In Search of Common Ground:
Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ Struggle for Citizenship during World War II

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Introduction

On the eve of World War II, Maya Angelou – then a teenager – moved from the small town of Stamps, Arkansas, to Oakland, California, before settling in San Francisco. In her autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou recounts the shock of moving out West as a young African American adult and navigating a bustling city that was so different from the town in the South in which she had grown up. In San Francisco, Angelou grew to love the fog and the Bay, but she also struggled to find her place as a Black teenager in the predominantly white city.¹ Her experience of culture shock included witnessing the Western Addition neighborhood, which was the pre-war hub of San Francisco’s Japanese American community, undergo “a visible revolution” following the attack on Pearl Harbor.² Within months of the attack, the federal government organized the mass relocation and incarceration of Japanese Americans living on the West Coast. “As the Japanese disappeared,” Angelou explained, “Negroes entered with their loud jukeboxes.”³ Houses and apartments emptied of their Japanese American occupants became home to the many Blacks who migrated to the West Coast to work in the wartime defense industries. The great misfortune of Japanese Americans was a boon to the African American newcomers who, excluded from predominantly white areas, were desperate for accommodations amidst the West Coast’s wartime housing shortage. The local economy registered the population shift: Yakamoto Sea Food Market became Sammy’s Shoe Shine Parlor and Smoke Shop, Yashigira’s Hardware became La Salon de Beauté, and Nippon Drugs became a Black-owned jazz club called Bop City.⁴ A similar pattern occurred in Los Angeles. Pilgrim House, a social services organization that served a predominantly

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² Ibid., 177.
³ Ibid.
African American community, replaced the Japanese Union Church, and the district of Little Tokyo was renamed Bronzeville. “Where the odors of tempura, raw fish and cha had dominated,” Angelou recalled, “the aroma of chitlings, greens and ham hocks now prevailed.”

A little-known story, the evolution of these neighborhoods in San Francisco and Los Angeles reflects the monumental impact World War II had on domestic race relations in the United States, as well as people’s experiences of race in the country. The war reconfigured the position of Japanese Americans and African Americans in U.S. society and in relation to one another. As U.S. historian Matthew M. Briones argues, “While Blacks and Japanese had interacted before this time, they had never previously been forced – in such large numbers and with such regularity – to share urban spaces so intimately, compete for similar jobs so intensely, or agitate for civil rights with such collective might.” The transformation of Little Tokyo into Bronzeville is just one example of how, in the context of war, the federal, state, and local governments approached non-white citizens and how these citizens responded to their new relation to the state.

World War II altered dominant ideas of race and citizenship in manners that had significant ramifications for conceptions of Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ national belonging. As with any war, the circumstances of the war led to the state redrawing boundaries of what it meant to be an American citizen and who qualified for recognition as such. As legal scholar and historian Barbara Young Welke theorizes, throughout U.S. history, citizenship and national belonging – distinguished by the legal components of citizenship as well as the cultural aspects of national belonging – have “[depended] on there being others who do not belong.” These “borders of

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5 Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 178. I originally read this quote in Kamiya, “Western Addition.”
belonging” have shaped the contours of individual and group identity and their relationships to power in the United States since its inception. During World War II, Katherine Archibald, a U.C. Berkeley graduate student, tracked this dynamic by conducting a survey of the Moore Dry Dock Company’s shipyard in Oakland. Based on her research, she concluded that the war “reëmphasized America’s disunities, … [which] became a subject of increasing concern; for war, of course, demands subordination of lesser disputes to the service of the common battle. In the frantic search for a unity of thought and action America discovered the depth of its social canyons.”

Even as the United States joined forces with other nations to fight fascism abroad, its citizens grappled with issues of racism and disunity within its borders. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 fueled intense anti-Japanese sentiment nationwide. Shortly thereafter, President Franklin Roosevelt’s signing of Executive Order 9066 codified as national policy the classification of Japanese Americans as “enemy aliens,” which paved the way for their expulsion from the West Coast and subsequent mass incarceration. Simultaneously, the increased labor demands of the wartime economy spurred a massive internal migration of African Americans, who left their communities in the South and struck out for the West Coast in search of employment. Up to that point, the Black population of the western United States had been relatively low. The influx of African Americans elicited fierce resistance from white residents and authorities, who considered them a contagion and destabilizing influence on the status quo. These significant wartime relocations threatened the prevailing social order, which was rooted in and perpetuated white Americans’ economic and political supremacy. The federal government, in collaboration with many actors and institutions, orchestrated these wartime relocations but also worked to minimize and control their potential to disrupt the existing power structures.

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In their theory of racial formation, sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant foreground the centrality of the state as an agent that creates and enforces the meanings ascribed to racial categories in society. Omi and Winant describe the state as a sprawling network that functions somewhat like a rhizome.\(^9\) Rather than a singular, unified entity, the state is a set of “institutions, the policies they carry out, the conditions and rules which support and justify them, and social relations in which they are embedded.”\(^10\) Because the state functions without one central node of control, “various state institutions do not serve one coordinated racial objective; they may work at cross-purposes.”\(^11\) Although the state is in reality an incredibly decentered and nebulous system, it is often consolidated in people’s conceptualizations as one coherent entity, because the disparate components that comprise the state are united by a common goal of working together to uphold and enact the nation’s normative values. As it appears in this study, “the state” should be understood as shorthand for an immense web of institutions, individuals, policies, and organizations spread across the nation. In the United States, the state upholds policies and structures institutions to privilege whiteness.

