recuperation

The first few months in both camps, where incarcerees and refugees met with scarce or spoiled food and inhospitable living conditions, were extremely difficult and created an atmosphere of diminished spirits amongst the camps' inhabitants. Thus, within the overpopulated and unprepared camp spaces where everyday existence consisted of deprivation and monotony, food played a critical role in maintaining and boosting the morale of the refugees and incarcerees. In order to combat those feelings of hopelessness, both refugees and incarcerees found comfort in community and used their creativity and resourcefulness to improve their living conditions by linking to memories of happier times and standing against mistreatment within those carceral spaces to make their situations more tolerable. In this chapter, I define resistance as the ways in which people created methods to cope with their new environment and refused to accept the dehumanizing conditions imposed on them within the camps.

To fight against their dehumanizing treatment and assert their humanity, the Japanese American incarcerees and Vietnamese refugees enacted varying modes of resistance revolving around food and foodways in the camps. However, resistance in the camps did not always take the form of an organized protest or a strike. Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi explains, "Although the U.S. Military controlled their mobility, sustenance, and political status in the camps, refugees still found ways to subvert military power via quotidian acts of survival."[171] Thus, in order to survive, the camp occupants resisted their dehumanization at a day-to-day level and used food as the means through which they could internally exceed the confines of the camps. In this chapter, I will discuss forms of food resistance in the camps through an increasing order of risk from inventiveness and resourcefulness to demands and organized collective action.

[171] Gandhi, *Archipelago of Resettlement*, 93.

**"Edible Memories"**

Because eating is often an all-sensory experience, some of our strongest memories revolve around food.[172] Neuro-anthropologist John S. Allen states, "Food memories are important not just because they concern sustenance but also because they have extensive connections to other memories of people, places, and things."[173] Keeping this in mind, there are many messages that can become encoded within food and then attached to memories. Tami Tomoye Takahashi recalled her experiences as a Nisei (second-generation Japanese American) who was imprisoned at the Topaz camp during WWII:

> Even now seventy years later if I look at a tin pie plate it brings back memories. I used to look at it so long, and I used to be so hungry. So, I ate everything. But there never was much of anything it was very skimpy. I had to imagine other things that I was fond of and make believe that I was eating an enchilada or a tamale, some Chinese food, a turkey and stuffing. I would imagine that as I put other things in my mouth.[174]

Although seventy years had passed, looking at a tin pie pan brought her back to her time in camp. Her food imaginings reveal an important aspect of her identity and life prior to her incarceration. Historian Valerie Matsumoto gives further insight into the importance of the specific foods that Takahashi references: "Imagining the enchiladas and Chinese dishes reveals the multiethnic communities in which she previously lived. Her nostalgia for Thanksgiving turkey marks her as a U.S.-born Nisei."[175] While trapped in camp and yearning for home, Takahashi drew on memories of fonder times and her favorite foods to fill out the skimpy offerings on her tin pie plate. Her memories longing for those specific food that conjured images of home and holiday traditions, indicate the ways in which she felt alienated from all that she

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[172] "Food and Memory," Harvard University Press Blog, accessed October 2, 2021, https://harvardpress.typepad.com/hup_publicity/2012/05/food-and-memory-john-allen.html; Julie R. Thomson, "Psychologists Explain Why Food Memories Can Feel So Powerful," HuffPost, May 10, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/power-of-food-memories_n_5908b1d7e4b02655f8413610.

[173] Allen, *The Omnivorous Mind,* 152.

[174] Nelson and Silva ,"Weenie Royale," https://www.npr.org/transcripts/17335538.

[175] In conversation with Valerie Matsumoto, AAAS panel closing comments.

previously knew.

Memories like these are important not only because they are formative moments in a person's life, but they also preserve the impacts of government and empire on individuals. The powerful food associations retained in these poignant recollections of deprivation and alienation—where dehumanizing food provisions informed the camp occupants how they were graded on a scale of human worth—demonstrate the lasting impact of the carceral experience. Focusing on this common experience of food scarcity pervading the memories of the incarcerees and refugees, I noticed that a common theme in my interviews was a discussion of food memories during these periods of hunger. Historical archaeologist and historian Kelly Fanto Deetz uses the term "edible memories" to explain, "Food acts as memory, a connection to the past, and a signifier of one's ancestral roots." Removed from their homes and homelands, the Japanese and Vietnamese used food and foodways to uphold cultural traditions and a sense of community. Using Deetz's concept of "edible memories," I highlight the ways in which memories of food helped my interviewees to cope with their new surroundings and boost morale. Within the unfamiliar carceral spaces of camp, "[f]oodways exemplify the importance of food as culture, a way to maintain connections to the ancestors and to a land and people left behind." As I have examined above in the recollections of Tami Takahashi, these edible memories can reveal the connections between generations, where individuals came from, and what foods might remind them of home—the places they lived before entering the carceral spaces of the camps.[176]

A vivid example of edible memories came from one of my Vietnamese interviewees; Phù Sa left Vietnam in 1982 when he was about sixteen years old and spent 56 days in a transitional camp on Kuku Island before being transferred to Galang refugee camp in Indonesia, where he

[176] Kelley Fanto Deetz, *Stolen Bodies, Edible Memories* (Routledge Handbooks Online, 2014): 115, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315753454.ch7.

stayed for about eighteen months before leaving for California. He told me about a game that he would play with friends that he made in the camp. Like these friends, he fled from Vietnam without his family. So, these young men banded together to help each other survive their experience, pooling together their food and also sharing their edible memories. He said:

> We only had this game at night, where we start talking about food and describing the food. For example, it's my turn, and you know I like pho, so I would describe the pho. I'd say, "Ok, everybody! So, this is pho, this is what it looked like and then like, how you're going to eat it**…"** It's more like game but in a way, kind of eases the way that we missed Vietnam. Yeah, for me, what remind me of Vietnam most in food is pho. And I remember vividly, you know, like how I'd say, "Oh you know imagine this bowl with really hot broth and there is aroma, lots of steam rises up. And then you take a piece of lemon and you squeeze it in." And you can feel the saliva start forming in your mouth and you look at your friends start salivating.[177]

While telling me this story he was laughing and sounded like he was really having fun recounting these tales. He even bragged that he and several of his friends were so good at describing these foods that by 1 or 2 AM the rest of his friends were telling him, "You guys, shut up! Let me sleep, I am hungry already, don't do this!" Espiritu writes, "even in this very space of despair and chaos, refugees managed to create new and meaningful social relations. Bound by their shared fate, confined in a crammed environment, and with ample time to spare, refugees often developed intense kin-like relations with each other."[178] Phù Sa confirmed the strengths of the bonds that he formed with his scout group at Galang, making sure that I understood that "those people in scouts become friends for life."[179]

As my interviewee mentioned, these edible memories were more than just a game; the

[177] Phù Sa telephone interview by the author, December 30, 2020.

[178] Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 69.

[179] Phù Sa, interview, December 20, 2020; November 13, 2021. He explained that in Vietnam, Boy Scouts was disbanded in 1975. However, he had been a boy scout pre-1975, so when he arrived at Galang camp he said that that the UNHCR asked for some programs to be run in camp to manage all of the kids in camp. This had already been implemented when he arrived. So, he was asked to join one of these groups—and the groups were organized by age—thus, the friends he developed the strongest relationships with in camp were his scout troop.

comfort and joy that came with sharing these "imaginary delicacies"[180] served as a form of coping that highlights "the pivotal role of food in holding together, projecting and re-imagining a lost world and identity in the context of extreme trauma and dislocation."[181] Monica Janowski states, "food is a potent mnemonic for remembering the past and for attempting to recreate it."[182]

As they drifted further from their lost country, Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ recalled the ways in which people aboard the U.S. Naval ship found ways to pass the time as they waited in line to get their daily allotment of water. Nguyễn-võ remembered that her family was situated next to someone who had a talent for mimicking voices and would imitate speeches "of failed South Vietnamese leaders for sarcastic laughs."[183] However, when he was not reenacting political speeches, he would instead recite recipes. She recalled, "He would talk all day, he was our radio. You know, it was like alternating between political speeches so people could insult their leaders and describing food dishes. So, it's like food was something that haunted us…we were preoccupied with food [laughs]."[184] Reflecting on her experiences further, she explained the connection between the failed political leaders and food: "It's like that's how we ended up stateless and deprived of food, which he proceeded to provide us through recitations of recipes."

In the moment of the interview, I blurted out that it seemed counterintuitive and not very helpful to be talking about food when everyone was so hungry, but she explained that discussion of food brought good humor, and "it created a kind of community, people joined in, they would volunteer their version of that dish instead of the one that he was talking about. And then they would add, you know, their own dishes." She said, "There was a compulsion and joyful

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[180] Wenying Xu, *Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian American Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 1.

[181] Monica Janowski, "Food in Traumatic Times: Women, Foodways and 'Polishness' During a Wartime 'Odyssey,'" *Food and Foodways* 20, no. 3–4 (July 1, 2012): 326, https://doi.org/10.1080/07409710.2012.715969.

[182] Janowski "Food in Traumatic Times," 331.

[183] In conversation, Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ.

[184] Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ, interview by the author, December 28, 2020.

compulsion about adding whatever dish you know, to repertoire of dishes that everybody was consuming, you know, through imagination."[185] With these imagined and imaginative dishes came good humor, and these stories raised people's spirits. People's "imaginary delicacies" and "edible memories" had the ability to symbolically keep a part of themselves tethered to their homes even as they were drifting away from it.

In the spaces to which they were relegated because of imperial entanglements, the Japanese Americans and Vietnamese refugees tried to recuperate or invent memories of food and foodways to cope with their carceral status. The feelings of joy that people were able to conjure up despite being thrown into these unfamiliar and hostile environments provided a moment of respite from the feelings of loss and fear on their perilous journey. During those times of scarcity within the carceral spaces, people used food to help recuperate their humanity and help each other to survive under these difficult conditions. By sharing memories of food, people worked together to establish community and to preserve their identities.

**"The Hidden Food": Creative Cooking for Survival**

As I discussed in the previous section, when incarcerees and refugees did not have enough food, they supplemented their reality with "edible memories" and "imaginary delicacies" to help collectively lift their spirits. However, after some time had passed in the camps, when the incarcerees and refugees were served repulsive or boring foods, they invented creative methods to make use of what they had in order improve their food situations and subvert the power structures of camps. In this section I build upon Thomas Ugelvik's concept of "the hidden food" to discuss the ways in which people made their lives more livable within these camp spaces and used food to reclaim some agency within the dehumanizing spaces of camp.

[185] Nguyễn-võ, interview by the author, December 28, 2020.

