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The Meanings of “Japanese Canadian”

Kandice Chuh has suggested that “*transnation* designates cross-border collectivities and identity formations, and *transnationality* refers to the conception and condition of membership in those organizational forms.”²⁸ Accordingly, Nikkei in Canada might be said to have been a transnation that engaged with the place of their ancestors (Japan) as well as the one that might issue them a passport (Canada).²⁹ In the late 1970s and early 1980s it also engaged with another key place: the West Coast of the United States, where the bulk of Nikkei who had also been subject to officially sanctioned racism during World War II once more resided. As a result, the transnation to which Japanese Canadians belonged had unclear boundaries and varied constituents. Nikkei north of the 49th parallel recognized aspects of a shared experience, from prewar racism to post–Pearl Harbor imprisonment, which linked them with their southern neighbors. But in the 1980s they also increasingly recognized historical differences that set them apart. These included government structure (a parliamentary system that perpetuated an imperial imaginary), as well as differences in both wartime mistreatment and continued official harassment after the war.

People of Japanese ancestry who lived north of the 49th parallel did not think of themselves in terms of a larger, purely Nikkei collective at that time. On the contrary, they occupied what Russell Leong has called a “parallel Pacific”: “contested spatial, political, and cultural conceptions of peoples and places. Parallel Pacifics can also include those of Asian and Pacific descent, as well as native nations within the Pacific diaspora.”³⁰ But insofar as wartime incarceration and the pursuit of redress raised the question of

Japanese origins and character, that question came to the fore in critical moments. As a result, a Nikkei North American imaginary began to take shape, one that was subsidiary to a larger parallel Pacific. That imaginary arose not from local historical and cultural circumstances, but those circumstances repeatedly activated a sense of connection with U.S. and Japanese interlocutors. For this reason, the transnationality of Japanese Canadians was complex and ambivalent.³¹

The complex cross-border Nikkei engagement is ironic. For one thing, it manifested itself in a community that was falsely defined as inherently transnational at the time of the bombing of Pearl Harbor.³² The primary justification for mass incarceration was that Japanese identity transcended geographical and political differences, and that it therefore would remain immutable, even in people who had been born and raised in North America. Of course, the contrast between reality and racist essentialism could hardly have been starker. On December 21, 1941, for instance, Vancouverite and columnist for the *New Canadian* Muriel Kitagawa wrote to her brother that “we’re Canadians and can expect decent treatment from decent people.”³³ And yet, the legacy of injustice on both sides of the border eventually produced a sense of common cause between Nikkei Americans and Canadians.

A second and related irony of this cross-border dynamic is that injustice further complicated the relationship to Canadian citizenship of people of Japanese ancestry. Defenders of wartime incarceration, including those in Canada, have often spoken of how it sped the process by which people of Japanese ancestry knit themselves into North American societies. Even people who recognize the inherent racism of Canadian and American wartime policies have accepted this argument at times. For example, the Canadian-born linguist and former U.S. senator S. I. Hayakawa once suggested that “whatever injustices there were in the relocation, it accelerated the absorption of Japanese Americans into the mainstream of American life by one full generation,” a comment published in the *New Canadian*, among other places.³⁴ Such statements recapitulate aspects of the racist transnation that had originally served to justify incarceration, insofar as they suggest that a large group of supposedly alien souls moved inexorably toward a degree-zero national identity. In truth, the situation in both Canada and the United States was more complex, as this chapter and Chapter Five will make clear.³⁵ For instance, in pursuing redress, Canadian activists sought less to affirm

their citizenship credentials than to find alternatives to the narrative of an ever-more-assimilated immigrant group. Crucially, Nikkei Canadian activists did so by comparing themselves to Nikkei elsewhere—in the United States, but also in Latin America.