This conception of the state and its functions is particularly useful for making sense of domestic race relations during World War II, because there were many contradictory government messages and policies occurring at the same time. These include the simultaneous condemnation of fascism abroad and the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans at home and the professed commitment to racial equality while legally barring African Americans from equal opportunities in the defense industries and armed services. Rather than evidence of a broken, unorganized, or


\(^11\) Ibid., 77.
confused power structure, these contradictions reflect the multivariate operations of systems of power actually working in tandem to maintain power, assert normative ideas of American identity, and control the nation’s citizens. Omi and Winant’s conception of the state recognizes the contradictory, flexible, mutable, and resilient nature of the state and the racial order it oversees. My work highlights these characteristics by analyzing the state’s role as an arbiter of citizenship, both in terms of legal rights and symbolic belonging to the nation.

This research considers how the material and rhetorical demands of the war, as determined by the state, affected the treatment of Japanese Americans and African Americans. I identify and analyze the overlaps and disjunctures in these two groups’ experiences with racism and their responses to it, as well as the moments of connection – both physical and ideological – between these two communities during and immediately after the war. Central to this examination is the following question: how, during World War II, did notions of race shift and figure into wartime formulations of citizenship and its associated entitlements?

Another important question guiding this research is how the unique circumstances of the war compelled racially marginalized citizens to reconceive of their national or cultural belonging. This project addresses the ways in which Japanese Americans and African Americans responded to denial of their full citizenship, which further reveals the complexity and flexibility of the power structures behind white supremacy. Because the state imposes the status quo upon a large, diverse citizenry, it must inevitably deal with challenges to its authority from those at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. In response to racialized citizens’ pushback against its objectives, the state is constantly refining its strategies and policies, resulting in a “unstable equilibrium.” As Omi and Winant explain, “Racial conflict persists at every level of society, varying over time and in respect to
different groups, but ubiquitous. Indeed, the state is itself penetrated and structured by the very interests whose conflicts it seeks to stabilize and control.”

Because the racial order is constantly in flux, the state employs various tactics to maintain the status quo, sometimes making minor tweaks to policies and practices and sometimes being forced to make major adjustments. During periods of national stability, “state institutions have effectively routinized the enforcement and organization of the prevailing racial order. … The system of racial meanings, of racial identities and ideology seems ‘natural.’” However, when the nation inevitably encounters social, political, or economic instability, such as during periods of war, “inter-institutional competition and conflict within the state is augmented, as some agencies move toward accommodation of challenging forces while others ‘dig in their heels.’ Recomposition of constituencies and political alliances takes place.”

The state’s flexibility and the multiplicity of tactics it uses suggest that the state is able to retain its power by continuously adapting and shifting its strategies while maintaining fidelity to the core normative ideologies that undergird the system, such as white supremacy. The experiences of Japanese Americans and African Americans during the war make legible the myriad ways the state addressed and exploited race ideologies to satisfy wartime labor demands, as well as to assuage public attitudes and anxieties.

World War II constricted and reified the nation’s exclusive borders of belonging. The state mediated both Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ experiences of exclusion by implementing anti-Japanese and anti-Black policies during the war. Through Executive Order 9066 and associated legislation, the federal government created a network of agencies to displace Japanese Americans from the West Coast and incarcerate them en masse. Japanese Americans’ expulsion and intense vilification was a clear example of the state mobilizing its power to place citizens outside the

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12 Ibid., 79.
13 Ibid.
constructed borders of belonging. While less concentrated, spontaneous, and egregious than Japanese internment, the discrimination African Americans experienced during the war also demonstrated the state’s broader investment in their second-class citizenship. Despite some legal shifts that created more opportunities for African Americans to work in the defense industries, these changes were mostly superficial and/or temporary, intended to boost the war effort rather than signal a fundamental change in the government’s treatment of Black citizens. In the case of African Americans, the federal government instituted reform measures in terms of war work and service out of a need to recruit Blacks to the war effort, which suggested the government’s investment in racial equality. In actuality, these changes were superficial reforms that prevented – as they were intended to do – meaningful civil rights reform that would upset the status quo. The state recalibrated its treatment of racialized groups during the war, enacting both overt and subtle policy shifts that racialized Japanese Americans as perpetual and potentially dangerous outsiders and African Americans as inferior insiders. However, national discourses emphasizing freedom and democracy, scripted and fueled by the federal agencies, obscured these events as racism. Further, dominant discourses of patriotism elevated loyalty and unity such that individuals or groups that levied critiques at the government risked being labeled and treated as suspect, even treasonous.

As the objects of state repression, Japanese Americans and African Americans became more aware of and concerned by the state’s insidious approach to maintaining the racial order. As a result, the two racialized communities increasingly looked towards each other’s situations to try to make sense of the racism and inequality they both faced in the United States. In particular, the rapid demotion of Japanese Americans in the racial hierarchy – to assume a position traditionally held by African Americans, albeit in a different form and for different reasons – compelled cross-identification between these two groups. Many African Americans recognized the process of racialization Japanese Americans were undergoing. Likewise, Japanese Americans began to identify
connections between their situation and African Americans’ marginalization, which has, throughout U.S. history, traditionally been the most visible and enduring foil to white Americans’ power.