In his article, "The hidden food: Mealtime resistance and identity work in a Norwegian prison," Ugelvik explores the ways in which prisoners cope with their imprisonment through their engagement with food, specifically through creative methods of modifying the standard prison fare to concoct what he calls "the hidden food." These hidden foods must be concealed because their preparation involves the breaking of prison rules and would result in punishment. Thus, he pays particular attention to why, despite the risk of punishment, prisoners go to such great lengths to modify their foods. He explains, "prisoners experience the official prison food as a continuation of the more general attacks on their identity that prison entails, denying them status as a person with competence and agency." Therefore, the prisoners' understanding of their "daily meals thus serve as painful bodily manifestations of the power the institution holds over the individual."[186]

The prison food encodes the hierarchical power structures of the institution. Thus, one prisoner explained to Ugelvik why he goes to such great lengths to improve the prison food: "it's not that I want to break the rules, you know? I just want to survive. You have to do something to survive this place."[187] In prison, an institutionalized space designed to neutralize individuality and agency, these prisoners subverted the regimented and fully controlled space of the prison by using food to hold onto their identities. Ugelvik draws attention to the hidden points of food and resistance at the everyday level:

> If one, following Foucault (1999b/1975), thinks of every meal served as a tiny movement of the prison machinery, each alternative meal made in a cell can be seen as a grain of sand in the cogs of the machine. The fact that the official prison food is made to represent symbolically the prison walls means the prisoners are given the power to scale those walls, symbolically speaking. They may not be able to walk out of the prison at their own volition, but they can at least eat what they want, when they want it.[188]

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[186] Thomas Ugelvik, "The Hidden Food: Mealtime Resistance and Identity Work in a Norwegian Prison," *Punishment & Society* 13, no. 1 (January 2011): 47, https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474510385630.

[187] Ugelvik, "The Hidden Food," 51.

[188] Ugelvik, "The Hidden Food," 56.

Looking at these altered foods as everyday acts of defiance—"grains of sand in the cogs of the machine"—highlights the significance of creative expressions of agency. This intentional act not only brings more pleasure into the prison environment through better tasting food, but also allows the prisoners to pretend through this "hidden food" that they have transcended the prison walls. Cooking in the prison thus becomes an everyday act of defiance in which the prisoners reclaim some control over their lives.

Like the prisoners in Ugelvik's study, the Japanese American incarcerees also found ways to alter their food creatively and resist the oppressive and regimented spaces of camp. By developing new recipes with the limited ingredients available, incarcerees demonstrated their ingenuity. The podcast *Campu* highlights a column in the *Topaz Times* called "Food Fancies," authored by Evelyn Kirimura, "which was dedicated to sharing recipes that could be made on a hot plate from simple ingredients purchased at the canteen."[189] Hot plates were banned in camps, but incarcerees could occasionally obtain them. Being able to cook within the confines of their barracks allowed the incarcerees to create a more personal space for themselves to eat as a family and to have more autonomy in eating what they wanted to eat. This gave them a sense of agency within the prison camps.

Jane Dusselier provides an example of creative cooking within the space of the Japanese American prison camp: "As Kiku Funabiki recalled, deprivation of customary food stirred strong emotions among imprisoned Japanese Americans. 'After a year of dull 'camp fare'—canned beans, Spam, rutabagas, 'slop suey,' heavy with fats and starches—Mother longed for unagi.'"[190]

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[189] Maruyama, "Food," *Campu,* podcast transcript, 25.

[190] Kiku Funabiki, "Camp Cravings," in *The Rice Cooker's Companion: Japanese American Food and Stories,* Gayle Nishikawa, ed. (San Francisco: National Japanese American Historical Society, 2000), 65, quoted in Dusselier "Does Food Make Place," 159.

In order to help satisfy this craving, "Funabiki's father and brother [were motivated] to seek out a rattlesnake as a substitute for eel by sneaking past a guard and crawling under the barbed wire fence. Once captured and skinned, the snake was marinated, broiled, and eaten."[191] At the beginning, leaving the fenced enclosure or even approaching the fences overseen by military sentries could be a high-risk activity that resulted in death. One such tragic example was the killing of a 63-year-old Issei man, James Hatsuaki Wakasa, who was shot to death by a military sentry while walking his dog near the fence inside the Topaz camp.[192] The risks involved in leaving the camps highlight the importance of food not only for physical sustenance but also for the emotional well-being of the incarcerees.

Muralist and children's book artist Katie Yamasaki has recorded another example of incarcerees risking punishment to seek out soul-sustaining foods beyond the camp fences in her illustrated children's book, *Fish for Jimmy.* Her story of a young boy named Jimmy struggling to cope with being uprooted from his home and incarcerated with his family at the Amache camp in Colorado, was inspired by a story from her family's history in which her "grandfather's cousin snuck out of the camp to find fish for his very young son."[193] In her story, Yamasaki portrays Jimmy's struggle with adapting to the unfamiliar foods in camp. She writes, "Jimmy didn't understand why his family couldn't be together at home near the Pacific Ocean, at home where they could eat in their own kitchen. Why couldn't his mother cook the good rice and noodles, fresh vegetables and fish that he was used to." Because he could not understand what was happening to him and his family, and he did not like any of the food that was being served, Jimmy refused to eat anything. Thus, to remedy the situation, Jimmy's older brother Taro—

[191] Funabiki "Camp Cravings," quoted in Dusselier "Does Food Make Place," 159.
[192] In conversation with Valerie Matsumoto; https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Homicide_in_camp/
[193] Katie Yamasaki, *Fish for Jimmy: Inspired by One Family's Experience in a Japanese American Internment Camp,* (New York: Holiday House, 2016), Kindle.

acting as a fictional stand in for Yamasaki's grandfather's cousin—cuts a hole in the fence of the camp in order to go catch some fish for his brother. In her illustration, Yamasaki details the delight that this fish brings to his little brother Jimmy and his mother: "Mother laughed as Jimmy ate at last. Taro had forgotten the sound of his mother's laugh, and it was beautiful."[194] With good food comes good spirits. This fish was essential to the emotional life of Jimmy, and it saved him.