In the course of trying to identify potential types of redress, and then of trying to select which type to pursue, Nikkei North Americans looked to one another. The result was circuitous movement among local, regional, national, international, and transnational identities. Initially constituted by immigration, then fragmented by imprisonment and postwar dispersal, Japanese Canadians eventually re-formed as a group in ways that called into question the very idea of such an identity. Thus, a country that forcibly tried to render one segment of its population invisible ultimately produced a group that would be much more vigorous, visible, and politically engaged than it had been at the outset of the Second World War. Even as it was repeatedly subjected to totalizing narratives, that group drew on the after-life of its constituents' experiences to subvert those narratives and, thereby move toward a narrative and a political engagement that was its own.

And yet, immigration, fragmentation, and re-formation inextricably linked Japanese Canadians with their American counterparts. This is not to imply American exceptionalism, but simply to note that a community north of the border, which was profoundly diminished as a result of government mandate, did at times adopt strategies and draw on lessons from the United States. Nonetheless, Japanese Canadians ultimately remained self-consciously distinct. Their historical experience was, as they repeatedly pointed out, only similar to that of Japanese Americans. Consequently, they had to address internal problems, cultural and economic challenges, that differed in various respects. As many of the leading figures in the fight for redress in Canada recognized, they also had to work within a very different political system. That provision, they also noted, remained in place, a continuing threat to any group deemed sufficiently dangerous.³⁶ As a result, the transnationality of Nikkei North Americans was necessarily provisional and its contours were and still are in flux. In some ways it has been more of a question than a thing about which one could ask a question. Nonetheless, a common engagement with Nikkei wartime experience and its aftermath, as well as with Japan as a country of origin, did exist north and south of the border. And that engagement proved critical to the formulation and reformulation of Japanese Canadian political action.

The dynamics of Nikkei transnationality and of redress are complex, but one particular moment is especially important: the year following the 1982 publication of *Personal Justice Denied*, which presented the findings of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC). As noted in Chapter Two, the commission's report was tremendously important in the United States, but it also was influential in debates in Canada because it validated long-standing Japanese American claims of injustice publicly and in detail. Putting to rest any doubt about the trustworthiness of Nikkei citizens and their family members, the report established an unambiguous point of reference for wider cultural and political work. It also established a solid legal foundation for redress. The product of a commission rather than a single individual, built on testimony from hundreds of eyewitnesses and drawing on evidence that had long been suppressed by government agencies, *Personal Justice Denied* documented government misfeasance and the need for an official response. Furthermore, the commission had been tasked with making recommendations for how the U.S. government should address the legacy of Executive Order 9066. As a result, its findings established a standard by which any official action could be judged.

In the months following publication of the commission's findings there were important changes in the Japanese Canadian community. Those changes have generally been thought of as local or national, but they also had a transnational component. Debates about redress in the *New Canadian* from late 1982, when the commission's report was made public, through early 1984, when the most divisive internal debates among Japanese Canadians had begun to subside and the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) moved officially to seek redress, shed light on this transnational component. Before examining the discourse of Nikkei North American identity at a time when it was undergoing rapid and profound change north of the 49th parallel, though, a basic history of the redress movement in Canada is in order.

Afterlife, Postwar Nikkei Life, and the Redress Movement

Japanese Canadians had long discussed how best to claim their place in Canadian society, but the idea of an organized redress movement did not take hold until the late 1970s. After the war, most Nikkei struggled just to feed their families. As was the case in the United States, many initially felt that

seeking redress would just cause further trouble, so they wondered: What's the point? What good would come of this?³⁷ But, as was also the case in the United States, younger generations wanted to know more about their families' pasts, including the afterlife of wartime incarceration. With that in mind, in the mid-1970s a group of Sansei formed the Japanese Canadian Centennial Project (JCCP) with the main goal of unearthing and publicizing the history of Nikkei in Canada.³⁸ It is worth noting that a Shin-Issei (new first-generation) named Michiko Sakata initiated the JCCP, having met a Nikkei man utterly shattered by his wartime experience.³⁹ Drawing together Nikkei from across Canada, the project eventually resulted in a 1977 exhibition entitled *A Dream of Riches*. Such was the impact of the show that Masumi Izumi has even suggested that "Japanese Canadian communities did not reorganize themselves nationally until 1977."⁴⁰