In this project, Japanese internment is the guiding framework that delineates the study’s temporal and spatial parameters; however, this framework does not preclude considering the experiences of African Americans. To the contrary, internment is a particularly useful framework with which to explore the connections between these groups because it brought them into closer contact, both physically and ideologically. Moreover, this framework highlights the significance of the West Coast as site of unique racial dynamics. In contrast to many other parts of the country – especially the South and the Northeast – the West’s significant histories of migration from Asia and Latin America influenced the formation of region’s racial hierarchy. These dynamics differentiated the West from other areas of the country that viewed and experienced race primarily as a Black-white binary. During and after the war, Japanese Americans, displaced from the West Coast, and African Americans, relocated to the West Coast, both attempted to make the West Coast their home, and they encountered many barriers in their attempts to settle there. In many ways, internment serves as the anchor of this project because analyzing it makes legible many of the war’s central issues and contradictions regarding state power, race, democracy, citizenship, and belonging.

There is a rich and significant body of scholarship on both Japanese internment and African Americans’ westward wartime migration from many different disciplines and perspectives, including historical studies, legal analyses, sociological and anthropological investigations, and oral history projects. However, generally, historians have segregated the histories of Japanese internment and African American wartime migration into distinct silos. In addition, much of the scholarship approaches these histories separately, detached from the broader, multiracial context in which they occurred. These silos obscure the connections and overlaps between these linked histories.
Making sense of Japanese internment has been a major focus of contemporary historians.\textsuperscript{14} The body of scholarship on Japanese internment has been deeply influenced by the extensive interdisciplinary research projects undertaken during the internment period, such as the Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study (JERS), which was led by U.C. Berkeley sociology professor Dorothy Swaine Thomas. Data was collected by more than two dozen Japanese American and non-Japanese American fieldworkers, who conducted research at temporary detention facilities, concentration camps, and in resettlement communities after the war. The JERS publications and data guided later scholarship on Japanese internment.\textsuperscript{15} Japanese Americans’ own personal accounts of their incarceration during the war, in the form of memoirs, diaries, interviews, and oral histories, have also greatly increased people’s awareness and understanding of the complexities and realities of Japanese internment.\textsuperscript{16}

In comparison to the literature on Japanese internment, there is less published scholarship on African American migration to the West. The difference in the volume of scholarship can be partly attributed to the fact that, unlike with internment, there were few contemporary studies conducted on Black migration as it unfolded, and few of the predominantly working-class Black migrants had much time on their hands to write down their stories. Most of the historical scholarship on Black wartime migration to the West belongs to a broader canon of scholarship on

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\textsuperscript{14} Greg Robinson, a professor of history at the Université du Québec à Montréal, is one of the preeminent contemporary scholars of Japanese internment. His publications, including By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese Americans (2001), A Tragedy of Democracy: Japanese Confinement in North America (2009), and After Camp: Portraits in Midcentury Japanese American Life and Politics (2012), have shaped the recent scholarship on this issue.


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westward African American migration throughout U.S. history. Some of the most compelling scholarship that focuses specifically on the experiences of African Americans out West during World War II is a product of more recent oral history projects.

In recent years, some scholars have used comparative frameworks to trouble this siloed approach to history, and their texts emphasize the points of intersection among Japanese Americans, African Americans, and other racialized communities. Texts that work within a comparative framework have explored the deep and varied history of political and social connections between people of Asian and African descent to emphasize the prevalence of interracial interactions and coalitions that developed as a result of sustained encounters between racialized groups. Matthew M. Briones’ book, *Jim and Jap Crow: A Cultural History of 1940s Interracial America*, is one of the few texts that conducts an in-depth analysis on the connections between Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ experiences during World War II. Briones highlights the prevalence of multiracial milieus before, during, and after the war, emphasizing the possibilities and challenges associated with interracial organizing and suggesting that cross-racial encounters were a fundamental part of the World War II era that should not be ignored.

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17 Quintard Taylor, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Washington, Seattle, is one of the most well-known contemporary scholars of African American migration to the West. His works, including *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West 1528-1990* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1998) and *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), are some of the most extensive surveys published on African American life on the West Coast. Likewise, Albert S. Broussard of Texas A&M University has focused on African American westward migration during World War II as part of a broader trend of internal migration. His books *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993) and *Expectations of Equality: A History of Black Westerners* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) give detailed historical accounts of African Americans’ experiences out West.


I use a comparative framework to put the wartime experiences of Japanese Americans and African Americans into conversation with one another. This method allows for a more nuanced, multifaceted analysis of how race and racial hierarchies functioned and manifested in different ways in the United States during World War II. Such a framework reveals the complexities of how the system of white supremacy operated with regards to different racialized groups during the war, exposing how the state wielded its power in a dynamic way while also maintaining some degree of continuity. The state conformed to some pre-war modes of maintaining racial order while also demonstrating its flexibility to deploy new and/or modified forms of state power to respond to unique circumstances of the war.