Another clandestine camp activity that raised spirits was the brewing of sake—rice wine—by some of the Issei. One of my Nisei interviewees, Min Tonai, recounted his experience with sake in the camp. Although he was too young to drink it, being only twelve years old at the time, he said:

> One day my father came home with half a pint of this milky stuff. They [his friends] gave him some sake and my mother saw the milkiness and dumped it out—"Oooh no no no, don't do that—!" Too late! The thing that she didn't know, is the reason that sake is pure—clear—is because they filter it. They hadn't filtered it. She thought it was moonshine and it was poisonous [laughs]. Oh, I always heard Isseis always making sure that they would get rice, you know, and they would make sake.[195]

Issei Noboru Shirai remarked, "When you wanted something badly enough, you figure out a way to get it."[196] He explained that those he called the "tipplers" were the ones who initially perfected sake-brewing in the Tule Lake camp, and they made a good amount of money on it as well:

> The tipplers began selling *sake* for more than $5 a gallon. Even at that price, they sold a lot for parties and social gatherings. The *sake* was a perfect accompaniment to the sashimi tuna we could order through our canteens and the daikon radish grown in our own gardens. We didn't have any restaurants, but at New Year's, we had a party that lasted for three days. We had been able to order a banjo called a shamisen from the outside and we invited the musicians in the camp to play. The musicians had made the rounds in the countryside of Japan in days long gone and knew how to play many old tunes. With liquor and nostalgic music, we sang and danced with abandon. Our hearts felt so light, it was as if the barbed wire fences around us had vanished, and we were free

[194] Yamasaki, *Fish for Jimmy*, 19.
[195] Min Tonai, telephone interview by the author, October 28, 2020.
[196] Shirai, *Tule Lake an Issei Memoir*, 84.

again.[197]

Shirai's account demonstrates the ways in which they were able to raise their spirits and celebrate on their own terms.

Vietnamese refugees also recalled several examples of culinary creativity in the camps. Although there were many triumphs of creative cooking that made food better, sometimes imaginative efforts did not always pan out. While at Pulau Bidong in Malaysia, my Vietnamese interviewee, Bình-Minh Trần explained that at some point during her stay the authorities stopped giving them dried salted fish and supplemented their rations with salt instead of fish so that they could cook. Unfortunately, however, this ration of salt did not last the month, so Trần recalled:

> I remember my aunt didn't have any more salt, but we need salt, otherwise you're going to get sick. So, she would tell my cousin to go out to the ocean, scoop up the ocean water, because it's salty, to cook her rice in it—We couldn't even eat rice! We would eat rice soup because it would extend the rice longer because, more water, so she would make rice soup with that rice. And then it was so bitter.

While she was telling this story, I remember nodding along because I thought for a moment that this might actually work—if you want to make rice salty, use salty water, genius! However, it turns out that seawater is just too salty. I could hear the regret in her voice as she explained, "They had to throw away the rice and we were so sorry that we lost the rice, because you couldn't eat it, so we stopped using seawater. But that was just…it's just horrible! Horrible! Horrible!"[198]

One important instance of creativity and resourcefulness within the camp spaces is represented in the feature film, *Green Dragon,* which was written and produced by Vietnamese American filmmaker Timothy Bui. The film takes place entirely at Camp Pendleton and chronologically begins before the end of the war and concludes months after the fall of Saigon.

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[197] Shirai, *Tule Lake an Issei Memoir*, 84.
[198] Bình-Minh Trần (pseudonym), interview by author, December 31, 2020.

Unlike the Pulau Bidong camp, where the refugees needed to cook their own food, there were not many opportunities to cook at Camp Pendleton because the marines did all the cooking for the refugees. Thus, this film demonstrates another way that refugees found ways to improve their situation in the unfamiliar camp setting.

The most symbolically significant food item in this movie is an "ot hiem" chili pepper. At the end of the film Sgt. Lance, played by Patrick Swayze, takes Tai, the appointed Vietnamese refugee camp manager, out of Camp Pendleton "to see America." Tai comes back from the excursion optimistic about their future because the supermarkets are huge, and the streets are clean and beautiful; he explains that they have nothing to fear about leaving the camp. One man asks Tai if they sold "ot hiem" pepper at the market. Tai replies, no, but conveniently pulls out a single pepper from his pocket, declaring that although you cannot buy them "you can grow them here." In this scene the enthralled crowd of refugees stares in wonder at this pepper as it changes hands throughout the crowd. This moment had been foreshadowed throughout the film, as one man was shown meticulously cultivating a patch of dirt, sprouting what are revealed to be these peppers. This plant not only represents the passage of time throughout the film, but also the ability of the Vietnamese to plant themselves and thrive in America. So, although the Vietnamese refugees were not expected to cultivate the lands of the refugee camps, they still found ways to grow a connection to their homes.[199]

**Refugee Resourcefulness as Resistance**

Within these spaces of camp refugees were far from helpless. Their stories help counter the narrative that refugees were "passive objects of sympathy."[200] Nguyễn-võ recalled her mother's resourcefulness in taking care of her family in the camp:

[199] Timothy Bui, *Green Dragon*, 2001.
[200] Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 50.

> my mother was so resourceful… she was hustling, like for every single little thing that we needed. So, she went and found some cardboard, and she found some strings and she made, like flip flops out of cardboard. It was very thin cardboard, but it was still, you know, something that we could use to walk on the hot gravel and then get to the mess hall.[201]

When jumping from boat to boat to get onto the U.S. naval ship, they had removed and lost their shoes, so having some form of footwear to get around the camps was incredibly important and ingenious.