When Japanese Canadians gathered to talk about their hundred-year history, younger generations felt the anger and pain in the speeches, particularly those about wartime incarceration. As Maryka Omatsu stated, "For the first time curious sansei demanded an explanation. The sansei, holding the issei's soft hands or looking deep into the nisei's avoiding eyes, could sense that lying just below the surface was a bitter truth."⁴¹ Younger Japanese Canadians soon became a driving force in the pursuit of redress. As Miki has recounted, in 1981 several of the more activist members of the JCCP began to discuss the formation of the CWRIC, the cultural and political place of Nikkei in Canada, and possible courses for pursuing redress.⁴² Though initially an informal group, and one that never claimed any particular authority, these people (including Miki) eventually formed the JCCP Redress Committee, which published a pamphlet, *Redress for Japanese Canadians*, to ensure that Nikkei would be as informed as possible. They also organized community forums and letter-writing campaigns as debates over redress began to heat up in 1983.

As a result, Nikkei in Canada were becoming ever more aware of themselves as an identifiable group with political potential that derived from a shared history and cultural patterns that extended across generations. In September 1983, for instance, the *New Canadian* described a community meeting about redress as being "attended by several Isseis as well as many Niseis and Sanseis. About half of those present seemed to be of the age to have directly experienced the wartime mistreatment."⁴³ In many ways, then, the 1977 commemoration of a century of Japanese Canadian life reopened

earlier conversations about the future of the Japanese Canadian community: "The Centennial was a year to confirm our pride in our heritage, to celebrate our 100 year history and contribution to Canada, and to re-establish our bond as a community. It was a year of reunification."⁴⁴ That reunification, however, took less the form of a concrete, stable identity than of a generalized sense of both commonalities and differences within and without the community.

The timing was auspicious. Soon after, the redress movement in the United States achieved its first major victory, the establishment of the CWRIC, which initiated hearings in 1980.⁴⁵ As Miki later wrote, "we were fascinated by the unfolding of the issue in the U.S., specifically the dramatic hearings organized by the U.S. Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians." Those hearings galvanized a group of people involved with the Centennial Project to form the JCCP Redress Committee, which eventually reconfigured itself as "an activist collective driven by the belief that the question of redress should be faced by Japanese Canadians."⁴⁶ The JCCP Redress Committee's work culminated in a 1984 brief to the NAJC advocating individual compensation for the victims of wartime bigotry. Other groups related to redress, such as the Sodan-kai ("Study Group," a non-partisan organization), also formed around the time *Personal Justice Denied* appeared in print.⁴⁷

The next four years saw significant debate among Japanese Canadians. The starting point for that debate was the form redress should take. Some argued in favor of an official governmental apology coupled with blanket compensation. That might help fund a community foundation.⁴⁸ Others advanced two main arguments for individual compensation: first, the Canadian government-appointed custodian tasked with safeguarding Japanese Canadian property during the war had sold off virtually all of the valuable parts of that property at fire-sale prices; and second, an earlier response to these losses was an abject failure. The Royal Commission on Property Claims, also known as the Bird Commission, a governmental body formed in 1947 to address the misfeasance of the custodian, offered paltry sums upon application in a process that ended just nine months after it began. In addition to providing minimal financial compensation, the Bird Commission required applicants to produce receipts that would demonstrate the financial value of what had been lost. Having just been released from prison camps after being abruptly uprooted and relocated eastward, most Nikkei

were not in a position to produce such documentation and, consequently, received even less than the commission was empowered to provide.⁴⁹