As with the concept of the state, it is important that I clarify my usage of several other important terms. In this project, I use the term “Japanese American” as an umbrella term for people of Japanese ancestry living in the United States as permanent residents and citizens. This term encompasses the Issei (the first generation immigrants from Japan to the United States), the Nisei (the second-generation children of the Issei who were born in the United States), and the Sansei (the third-generation children of the Nisei), as well as people who do not fit in rigidly defined immigration categories, such as the Kibei, who were American-born people of Japanese ancestry who were raised and educated in Japan. I also use the terms “African American” and “Black” as umbrella terms for members of the African diaspora living in the United States. This term refers primarily to those who were descendants of Africans captured, enslaved, and brought against their will to North America as part of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Additionally, I aim to use precise, accurate language about Japanese Americans’ mass incarceration in this project. As part of implementing the state’s policies, government staff members created public relations guidelines that

20 My definition of the term “Japanese American” is analogous to the term “Nikkei,” which refers to all those in the Japanese diaspora living as permanent settlers outside Japan.
established a lexicon of euphemistic terms to refer to the displacement and detention of Japanese Americans. This study intends to reframe many of these misleading, minimizing terms. Except when quoting primary source materials, this thesis will use the terms “forced removal” and “expulsion” instead of “evacuation,” “temporary detention facility” instead of “assembly center,” and “internment camp” and “concentration camp” instead of “relocation center.”

This narrative begins by focusing on the evolving forms of power the state deployed during World War II in order to regulate Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ citizenship and belonging. The first chapter examines both the mass incarceration of Americans of Japanese descent and the expansion of racially restrictive housing covenants and other forms of anti-Black spatial segregation policies, arguing that such policies were undertaken to ensure that Japanese Americans and African Americans could not claim full citizenship rights. In this chapter, I draw on Omi and Winant’s seminal racial formation theory to decipher how and why the state reimagined and reconstructed Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ racial identities during the war. In particular, I use this theory to examine how the state restricted these groups’ property ownership and physical mobility and reoriented their participation in the wartime economy. I argue that the state adapted its strategies of control during the war in order to maintain the white supremacist racial order. The wartime restrictions on racialized communities’ movement and settlement solidified their place as outsiders in the nation and reinforced white Americans’ dominant social, cultural, and economic position during an era of immense domestic and international destabilization.


22 Although “internment” as a term is itself fraught and, arguably, somewhat misleading, this project still uses it as an overarching label to describe this issue because its frequent usage in mainstream settings makes it a familiar and easily recognizable catch-all term.
The second chapter shifts focus to how Japanese Americans and African Americans responded to the state’s wartime shifts in policy. This chapter examines the ways in which these communities negotiated their experiences as racialized people who were treated as second-class citizens in the U.S. The orientation of this chapter is also influenced by racial formation theory, since a central mechanism of the theory is the inevitability of pushback against the state. Part of the reason the state is constantly adapting its approach to maintaining the racial order is that racialized citizens resist the repressive state forces that are meant to keep them subordinated. This chapter explores Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ understandings of their changed status as well as their actions to counter the state. Incipient solidarity between Japanese Americans and African Americans emerged as a form of pushback against the state. During the war, Japanese Americans and African Americans began to develop relationships with one another as the circumstances of the war forced both communities to reconceptualize their understandings of race, white supremacy, democracy, and citizenship in the United States. For Japanese Americans and African Americans, the expansion of both anti-Japanese and anti-Black rhetoric and policies across the country was a catalyst for both communities to reflect on what it meant to be racialized people in the United States, as well as to look beyond the limits of their own racial communities to try to find solutions to the problem of racism. In particular, many Japanese Americans and African Americans saw internment as a shocking and threatening revocation of a racialized group’s citizenship, and the policy spurred Japanese Americans and African Americans to observe, sympathize with, and draw on the organizing tactics of other groups with an increased sense of urgency. The war inspired nascent interracial coalitions between Japanese Americans and African Americans, as these two groups tried to develop a cohesive, multiracial theory of oppression by inverting the dominant contemporary understandings of race. Rather than attempt to solve the “Negro Problem” or the
“Oriental Problem,” Japanese Americans and African Americans worked together to address the underlying “American Problem” of white supremacy.

The third chapter is a case study of the extended interactions between Japanese Americans and African Americans in San Francisco and Los Angeles after the war, within the broader context of ghettoization, exclusion, and economic hardships. As Japanese Americans returned to their pre-war neighborhoods on the West Coast, they encountered African Americans who had moved into these vacated neighborhoods during the war. In the post-war era, Japanese Americans and African Americans clashed and cooperated as they attempted to share spaces they had at various points in time each considered exclusively their own. In the Western Addition neighborhood of San Francisco and the Little Tokyo-Bronzeville neighborhood of Los Angeles, residents collaborated to build bicultural community institutions and foster a culture of compromise and mutual respect. Taking such steps ensured that both Japanese Americans and African Americans had the opportunity to belong to the neighborhoods. The Afro-Asian neighborhoods in San Francisco and Los Angeles were short-lived, as the state mobilized in a new form in the 1950s and 1960s to again reconfigure Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ position in society – this time through policies of urban renewal and redevelopment. The chapter evaluates the degree to which people put into practice the expressions of solidarity highlighted in the second chapter and whether these alliances were an effective challenge to the state’s power. An examination of the post-war era throws into sharp relief the ways in which these narratives are deeply interconnected and share many points of physical and ideological common ground. Examining this period of continued accommodation and upheaval demonstrates the constant cycle of disruption and change that characterizes the unstable relationship between racialized people and the state.
Chapter I

The State of Belonging:
World War II and Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ Conditional Citizenship

World War II profoundly changed the United States. Over 12 million Americans enlisted in military service, with almost three-quarters of them stationed in the European, Pacific, and North African theaters of combat. On the homefront, Americans mobilized to support troops abroad and Allied Victory. The war managed what the New Deal had not; it decisively ended the Great Depression, and the unemployment rate decreased from over 14 percent to less than 2 percent, as people went to work on behalf of the war effort. The defense industries expanded their employment and increased their production, and the composition of the workforce changed, with women and people of color finding new avenues of employment as the state worked to fill the gaps produced by those who left their pre-war jobs to serve in the military. Scores of married, middle-class white women entered the workforce for the first time to take the places of white men who left to fight in the war. Black women’s work opportunities also changed. Before the war, Fanny Christina Hill was one of the over 50 percent of Black women confined to domestic service. “The War,” she claimed, “made me live better: Hitler was the one that got us out of the white folks’ kitchen.”