Both my maternal grandmother, Trà Bùi, and Nguyễn-võ were Vietnamese refugees who, after fleeing Vietnam, stayed for a brief time in Guam and then ended up in Camp Pendleton in California. Although I never had the chance to talk to my grandmother directly about her experiences fleeing Vietnam and ending up in a refugee camp, I am fortunate that my mother remembers enough of her mother's story to help me understand the path of her life after she left Vietnam.

One of the overlapping stories between my mother and Nguyễn-võ revolved around the scarcity of vegetables in the camps. Although my mother did not share with me details about her mother scavenging the grounds of the refugee camp in Guam for edible grass or weeds, like in Nguyễn-võ's experience, she recalled that my grandmother had missed having fresh vegetables while in the refugee camp. Gandhi notes that while the refugees had success pressuring the camp administrators to get them non-perishable supplies while in Guam, she explains, "The fact that they were unsuccessful in acquiring fresh vegetables speaks less to their efforts than to the general difficulty of shipping large quantities of perishable produce to an island whose own domestic agriculture had been all but obliterated by centuries of Spanish colonialism, Japanese occupation, American settler militarism, and unpredictable typhoons."[202] Gandhi explains that by

[201] Nguyễn-võ, interview by the author, December 28, 2020.
[202] Gandhi, *Archipelago of Resettlement,* 96.

"[f]oraging food from the local environment, Vietnamese refugees subverted the U.S. military's ability to exercise total control of their means of subsistence. In Joaquin "Kin" Perez's words: 'They were able to take care of themselves.'"[203] Foraging for food also enabled refugees to sell goods on the black market. The black market also demonstrates a breach in the enclosure of the camp space, and "signaled the inability of the UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] and the Malaysian government to fully control the perimeter of the island."[204]

My interviewee, Bình-Minh Trần, proved immensely resourceful when she was in the Pulau Bidong camp from October 1978 until June 1979. At fourteen years old, she helped to improve her family's quality of life during their seven months at the camp by utilizing the camp's black market and coming up with creative ways to make money. At the camp they had to cook their own food and find their own utensils and dishware. Before she left Vietnam her mother gave her a hundred dollars rolled up in a tube of toothpaste for safekeeping. Trần explained that she was "only able to buy a pot to cook rice in and a plastic bowl to do wash—a small plastic bowl not even a big one that you can buy at the dollar store for $1 now—and a cheap pot, you know, so we can cook rice in it. And that was all." For bowls they used empty cans discarded by other refugees at the camp who had enough money to buy food from the locals who brought canned food to sell on the black market. For utensils they would "chop up branches of the trees to use as chopsticks."[205]

At some point the camp administrators began rationing mung beans that, as Trần explained, would "sometimes get scattered and spilled over to the sand and the beach. So, what we did, me and my brother, was we'd run out to the ocean—the sand, the beach, and filter all the

[203] Gandhi, *Archipelago of Resettlement,* 97.
[204] Lipman, *In Camps*, 70.
[205] Trần (pseudonym), interview by the author, December 31, 2020.

sand out to get all the green beans, and those are the extra green beans besides the ration." I thought what she did next was brilliant. She told me that since they were living in the last row of housing they had no neighbors behind them, only mountains, thus she "went back there [to a] flat mound piece of land and decided to grow bean sprouts." Trần continued, "I put all those mung beans I found on the ground, cover them up, watered them, and I got mung beans. So, I would go get the mung beans and go to the market and sell them. I think the first day we got like seven U.S, dollars and I used that money to buy us bowls." Although she initially said that she sold mung beans, as she continued through her memories she clarified, "I kept digging out bean sprouts and growing them, and bringing them to the market and selling them, so that was how I was getting some extra money."[206] Thanks to her ingenuity, her family was able to eat from real bowls instead of rusty discarded food cans for the remaining half of their time at the Pulau Bidong camp. Going from rusty discarded cans to real bowls must have helped them feel more human.

**Demanding Sauces for the Soul**

When she was at Camp Pendleton, Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ remembered that the marines could not figure out why the Vietnamese refused to eat the fish that they had prepared for them: "The Marines would be so puzzled. They were like, 'You guys are from the coast. How come you don't eat fish?' And they don't realize that it's exactly because you're from the coast and most of your diet is fish that you're very particular and discriminating about what kind of fish you eat and how you prepare the fish." Although none of the refugees enjoyed the fish, she explained that they loved the chicken. What made the chicken stand out in comparison to the fish was the sauce that accompanied it—"the cooks in the mess halls learned to make an imitation

[206] Trần (pseudonym), interview by the author, December 31, 2020.

fish sauce." She describes it as a little sweet, sour, and salty with some cut up chilies added into the mix that "went really well with the chicken." She explained, "I can't remember exactly how the chicken tasted. But I still remember the taste of the fish sauce. It was very good."[207]

Several weeks after she had told the story of this improvised fish sauce, Nguyễn-võ shared with me her retrospective reflections about our previous conversation. When she thought back on the reason behind the cooks coming up with their version of fish sauce, she supposed that "it could have been the refugees putting pressure on the camp administrators or the Marines who ran the camp to get more palatable food…the fake fish sauce, I don't know when it started to appear but it could have been something that was added later." Continuing to muse on the fake fish sauce, she explained that the camp operators had incentive to improve the taste of the food so less of it would go to waste. By refusing to eat the food that they did not like, the refugees clearly communicated their needs to the camp administrators and potentially made their own demands to acquire foods that they desired.