Two main problems hindered later Japanese Canadian attempts at securing redress. The first was internal divisions that plagued the Nikkei community. In some cases, the divisions were primarily philosophical, pertaining to whether and in precisely what way people should seek redress. Others, however, were of a more specifically political sort, pertaining to who would lead the fight and on what occasions.⁵⁰ These divisions complicated matters, particularly given a second problem that activists faced. Specifically, the 1980s also saw significant government opposition. For instance, various current or former members of the government questioned the need for redress. Perhaps the most infamous of these was Wilson, who in the spring of 1983 came out strongly against redress, citing his long-standing belief that there was no appreciable difference between Japanese and Canadians of Japanese origin.⁵¹ Others, such as Pierre Trudeau, prime minister from 1980 to 1984, adopted less overtly racist language while still rejecting outright the need for redress. In 1984, for instance, Trudeau remarked that “we could mount pressure groups across this country in many areas where there have been historic wrongs. I don’t think it’s the purpose of government to right the past. . . . It cannot rewrite history. It is our purpose to be just in our time.”⁵²

The election of Brian Mulroney in the autumn of 1984 brought renewed hope to the NAJC and its allies, since Mulroney had indicated his support for redress the year before. However, the redress movement continued to encounter difficulties under the new government. In particular, the office of the Minister of State for Multiculturalism, which was tasked with resolving the issue, attempted to preempt a large and expensive individual-compensation settlement of the sort that was beginning to look likely in the United States, particularly after June 1983, when the CWRIC recommended that the American government provide such a settlement.⁵³ In the winter of 1984–1985, the Multiculturalism Directorate of Canada presented a plan that included an official apology and the establishment of a governmental foundation to address Canadian racism in general. In an attempt to bypass the NAJC, representatives of the government informed the organization that if the community did not accept the offer it would simply implement this plan and consider the matter finished. No individual-compensation package, they said, would be forthcoming; neither would any sort of community foundation.⁵⁴

The next eighteen months would see an exhausting bout of negotiations complicated by two main problems. The first was continued strenuous opposition to any sort of individual-compensation settlement by the Multiculturalism Directorate; the second was the directorate's attempt to negotiate with a splinter group of Nikkei that had formed in the wake of the 1983 conflicts. While the federal government continued to antagonize Japanese Canadians seeking a fuller account of history, the NAJC set about establishing hard data on the economic losses of the Nikkei community in Canada, surveyed its constituents and, as a result of that survey, formulating a position in favor of individual compensation. Negotiations continued through the summer of 1987, at which point the NAJC, exhausted by a shift in the government's position away from open hostility toward foot-dragging, broke off discussion. After the passage of a H.R. 442 in September 1987, public pressure beyond the Nikkei community in favor of redress continued to grow, and in December the government initiated talks once again. As discussions continued throughout the spring and into the summer, the NAJC and its allies held rallies and continued to apply public pressure on the government. When Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act into law on August 10, 1988, Mulroney's ministers rushed to resolve the matter, finally agreeing to a formal settlement on August 27. After years of denying the possibility of any such arrangement, they agreed to provide an official apology, individual compensation (C\$21,000), citizenship for Nikkei wrongfully deported after the war, pardons for those convicted under the War Measures Act, and the establishment of a Canadian Race Relations Foundation.⁵⁵

A Divergent National Discourse

To write of Nikkei transnationality may seem odd, for Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians spoke so frequently about their respective national identities. For instance, Tamotsu Shibutani complained during his imprisonment that "if we are citizens and as long as we are willing to chip in and do our share why in the hell do we have to live in a dump like this and get paid starvation wages."⁵⁶ This complaint acknowledges a legal fact, citizenship status, but it also relies on the ability (or lack of ability) to identify with a larger population. That is, it builds on the (false) presumption of community, which is why Shibutani went on to speak of citizenship not

as an official designation, but as something experienced in the first-person plural: "A threat to our civil rights is a threat to the rights of all elements of the American population because it sets a dangerous precedent for others to follow."⁵⁷ Primary sources in Canada demonstrate a similar sense of betrayal that followed the presumption of belonging, however complicated that was before the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Think, for instance, of Muriel Kitagawa's declaration that, as a Canadian (though still a British subject), she and her family had the right to expect what she called "decent treatment." Not only did she declare a specific geographical affiliation, but she also went on to express the expectation of certain rights and privileges associated with representative government. She spoke, in short, as someone who did more than claim Canadian identity; she also lived one of the most basic presumptions associated with it. Her decision to do so is all the more complicated since Nikkei in Canada were declared noncitizens during the war and even for several years afterward. (Only in 1948 did they regain citizenship and finally get the right to vote.⁵⁸)