Wartime economic mobilization relied on internal migration, both voluntary and forced. Americans across the country picked up to go where the work was: “[W]hole sections of the country [were] being loaded into cars and trucks and trailers, busses, and trains. … At night the highways

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were dotted with their campfires, and the roadhouses and trailer camps were crowded with them.”

World War II had such an astounding impact on the reorganization of the United States’ population that the 1948 Census Bureau noted, “Probably never before in the history of the United States has there been internal population movement of such magnitude as in the past seven eventful years.”

African Americans were among those on the move. Since the World War I era, Blacks had migrated from the South to urban centers in the North and Midwest, but with World War II they also moved west in unprecedented numbers to take advantage of work opportunities on the West Coast. As African Americans moved in, Japanese Americans were moving out, but not by choice. After the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which designated a military zone from which anyone deemed a threat could be excluded. The order targeted Japanese Americans, who General John DeWitt, head of the Western Defense Command, classified as “a dangerous element whether loyal or not.” As a result, within six months of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the federal government forcibly removed over 110,000 Japanese Americans – nearly two-thirds of them American citizens – from their homes on the West Coast and incarcerated them in concentration camps in the interior of the country.

Participating in a global war – and, more importantly, winning one – prompted the complete reorganization of the American state. This chapter explores the state’s wartime practices of restricting racialized groups’ property ownership and mobility while simultaneously incorporating them more fully into the national economy as part of the war effort. Various state agencies and operatives deployed these tactics against Japanese Americans and African Americans as part of the

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6 General John DeWitt, testimony before the House Naval Affairs Subcommittee, April 13, 1943.
wartime project of redefining these communities’ citizenship and belonging. Following Pearl Harbor, the federal government implemented a sprawling legal framework to displace, sequester, and incarcerate the bulk of the nation’s Japanese American population for the duration of the war. Internment disrupted Japanese American communities by uprooting residents from their homes, dismantling their businesses, and reorienting their position in the economy to better serve the nation’s wartime interests, such as laboring on government-supported agricultural and manufacturing projects. At the same time, almost half a million African Americans moved from the South to the West Coast in search of work in the defense industries. During the war, the West’s Black population increased by 33 percent. The influx of southern African Americans sparked intense discrimination and hostility from white West Coast residents and local governments. Housing was a major flashpoint issue, and discrimination and segregation flourished in both private and public housing. However, the heightened demand for wartime labor afforded African Americans some increased job opportunities and the possibility of economic advancement. I argue that the state’s interactions with these two racialized groups changed in relation to the war in manners unique to each group’s value to state agendas. The state’s actions helped to redraw and redefine the nation’s “borders of belonging,” placing both Japanese Americans and African Americans on the outside of these boundaries.

This chapter employs Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s racial formation theory to analyze how the state enacted policies during the war that redefined Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ status as citizens. I argue that the state’s policies, which appeared contradictory at times, were part of a broader effort to maintain the racial order during a time of national upheaval. Omi and Winant theorize that race and its meanings are dynamic and fluid; each is constantly being

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“formed, transformed, destroyed and re-formed.” The content and significance of racial categories is constantly shifting, depending on the prevailing social, political, and economic forces and counterforces. The state – viewed broadly as a decentered but coordinated aggregate of institutions and agencies – mediates, defines, and redefines the various meanings ascribed to different racial designations. Accordingly, “racial meanings pervade US society, extending from the shaping of individual racial identities to the structuring of collective political action on the terrain of the state.”

In times of war, the mechanisms with which the state deploys, manipulates, and exploits ideologies of race become uniquely visible due to the state’s quick and extreme actions motivated by crisis.

In this chapter, I use property ownership/physical mobility and labor as the main sites of focus to examine how the state solidified Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ limited citizenship and belonging. I analyze these two sites of focus in order to trace the wide-ranging impacts of the state’s actions during the war. Property ownership/physical mobility and labor were significant axes of state control during World War II because these concepts were central elements of the state’s conceptions of freedom and citizenship. Throughout U.S. history, both people of Japanese and African descent have had tenuous relationships to land, property ownership, physical mobility, and economic independence. The state has used both de facto and de jure exclusion policies as tactics to dictate where these groups could settle and how they participated in the national economy. The state utilized exclusionary tactics during World War II to reinforce the boundaries of citizenship and national belonging amidst the tumultuous societal shifts of the war.