A trace of the refugees' dissatisfaction with the foods being served in camp surfaced in a "Report to the Congress: U.S. Provides Safe Haven for Indochinese Refugees," from June 16, 1975. The line reads, "A much sought-after sauce for rice was expected to arrive on Guam shortly after our departure and should make the rice more acceptable to the refugees."[208] Gandhi corroborates Nguyễn-võ's guess that refugees might have placed pressure on camp administrators to get better food, stating that "[r]efugees also rejected American canned goods, demanding that the U.S. Military accommodate their palate preferences." Additionally, she seems to confirm that the "much sought-after sauce" from Staats's report was in fact nuoc mam, explaining: "In response, the Navy ordered, '100,000 chopsticks' from Japan; diverted '500 tons

[207] Nguyễn-võ, interview by author, December 28, 2020.
[208] U. S. Government Accountability Office, "U.S. Provides Safe Haven for Indochinese Refugees," 28.

of rice' to Guam from 'a ship bound for other Far East destinations'; and started placing 'fish sauce, dried curry powder, coconut cream, bamboo shoots, greens and dried beef pork' on 'most tables'."[209]

Nuoc mam truly exists as the heart of Vietnamese cuisine and is an essential ingredient for making the Vietnamese refugees feel less distanced from their homes. In her book, *Inside Out and Back Again,* Thanhha Lai has turned her own experiences fleeing from Vietnam into a sequential collection of short stories written from the perspective of a ten-year-old girl named Hà. Lai has infused her protagonist with her own emotions and memories, explaining that "[m]uch of what happened to Hà happened to me."[210] One of Hà's most joyous memories is of the refugees receiving cases of nuoc mam in the refugee camp in Guam. By placing the government document in conversation with this literary work, I imagine one scenario in which Hà was at the receiving end of the "much sought-after sauce" that was set to arrive in Guam. Prior to receiving the nuoc mam, she describes eating "heat[ed] up cans of beef and potatoes, [that tasted] like salty vomit." Hà says that "[e]verything is more edible with nuoc mam." The fish sauce brings life back into the refugees. Hà writes that "[s]o many appetites wake up that Brother Vũ just has time to cook rice and serve it with plain fish sauce."[211] Having nuoc mam was a significant morale booster to the refugees. In this barren place so far from their homes, the nuoc mam shows how the refugees found some comfort in this familiar essential food item that brought them a taste of home.

**Fed Up: Japanese American Protests in Camp**

Because it was so tightly regulated, food became a site of political contestation and

[209] Jim Eggensperger, "Island Was Safe Haven for 1,000s," *PDN*, 14 Jan. 1976, 3A; "Refugees May Be Here through Summer," *PDN*, 31 May 1975, 10 quoted in Gandhi, *Archipelago of Resettlement,* 95.

[210] Lai, *Inside Out and Back Again*, 261

[211] Lai, *Inside Out and Back Again,* 100.

resistance in the WRA camps. As I have previously mentioned, before the incarcerees began growing their own food in camps they were given starch-heavy diets that included meat parts that the Japanese were not used to eating nor cooking. Heidi Kim explains, they were given "throwaways—the food that the government had subsidized but nobody wanted to eat."[212] Similar to the situation that the Marines faced with the Vietnamese refugees at camp Pendleton refusing to eat the fish, "[y]ou see the camp administration in these archives, really running into problems with trying to give people less desirable foods." Kim remembers finding an archival letter in which someone wrote: "We can't move tripe, like nobody, nobody wants. Nobody wants to eat the tripe. And we tried to serve beef hearts last week and my understanding is that the garbage cans were overflowing."[213] Artist Miné Okubo who was incarcerated at the Topaz camp corroborates this account of Japanese and Japanese Americans refusing to eat these foods and demanding better food: "Often a meal consisted of rice, bread, and macaroni, or beans, bread, and spaghetti. At one time we were served liver for several weeks, until we went on strike."[214] Because these unhealthy and undesirable foods were common at all the camps, incarcerees in many different camps began organizing to demand better treatment.

One of the most common reasons for the strikes within the camps were workers feeling that they were not given enough food to function at their labor-intensive jobs. An example of incarcerees protesting insufficient food provisions occurred "[o]n June 16, 1942 [when] eight hundred internees making camouflage nets for the government at Santa Anita went on strike asserting that their lunch of two Vienna sausages, sauerkraut, bread and 'brown water called tea' was inadequate."[215] Similarly, tired of being under nourished and overworked at Tule Lake, Issei

[212] Maruyama, "Food," *Campu,* podcast transcript, 6.
[213] Maruyama, "Food," *Campu,* podcast transcript, 12.
[214] Okubo, *Citizen 13660,* 143.
[215] Dusselier, "Does Food Make Place?" 146.

(first-generation Japanese American) Noboru Shirai explained that "tensions came to a head in the agricultural division because the situation there was the worst." In addition to their paychecks being delayed by two months and them not getting necessary equipment like work shoes and clothing, "[t]hey also felt that they were underfed considering the hard, physical work they had to do." He wrote that his lunch consisted of "just two thin sandwiches. It wasn't enough to hold them [agricultural workers] over until dinner. No wonder they were light headed."[216] These skimpy meal descriptions demonstrate that the food supply varied from camp to camp.

In response to these complaints, Shirai reported that the Tule Lake project director, Chief Elmer L. Shirrell "issue[d] a warning in the camp newspaper, the *Tulean Dispatch.* He warned that if the food situation was this bad in summer, it might become worse in the winter. Therefore, people should eat less during the summer to save for winter. In addition, internees should also produce more." The project director's insinuation that the incarcerees were not working hard enough seem to imply that he was of the opinion that the Japanese Americans were being "coddled" in camp. Based on Shirai's writing, I do not think this referenced the same strike, but The *Seattle Times* newspaper ran an article about a Tule Lake strike from November 1943, titled "Disloyal Japs Fed Well, Idle While Nearby Crops Rot." Such one-sided newspaper articles, circulating devoid of Japanese American perspectives, sustained the assumptions of pampering and coddling in the camps.[217]

These misconceptions placing the blame on the incarcerees for staying "idle" echoed a very similar statement that my grandfather, James Yamasaki, recorded in his camp journal. Taken from the *Gila News Courier* on October 11, 1942, my grandfather quoted project director

[216] Shirai, *Tule Lake an Issei Memoir*, 69.