Like Mineta in his congressional testimony in support of Japanese American redress, Shibutani and Kitagawa each articulated more than just political ideals. They also expressed aspects of a specific national identity, such as Kitagawa's mention of being Canadian. She returned to this subject repeatedly in the 1940s, both in print and in correspondence.⁵⁹ To some extent, Nikkei North Americans had to carry themselves this way. Many had been born in the United States or Canada, and they were well schooled in each country's rhetoric of equality before the law, despite the uglier truths they lived. That is why, before stating her expectation of "decent treatment," Kitagawa drew a contrast with Germany, which forced its people "to work for nothing in the fields and factories far from home and children," and denounced Hitler's "system of captive labour; shooting hundreds in reprisal for one." Referring to the rhetoric of equality before the law, she closed this passage by expressing the hope that "the little peoples [will] have a chance at life again."⁶⁰

The issue of Canadian identity became even more pressing after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, since it sharpened the question of how physical difference might relate to citizenship. Virulent Canadian racists such as Halford Wilson and Ian Mackenzie seized on that question to justify the mass expulsion of Nikkei from British Columbia. It should therefore come as no surprise that Gordon Kadota, the president of the NAJC in the early 1980s, would paraphrase the postwar Japanese Canadian attitude as having

been “never again do we want to be Japanese. We are Canadians.”⁶¹ Presented with a binary opposition by their largely white compatriots, Japanese Canadians sought to minimize their deviation from the imposed norm and instead call attention to their participation in the fraught imperial politics of Canadian belonging.

Though Kadota’s statement came in 1983, not 1941, it demonstrates that being Japanese Canadian was at key moments thought of as something specific that one could cultivate. While Kadota summarized a strongly defensive postwar mentality, a sense of specificity nonetheless persisted among Japanese Canadians of later generations. Communities may be imagined, but they still exert enormous pressure on their constituents.⁶² For that reason, recognition of specificity persisted long after Nikkei had left the camps and the ghost towns, relocated, and tried to reestablish their lives. Already under pressure to become enculturated before the war, many of them went on to participate even more fully in supposedly Canadian cultural patterns afterward.

As a result, the question of what the term “Japanese Canadian” might mean, if anything, was on the minds of many readers of the *New Canadian*. This is evident in articles like “Questions and Answers on J. C. Redress by National Association,” which appeared in the July 19, 1983, issue. Largely a reprint of a fact sheet sent out by the NAJC, this article provided background information concerning redress efforts in Canada and discussed aspects of how Japanese Americans were pursuing the matter. The NAJC had begun canvassing the Nikkei community about what form redress might take, and the purpose of the fact sheet was primarily to answer questions people might have, rather than advocate a specific policy. To that end, the organization asked and then answered basic questions on redress, such as, “When is the campaign being carried out? Now.” It listed the options available, discussed the implications of each, and compared those options with developments in the United States. It also spoke of the need “to give JCs a sense of place and a sense of confidence,” which were “traumatically disrupted in 1942.”⁶³ The NAJC also spoke of the need to clarify the Canadian-ness of Nikkei citizens. It addressed the peculiarities of Canada’s governmental structure as well, pointing out that “the class action option is not yet a viable alternative in Canada, not like in the U.S.”⁶⁴ Even though the article was about the constitutional and legal obstacles to Canadian redress, it also discussed “a sense of place” that had been “traumatically disrupted” and drew comparisons with U.S. precedent. Such engagements came with the investigation of a specifi-

cally Japanese Canadian sense of self, even as that sense was inseparable from aspects of the larger Nikkei diaspora.