Throughout the nation’s history, the state has been an arbiter of citizenship and belonging. In the United States, both legal citizenship and symbolic belonging to the nation have traditionally relied on or been connected to the ability to own private property and practice economic self-

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9 Ibid., 66.
ownership. Cheryl Harris, a legal scholar of Constitutional law and civil rights, argues that property rights are deeply entangled with, and are a marker of, racial identity and status. In her influential article, “Whiteness as Property,” Harris illustrates the historical underpinnings, stretching back to the nation’s foundations of slavery and colonization, that linked whiteness and white power to the ability to own property. Harris argues that “whiteness and property share a common premise – a conceptual nucleus – of a right to exclude.” Although the link between these two concepts has shifted throughout American history to assume “more subtle forms, … [it] retains its core characteristic – the legal legitimation of expectations of power and control that enshrine the status quo as a neutral baseline, while masking the maintenance of white privilege and domination.”

Similar to Harris, Barbara Young Welke argues that notions of property ownership are inherently tied to ideas of citizenship in the U.S. “Personhood,” as Welke argues, “rests most fundamentally on legal recognition and protection of self-ownership, that is, of a right to one’s person, one’s body, and one’s labor.” From this right flows other rights, such as the freedom to purchase, own, or inherit property, and the freedom of movement. Both Harris and Welke assert that the interrelated concepts of property ownership, unrestricted physical mobility within the country, and the right to control one’s labor are cornerstones of possessing full personhood in the United States. Limiting these rights to white Americans helped to solidify whiteness as a prerequisite for first-class citizenship. To retain the social, political, and economic powers and privileges afforded to white Americans, the state has enacted systems of control throughout U.S. history to regulate racialized people’s property, physical mobility, and participation in the economy.

11 Ibid.
12 Notably, this flexibility and endurance mirrors Omi and Winant’s conception of the state’s strategy of maintaining power. Ibid., 1715.
During World War II, citizens were moving around the country in unprecedented numbers and the composition of the labor force changed in response to the wartime production demands, which meant that this period had the potential to disrupt the links between whiteness, personhood, property, mobility, and self-ownership of labor. Therefore, it was a priority for the state to maintain the status quo by enacting new forms of control that regulated racialized groups’ ability to own property, move and settle freely within the country, and have control over their labor. As Harris and Welke demonstrate, racism and racialized structures of property ownership and labor were fundamental parts of the nation. The definition of a first-class American citizen with full personhood depended on creating classes of people who were cultural, legal, and racial outsiders.

As Devon Carbado explains, legal citizenship, American identity, and belonging are interrelated concepts, but they are not the same. Carbado writes, “American identity means the capacity, as a racial subject, to be a representative body – figuratively and materially – for the nation.” He continues, “Historically, Asian Americans, even those with formal American citizenship, have lacked this representational capacity.” In the case of Japanese Americans during World War II, the federal government, in collaboration with the media, nationalized longstanding anti-Japanese xenophobic and nativist rhetoric. There was a disavowal of Japanese Americans as internal enemy aliens whose presence in the country was invasive and destructive. Various state actors – such as President Roosevelt, members of Congress, and fear-mongering newspapers – took actions that helped to equate Japanese Americans’ racial identity with foreignness. According to Carbado, “Notwithstanding their formal citizenship status, [Japanese Americans] were perceived to be foreigners. One can think of Japanese Americans in this context as citizen aliens (as distinct from illegal aliens).” Many Japanese Americans had legal citizenship, but they were nonetheless seen as

14 Devon W. Carbado, “Racial Naturalization,” American Quarterly 57, no. 3 (September 2005), 638.
15 Ibid.
infiltrators and un-American, which justified and facilitated their displacement and mass incarceration.

In the case of African Americans, the war created the potential for social, political, and economic advancement by escaping the racism of the Jim Crow South and relocating to the West Coast. However, African Americans discovered that anti-Black racism was also deeply embedded within the West Coast through measures like restrictive housing covenants, racial quotas in wartime housing projects, and hierarchical economic structures that relegated Blacks to the lowest paying and least desirable jobs. Settling out West was challenging for African Americans, who encountered state-sanctioned employment discrimination and housing restrictions in every place they tried to settle. Unlike Japanese Americans, African Americans were not seen as perpetual foreigners, but they were nonetheless excluded from full citizenship rights, expressed through the state’s restrictions on their ability to settle freely. Carbado explains, “Slavery was a kind of forced naturalization, a process in which blacks were simultaneously denationalized from Africa and domesticated to (but never fully incorporated in) America.” With this foundation, Blacks “were intelligible as Americans – more particularly, as inferior beings that belonged to America.” 16 African Americans had both legal citizenship and were accepted as belonging to the American polity, but they were relegated to the bottom of the nation’s hierarchy. The state’s construction and enforcement of African Americans’ symbolic and material inferiority boosted white Americans’ hegemony and sense of national belonging during the war.

The war did not, and arguably could not, completely reshape a political and social structure reliant on restricting some people’s freedom. It did, however, profoundly impact the nation’s material circumstances, and, as a result, affect the state’s need to harness racialized groups’ labor.

16 Ibid., 642.
Despite the state's infringements upon their citizenship rights and denials of their cultural belonging, Japanese Americans and African Americans were still useful as workers, particularly in the agriculture sector and the defense industries. Their utility as workers tethered them to the national project during the war.