[217] Nick Bourne, "Disloyal Japs Fed Well, Idle While Nearby Crops Rot," Courtesy of the Seattle Times, November 7, 1943, cited in the *Campu* podcast, "Food" episode transcript, 38.

E.R. Fryer who said that the "only possible food shortage is vegetable. Self imposed by non-working Gila residents. When the army doesn't eat, we don't eat."[218] In his annotations my grandfather registered that this statement "[s]ounded like a threat." He continued to analyze Fryer's threat, ruminating: "The food produced by the Japanese were being shipped to army camps as well. It is one thing to work hard on your own farm as the Japanese did but to work the farm in camp where there was no reward commensurate with the effort on an individual basis was another thing."[219] The camp project directors from Tule Lake and Gila River seemed to be of one mind in believing that these food shortages were "self imposed."

In response to these claims of idleness, Shirai summed up the frustrated reaction of the incarcerees to messages like these, stating, "his [project director Shirrell's] response was the wrong move. Frustrated workers became angrier, 'What the — is he saying? He feeds us a poor man's meal and then wants our forced labor?' With the support of the civil engineers and the mess halls workers, the workers in the agricultural division held a meeting and later went on strike."[220] He explained that the agricultural strike was quickly resolved but the frustrations felt by the incarcerees were more deeply rooted. Likewise, Dusselier wrote that the Santa Anita strike was successful, because "[t]wo days later internees who were aware of the strikers demands noticed a 'sudden improvement in the food.'"[221]

Still at the mercy of the government-run camp officials, the Japanese and Japanese American incarcerees exercised as much agency as they could.[222] Although these strikes brought about important "improvement" in the camps, these improvements were limited. The many

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[218] Yamasaki, Annotated Camp Journal, 31

[219] Yamasaki, Annotated Camp Journal, 32. Original text is bold in his annotated journal.

[220] Shirai, *Tule Lake an Issei Memoir*, 69.

[221] Gordon H. Chang, *Morning Glory, Evening Shadow: Yamato Ichihashi and His Internment Writings, 1942-1945,* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, 117, 119 quoted in Dusselier, "Does Food Make Place?" 146.

[222] In conversation with Valerie Matsumoto.

memories of the incarcerees traumatized by the foods served in camp demonstrate that the food was not necessarily good, it simply became more edible.

One last example of organized protest that I would like to highlight in the Japanese American prison camp was an act of defiant refusal that sent a clear message to the camp administrators. At the end of his memoir, Noboru Shirai includes recollections from former Tuleans. The recollection of Kinya Noguchi, fourteen-years-old when incarcerated at Tule Lake, is particularly striking. He wrote, "On Thanksgiving Day, 1943, the Army offered a Thanksgiving dinner, but the residents turned it down. They didn't want anything American. Instead, they ate rutabaga and boiled rice."[223] In terms of intensity of resistance, this example is a step above "the hidden food" in which prisoners used creative cooking methods to subvert the prison menu.

Ugelvik explains why refusing to eat prison food can be so important to prisoners: "Eating the official food [the food provided by the prison for the prisoners], then, is somewhat like eating the entire prison, like making the prison a part of you."[224] Thus, although the Thanksgiving food was probably much better than the food that they would have been served normally, the Japanese Americans incarcerees took a stand against this gesture by the camp administrators. By refusing the food provided and choosing to eat the vegetables that they had grown to provide their own nourishment and the rice that symbolized Japanese culture, the incarcerees demonstrated how they would no longer ingest foods imposed on them in these prisons.[225] Through these exercises of agency, the incarcerees fought against the dehumanizing structures of camp to assert their humanity.

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[223] Shirai, *Tule Lake an Issei Memoir*, 216.
[224] Ugelvik, "The Hidden Food," 55.
[225] In conversation with Tritia Toyota and Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi.

**"The Hunger Strike": Refugee Refusal of Food for Repatriation**

As demonstrated by the Japanese American incarcerees in the Tule Lake camp, refusing to eat the provided prison food can function as a powerful enactment of resistance against the regimented carceral spaces of camp. I will conclude this chapter with a hunger strike that provides a powerful example of Vietnamese refugee resistance in camp.

In the first chapter of her book, historian Jana K. Lipman, tells the "unusual story of the more than fifteen hundred Vietnamese on Guam who decided they did not want to resettle in the United States."[226] Efforts by the United States to "save" the Vietnamese refugees were disrupted by "a vocal group of roughly two thousand Vietnamese protesters who over the course of six months demanded repatriation to their homeland of Vietnam."[227] This story ends with a mixture of triumph and tragedy: triumph as the Vietnamese repatriates succeeded in convincing the U.S. government to give them a ship to return to Vietnam, and then tragedy, when upon docking in southern Vietnam, all 1,546 passengers were immediately imprisoned in re-education camps because "the reunified government of Vietnam classified them as former enemies and suspect citizens."[228] In highlighting the complexity of this story that "refutes the American rescue narrative" but also brings to the surface "one of the war's lesser-known tragedies," Lipman emphasizes the ways in which this heart-wrenching story cannot be simply "read as a triumphant rejection of U.S. imperialism or a romanticized revolutionary victory."[229]