The imagination of a specifically Japanese Canadian community was also present in the first-person plural language of the NAJC's statements, which noted regarding the individual-compensation option that "the question here is how much should we demand, if we take the individual route." As for why Japanese Canadians should take action so long after the war, the NAJC statement argued that "our history would not be complete without a full resolution of that detention injustice."⁶⁵ The most important goal of this article was to promote a "national Japanese Canadian consensus" about redress, which also meant activating a Japanese Canadian collective identity that would include not only the NAJC's membership, but also "most community groups in Canada, including local chapters of the Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association, cultural centers, community groups, churches."⁶⁶ The idea of a collective identity was no small matter in 1983, when the question of redress gave rise to some of the most vigorous dissent among Japanese Canadians, even as it aggravated the perverse and long-standing suspicion among other groups that all people of Japanese origin were somehow essentially identical in terms of culture and politics. And yet, despite that dissent and the frequently rancorous environment that it contributed to, redress and its revivification of history helped to promote the imagination of a specifically Canadian Nikkei community by raising questions of cultural, political, and social unity.⁶⁷ In essence, then, afterlife provided a means to unify, provisionally, people driven by personal experience, which in this case is both shared and idiosyncratic.

One part of the Japanese Canadian imagination of community is particularly important: the recognition that Canada treated its Nikkei citizens and their family members in a particularly vicious manner. As Meisler pointed out in his *Los Angeles Times/New Canadian* article, "American civil libertarians will hardly take any solace in the fact, but no matter how harsh American treatment of Japanese-Americans may have been during World War II, Canadian treatment of Japanese-Canadians was worse."⁶⁸ Nor was this observation limited to outsiders, as Meisler pointed out:

Sitting with a few friends at a dinner in Kamo's restaurant on Powell Street, Tamio Wakayama, a 41-year-old photographer, put it starkly.

"The community in the States," he said, "was not so thoroughly trashed as the community in Canada."⁶⁹

The damage Wakayama referred to resulted from Canada's more punitive postwar measures, which included forced "repatriation" for many, as well as a drive to keep the remainder of Nikkei from returning to the West Coast.

This attention to differences of circumstance was widespread, as is evident in a profile of two camp survivors, Shiro Uchida and Roy Uyeda, that ran adjacent to an article on the CWRIC's recommendation of individual compensation in the *New Canadian* on June 28, 1983.⁷⁰ Entitled "When It Was a Crime to Be of Japanese Descent," the article made a blunt comparison with the United States, declaring that "Japanese Canadians fared worse than those in the U.S.," and described the postwar dispersal policies under Prime Minister Mackenzie King. The author of the article then pointed out the historical factors that made Canadian redress more difficult to achieve, especially the constitutional differences between the two countries: "Unlike the U.S., where Japanese Americans are claiming in their lawsuit [brought in 1983 by the National Council for Japanese American Redress (NCJAR), which had split from the JACL] that their civil rights were violated, the War Measures Act made it perfectly legal for Ottawa to force Canadians out of their homes and ship them around the country."⁷¹ According to this last statement, Nikkei in British Columbia were unquestionably Canadians who were wrongly stripped of their citizenship and then subject to unjust imprisonment and postwar deprivation. As Vic Ogura wrote in an editorial in the *New Canadian* during the following autumn, "History has recorded that they [Japanese Canadians] were innocents victimized by their own country of birth and allegiance."⁷² Building on this idea of dereliction, the June 28 article also suggests that the xenophobia of Canada's government produced an experience different from that encountered by Japanese Americans. Not all discussions were so explicitly comparative. In an article entitled "Redress Options," Maryka Omatsu wrote laconically of the various injuries visited upon the Japanese Canadian community, including "the restriction on returning to the coast for seven years."⁷³ But the discourse of redress in Canada still acknowledged that wartime incarceration in North America took two different forms, as explained above, and that the histories of the Nikkei communities on either side of the U.S.-Canada border thus diverged in important ways.