In the pre-war era, Japanese Americans primarily worked in small businesses in ethnic enclaves or as part of the agriculture sector in California, and nativists perceived Japanese Americans’ economic independence and self-sufficiency as a threat to white Americans’ economic interests. After Pearl Harbor, pushing Japanese Americans out of the West Coast economy became a tactic to revoke their citizenship rights and national belonging, in line with the link between personhood and economic independence identified by Welke. Moreover, nativists and white business owners rallied for Japanese Americans’ incarceration in part to boost their own economic standing, which reinforced their personhood and status as first-class citizens. Furthermore, while Japanese Americans were incarcerated, the government implemented programs for Japanese Americans to grow and harvest food and manufacture goods to serve the war effort. Controlling and reorienting Japanese Americans’ labor in the concentration camps became a tool to subordinate them and redefine their racial identity, underscoring their lack of full personhood.

In contrast to Japanese Americans’ historical position as a perceived economic competitor with white Americans, throughout U.S. history African Americans have been shunted to the bottom of the economic ladder, beginning with slavery. Before World War II, the economy was structured in such a way that African Americans had virtually no opportunities for economic advancement, and Black workers typically did manual labor, domestic service, sharecropping, and other stigmatized jobs. The wartime labor shortage provided a rare opportunity for them to potentially rise up in economic standing and gain access to previously unattainable jobs and wages. The West Coast defense industries appeared to be sufficiently flexible to employ both Black and white workers,
which represented a potential disruption of the equilibrium that was maintained in part through African Americans’ consistent economic subordination. However, the war presented a unique challenge, because the West Coast defense industries really did need African Americans’ labor to function at full capacity. To resolve this issue, the federal government implemented policies that gave Black workers more legal standing to enter into industries and jobs that previously excluded them, but white workers and supervisors on the West Coast kept Black workers’ economic mobility in check by treating them as inferior members of the workforce. Moreover, many of the legal advances that the federal government granted were temporary and limited in scope, which meant that although there was an outward appearance of fairness and equality, the underlying structure of relegating most Black workers to the bottom of the economic hierarchy persisted.

Enshrining these systems of racial hierarchy in a broader framework of democracy obscured their centrality to the nation’s functioning. This enabled the state to continually maintain the unstable equilibrium by shifting its forms of control over time. The shifts could appear to signal the end of the racial hierarchy when, in reality, the changes represented the flexibility of the state and the adaptability of the racial hierarchy. Analyzing these established mechanisms reveals the ways in which racism was able to persist during World War II in the midst of the state’s increased emphasis on democracy. The state refined its expressions of white supremacy against Japanese Americans and African Americans during this era to complement the nation’s shifting wartime rhetorical strategies and material circumstances.

**Shifts in Property Ownership and Physical Mobility**

The anti-Japanese backlash in the United States following the bombing of Pearl Harbor was swift and severe. Japanese Americans were the targets of prejudice, harassment, and abuse from civilians and authorities alike. After the United States entered the war, Japanese Americans across the West Coast realized that the social and economic position they had cultivated in the country was
in danger of crumbling around them. Since the mid-nineteenth century, federal, state, and local governments had implemented policies that restricted East Asians’ immigration and settlement in the United States, targeting people of Chinese and Japanese descent most severely. Japanese immigrants were ineligible for legal citizenship based on the Naturalization Act of 1870, and in 1924 Congress passed the National Origins Act, which included a special provision that called for the complete exclusion of immigrants from Japan. Alien land laws, such as the one passed in California in 1913, implicitly targeted Japanese immigrants and used their ineligibility for legal citizenship as the basis for prohibiting them from buying land or holding long-term leases. These exclusion policies created numerous barriers to Japanese Americans’ ability to settle, but nonetheless, many Japanese Americans had figured out ways to work within the system and eke out an existence, albeit an often marginalized one.

The racist and xenophobic ideologies that underpinned Japanese exclusion had been percolating for nearly a century, but ultimately, the state constructed the legal framework for displacement and mass incarceration and established a coalition of government bodies charged with implementing this policy in approximately one month.17 A variety of organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, worked together to rapidly create and deploy a series of policies and social frameworks to forcibly remove and detain the West Coast’s Japanese American community. These agencies built off of the anti-immigrant legacies and expanded their scope to also target people of Japanese descent who were born in the United States (and therefore had birthright citizenship). While the various state apparatuses were not wholly coordinated, together their actions aligned to revoke Japanese Americans’ belonging by stripping them of their property and forcing them out of the communities in which they lived.

17 Executive Order 9066 was issued on February 19, 1942, and the first Civilian Exclusion Order was released on March 24, 1942.
Less than a week after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Charles Kikuchi – a Nisei from Northern California who was studying to become a social worker at the University of California, Berkeley – wrote a handwritten note to Louis Adamic, the editor of *Common Ground* magazine, detailing the profound anti-Japanese hostility that he had witnessed in the days following the bombing:

Radio announces: Don’t patronize Japanese stores.
Boycott of store operated by Nisei.
A Filipino swings at a Nisei in the Japanese district.
Police officer sneers at a storeowner: “You ask me to be decent after what you ‘Japs’ did to Hawaii?”
Crowd in Montana attempts to lynch a “Jap.”
Illegal to give money to Japanese nationals. Son can’t give money to parents.
Grant Ave. art goods store mostly failing.
Chinese up and down coast wearing Chinese flags so they won’t be mistaken for Japanese.
Unions boycotting Japanese laundries in the name of patriotism.18

Kikuchi’s letter detailed an emerging coalition of institutions and attitudes that targeted Japanese Americans as enemies of the United States, emphasizing their supposed disloyalty and foreignness. These early responses to Pearl Harbor demonstrated that Japanese Americans’ belonging in the community was being re-negotiated on the local level.