Although they met with a difficult fate, the Vietnamese repatriates had known that this was a potential outcome. Despite knowing that there was a chance that they would be imprisoned upon their return they persisted in their demands for repatriation. Their assertion of agency

[226] Lipman, *In Camps*, 24.
[227] Gandhi, *Archipelago of Resettlement*, 140.
[228] Lipman, *In Camps,* 46.
[229] Lipman, *In Camps,* 49.

through the "the repatriates' campaign was breathtaking in its militancy and passion. Far from being passive, hopeless, or vacant recipients of aid and goodwill, the repatriates displayed an impressive array of political skills and organizing strategies."[230] Knowing the outcome of these protests does not detract from the intensity and effectiveness of the actions of the Vietnamese repatriates. Gandhi explains, "Resorting to public protests, hunger strikes, and riots to pressure the federal government to give in to their demands, these repatriates asserted that they had never intended to leave Vietnam permanently."[231] Within these various forms of protest, I specifically focus on the hunger strikes to discuss how the Vietnamese repatriates' refusal to eat interrupts the narrative of humanitarian rescue.[232]

In terms of food-related resistance within his study of a Norwegian prison, Ugelvik notes, "The ultimate practice of freedom involving food in a prison would be the hunger strike. The problem with the hunger strike is, of course, that it necessarily has to be expressive at a public level. It is no good if no one knows about it."[233] Thus, he argues that subtler forms of resistance are more effective because they can be hidden, whereas "[i]nitiating a hunger strike…immediately moves the proceedings to the public transcript, forcing the prison system to take official action."[234] In the case of the Vietnamese repatriates in Guam, public and noticeable demonstrations that required the "prison system" to take action were exactly the kind of response they were trying to provoke so they could be granted a ship to return to Vietnam. From a photo taken at a hunger strike comprised of two hundred and fifty participants, Lipman describes "an elderly couple posed holding a hand-written sign declaring simply, 'We Are on Hunger Strike.'

[230] Lipman, *In Camps,* 50.
[231] Gandhi, *Archipelago of Resettlement*, 141.
[232] Lipman, *In Camps*, 24; In conversation with Nguyễn-võ.
[233] Ugelvik, "The hidden food," 56.
[234] Ugelvik, "The hidden food," 56.

The juxtaposition of their aged bodies and faces with the defiant signs lent a moving image to the repatriates' cause."[235] This elderly couple who subjected themselves to further trauma and intentionally refused to eat or ingest any help from the United States underscores the stakes of the hunger strike, and their desperate desire to return to their home country. Participating in the hunger strike at great risk to their health signals that they would rather die than be kept in a place against their will, thus exemplifying Ugelvik's notion of the hunger strike as the "ultimate practice of freedom." These hunger strikes put the agency of the Vietnamese people on full display as they fought for control of their own destiny.

[235] Lipman, *In Camps,* 37.

# CONCLUSION

One of the most memorable moments I had while conducting oral history interviews for this project happened while I was wrapping up my interview with Phù Sa. As I was thanking him, he said to me, "By talking to you, I feel like I'm talking to my children. You know, this is my life. This is how it was. So, remember me for what happened to me. Don't remember me for what I am but remember what happened to me and treasure what you have." I was particularly moved in this moment because earlier he had explained to me that his children are not interested in hearing about his life stories. Having once been just like his children, I felt a pang of loss cut through my feelings of gratitude. I hope one day they have an experience like mine and discover an interest in their own family's history, so they do not miss out on their father's stories.

This conversation also reminded me of why I became interested in my family's history in the first place. I only learned that the United States had occupied Japan following World War II when I was a senior in college. This is when several lightbulbs turned on in my head and I remembered something I had seen before. When my grandfather passed, I was given a copy of the files on his computer because I knew he had been working on his memoir. However, it was not until I learned about the U.S. Occupation of Japan that I went and opened the file on my grandfather's computer that was named "Occupation." The file that I had previously ignored because I thought it contained his work—occupation—documents ignited my interest in elided or concealed history. Part of my fixation with nationalistic progressive history comes from my resentment towards the A.P. U.S. History textbook used by my high school that excluded information about the U.S. Occupation of Japan. My grandfather was alive while I was taking that class in high school, so part of me believes that had I known this bit of information before I might have been able to know the right questions to ask while he was still alive. Thus, this

project began many years ago when I began tracking down the ghosts of my grandparents in the fragmented recollections of my parents.

Thinking back to my family's history and how I exist because my parents met over a barbequed steak, I position my project as a work of memory about how food tethers us to the world and other people. Using my life as a simple metaphor, by looking back at the ways in which I stand positioned at the intersection of multiple empires, food thus becomes the connecting element. In the context of my research, looking at food as code within the carceral spaces of the Japanese American incarceration camps and the Vietnamese refugee camps, reveals the ways in which the Japanese American incarcerees and Vietnamese refugees experienced dehumanization through food deprivation in the camps as a continuation of the American racialized wars in the Pacific. These camps acted as a "transitional space of racialization" at the outskirts of empire suspended from the protection of the nation until they could be (re)incorporated back into it. Studying these carceral camp spaces and the ways in which they relate to empire—connecting the global context of war-making abroad with the domestic setting—is important because prison camps and refugee camps still exist. When abstracted as a homogeneous group of people, the image of a racialized enemy or caricatured stereotype emerges very easily. Personal accounts that draw attention to the humanity of incarcerated people serve to counter this abstraction into otherness. Thus, we need to make sure that the experiences of these camp survivors are not forgotten. Remembering what happened to these dehumanized populations within the camp spaces because of their racialization both defies the progressive historical narrative of empire that attempts to eliminate these oppositional narratives from existence and asserts the ways in which people need to be remembered and valued as human.

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