The divergence was critical for what Omatsu called "the re-emergence of Japanese Canadian consciousness." That reemergence came partly, she said, from the JCCP. But it also came from a reevaluation of the history of Nikkei

in Canada, the racism they had endured, and the government-sanctioned injustices they had suffered. As Omatsu wrote, “In the process of evaluating our history in this country, the destructiveness and pain of the war years and their aftermath is being acknowledged and discussed openly.” Addressing injustices was vital: “Talk of redress for the wrongs perpetrated on the Japanese Canadian community is daily gaining acceptance.”⁷⁴ Acceptance varied from person to person and region to region, though, and conflicts over redress within the Japanese community—particularly regarding who should represent the community—became acrimonious during the fall of 1983.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, as a topic redress helped advance awareness of the specifics of wartime incarceration and postwar bigotry in Canada, and that encouraged people to differentiate Japanese Canadian experience from that of Nikkei in the United States. Rather than produce a uniform definition, the result was to pursue a prolonged consideration that individuals would participate in as they wanted or could. As Frank Moritsugu suggested in an October 18, 1983, editorial in the *New Canadian*, “if this process has to take some extra time, better that we feel we’ve been part of the process—‘we’ being each Japanese Canadian who wants to be.”⁷⁶

The importance of differentiation extended beyond the Japanese Canadian community, too. As Kadota pointed out in a March 25, 1983, profile in the *New Canadian*, a bigoted transnationalism continued to plague public debates about wartime incarceration and its targets. The idea Kadota had in mind, one common among non-Nikkei Canadians, placed a vaguely white imaginary against a largely cohesive Nikkei one: “What bothers me about dealing with the media about these issues is that although they’re supposed to be well informed, they actually have narrow preconceptions about Japan and Japanese Canadians. Basically, it doesn’t differentiate between the two.” Kadota linked this inability to distinguish between culture, nationality, and race to fears of economic and political diminishment that were prominent in North America at the time: “To most Canadians, Japanese Canadians are still Japanese. . . . They don’t see them as Canadians. . . . It’s part of a black-and-white mentality, a kind of intolerance that comes from fear of other people. From suspicion. And it gets worse in bad economic times when people feel threatened.”⁷⁷

Kadota’s job as head of the NAJC therefore involved educating the non-Nikkei public: “I’m always being interviewed. In the last six months there’s been a lot of interest in the Redress Committee which is trying to get finan-

cial compensation from the federal government for the 23,000 Japanese Canadians who lost their property during the Second World War.” To advance the cause of his constituents, Kadota had to emphasize the specifics of their history, from the number of people affected to the particulars of how they suffered.⁷⁸ Part of this involved advancing a Nikkei history and experience that were discrete, identifiable, and above all beholden neither to Japan nor to the United States but that still addressed both. Like activist groups including the JCCP and the Sodan-kai, he sought to help establish the idea of a specifically Japanese Canadian community, with its own history, culture, and values, not in order to set the contours of that community in stone, but rather to destabilize racist preconceptions.⁷⁹

Ambiguous and Ambivalent Transnationality

The Japanese Canadian community never saw itself as entirely separate from its counterpart in either the United States or Japan, but neither did it see itself as of a piece with Nikkei elsewhere. Instead, Japanese Canadians associated themselves with analogous cultures at the same time as they distinguished themselves from those cultures. A September 30, 1983, editorial in the *New Canadian* spoke of “the Japanese on both sides of the Forty-Ninth parallel . . . looking seriously at the question of redress.”⁸⁰ Commonality both enabled and necessitated differentiation. This is a corollary of the shared audience that led the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New Canadian* to run Meisler’s 1983 article on Vancouver: Nikkei in Vancouver or Toronto recognized that they were both like and unlike those in Los Angeles or Seattle, and vice versa. After the publication of *Personal Justice Denied* that knife-edge similarity and difference helped produce a diasporic transnationality that worked through and beyond any given nation-state.⁸¹

The tendency to speak comparatively was due in no small part to the fact that *Personal Justice Denied* laid out the conditions of Japanese American incarceration so authoritatively and in such detail that it raised questions about the circumstances Japanese Canadians had found themselves in during and after the war. Given the sense of inevitability that so many Japanese Canadians had felt about the wartime Orders-in-Council, how could advocates of redress overcome resistance within the community?⁸² Differences over redress had sometimes been acrimonious even in the larger and more

politically active community of Japanese Americans. Furthermore, since the Canadian government's policy was to fragment and disperse, there was some question as to just how cohesive and active the surviving community might be.⁸³ And then there was the issue of how non-Nikkei citizens might view wartime incarceration. The publication of Ken Adachi's *The Enemy That Never Was* in 1976 and Ann Gomer Sunahara's *The Politics of Racism* in 1981 did much to demonstrate the racist motivation underlying the forced removal of Nikkei from British Columbia. But some questions still remained about how people might frame the topic as one of injustice, as *Personal Justice Denied* had done. There also was the question of how Nikkei Canadians ought to address the racist postwar policies that further damaged their communities.

Others shared these concerns. On February 11, 1983, for instance, the *New Canadian* ran an article on Ian Waddell, the member of parliament representing Vancouver-Kingsway, who was pressing for an official government inquiry into wartime incarceration. He declared that those who had been incarcerated or displaced "were not really a threat; they were Canadians, and their only crime was that they were of Japanese ancestry."⁸⁴ Arguing that inaction would allow the injustice to fester, he made two recommendations: first, that Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau formally apologize in the House of Commons;⁸⁵ and second, "we should have a commission to listen to the evidence and hear the historical record so that history will not be changed [i.e., distorted in order to minimize or ignore the injustices visited upon Nikkei in Canada]." Waddell went on to lay out the scope such an inquiry should take, modeling it on the example of the United States while at the same time referring to that example directly: "The commission should recommend whether there should be compensation individually or symbolically, and I point out there is an American precedent for this."⁸⁶

Canadian discussions of Japanese American circumstances did more than follow U.S. precedent or note historical divergences. They also addressed contemporary differences, for instance with respect to legal precedent and governmental structure. On April 22, 1983, the *New Canadian* ran an article on the obstacles facing redress through legal action. It began by noting that "all Japanese Canadians' eyes were on the actions of their Nikkei cousins down south and their battle for redress against the U.S. government for 'maliciously and unlawfully' depriving them of their constitutional rights

during the Second World War.”⁸⁷ Citing Roy Miki, who was then emerging as a leader in the redress movement, the article pointed out a crucial similarity between the two Nikkei communities: as was the case in California, Oregon, and Washington, in Canada too Nikkei present economic competition for their white neighbors, who used the bombing of Pearl Harbor as a pretext to eliminate that competition.⁸⁸ This was no simple equation, though. Having laid out the basics of the NCJAR class-action lawsuit, the article then made a contrast: “In Canada, where Japanese Canadians suffered longer than in the U.S., a similar group of second and third generation Canadians seeks redress but does not appear to have a legal position.”⁸⁹

That last sentence made two important points. First, as noted above, Japanese Canadian wartime experience differed from its Japanese American counterpart. Second, constitutional and governmental factors in Canada required that activists develop new strategies. Thus, the article quoted Miki’s observation that “the Canadian government, acting through the War Measures Act, was acting legally in that they did not exceed the authority granted them.”⁹⁰ Referring to Miki once again, it acknowledged the necessity of pursuing “moral and ethical routes” to redress, rather than taking legal action. In explaining the case against judicial action, this article also framed a distinctly Japanese Canadian circumstance and, thus, route to political engagement. And yet, it did so by referring to American precedent, even as all involved would have recognized the significant differences between each type of Nikkei North American experience.

Ancestry, Place, and Identity