Like Kikuchi, Mary Oyama, a Nisei journalist living in Los Angeles, experienced a dramatic decline in her social position after Pearl Harbor.19 In an article in the Spring 1942 issue of *Common Ground*, Oyama outlined the deteriorating political and social conditions in Los Angeles following the United States’ entry to the war. According to Oyama, amidst the hostility, mistrust, and violence from their neighbors and vigilantes, many Japanese Americans’ biggest concern was the risk of losing their homes as part of the war effort. Oyama explained, “Young Nisei wives had visions of being turned out into the streets, of having their down-payment stoves, furniture, cars, etc. hauled

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away; their gas, electricity, and water turned off.”\(^{20}\) Oyama expressed her own fears of losing her house, framing this loss in terms of its implications for her belonging in the United States: “Fred [Oyama’s husband] and I might even lose our new house. Though unpretentious, it is beautiful to us as the fulfillment of a dream, as a symbol of our roots here in these United States. I had thought it was only in old-fashioned melodramas that people lost their homes. . . .”\(^{21}\) Losing their homes was one of the most difficult and jarring possibilities for many Japanese Americans to consider, since their ability to own property was a recognition of their Americanness and an affirmation of their personhood. As an American citizen who was legally eligible for home ownership, Oyama did not realize how unstable her position in the community was until the war effort became a pretext to suspend her citizenship and its associated rights.

Kikuchi, more cynical and pessimistic than Oyama, presciently noted that the growing “seed of racial hysteria” was not limited to individual acts of violence and discrimination, but carried the very real possibility of state-orchestrated collective punishment for Japanese Americans. “The native patriotic groups would even want to send all of the Nisei to concentration camps,” Kikuchi wrote in a December 20, 1941, letter to Adamic. “This sounds crazy and I hope it does not go further than the talk stage, but is a most dangerous possibility and I am pessimistic about the outcome.”\(^{22}\) Unfortunately, Kikuchi’s pessimism proved accurate. Already marginalized before Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans’ racial designation as enemy aliens and perpetual foreigners solidified after the United States’ entry into the war.

Some of the earliest public expressions of anti-Japanese rhetoric following the U.S. entry into the war came from the media and non-governmental organizations. On January 16, 1942, the *Palos Verdes News* raised the alarm to its readers that “the Japanese [are] here cultivating the land

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\(^{21}\) Ibid., 12-13.

\(^{22}\) Kikuchi to Adamic, December 20, 1941 (CKP, box 11, 1:1) quoted in Briones, *Jim and Jap Crow*, 82.
immediately adjoining the ocean and military objectives … the Japanese are everywhere.” On February 13, 1942, the developer A. E. Hansen abruptly cancelled the leases of forty Japanese farmers who cultivated 500 acres of farmland on the Palos Verdes peninsula. Portraying Japanese Americans as uniformly traitorous and dangerous to the war effort promoted a certain idea about what Japanese-ness was, and this constructed designation facilitated and justified stripping the Japanese American farmers of their leases. Without an overarching state policy of exclusion yet in place, individuals and private institutions were already taking steps to control and block Japanese Americans’ belonging by drawing on the pre-existing legal frameworks of segregation, discrimination, and alien land laws.

Federal officials also contributed to the nationwide anti-Japanese fervor. One of the earliest, most extreme government proponents of Japanese Americans’ removal from the West Coast was John Rankin, a member of Congress from Mississippi. Rankin had cemented a reputation for himself in the House of Representatives as a staunch foe of civil rights legislation; he supported segregation, defended discriminatory poll taxes, and fought against anti-lynching bills. In addition to his anti-Black policy preferences, he also was one of the first government officials to call for the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. On December 15, 1941, Rankin boldly declared, “I’m for catching every Japanese in America, Alaska, and Hawaii now and putting them in concentration camps. … Damn them! Let’s get rid of them now!” Rankin’s espousal of anti-Japanese rhetoric was notable, since there were virtually no

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24 Ibid.

established Japanese American communities in Mississippi in the pre-war era, and anti-Japanese discrimination was not institutionalized in the South in the same way that it was on the West Coast. Rankin’s hostility towards Japanese Americans in the wake of Pearl Harbor demonstrates how racist policies, systems, and ideologies were able to be transplanted to different contexts and be deployed against different groups. Before the war, Rankin was already concerned with maintaining white supremacy, as he sought to use his political power to limit African Americans’ citizenship via spatial segregation and restricted rights and privileges. During the war, Rankin found a new target for his segregationist views – Japanese Americans – and applied his white supremacist mentality and tactics to a different racialized group.

On February 19, 1942, the calls for Japanese Americans’ removal from the West Coast reached the highest levels of the nation. President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which authorized the Secretary of War to “prescribe military areas … from which any and all persons may be excluded.” Like much of the anti-Japanese rhetoric during World War II, Executive Order 9066 used military necessity as a pretext to enact policies that xenophobic and nativist groups had long promoted. In this executive order, the President leveraged his considerable unilateral power to argue that “successful prosecution of the war” required and thus justified taking these sweeping measures to demarcate and limit the areas in which certain civilians could reside. Executive Order 9066 did not explicitly specify Japanese Americans as its target; however, many parts of society – individuals, media organizations, private businesses, nativist groups, and government officials – had already laid the groundwork and bought into the ideological frameworks that allowed them to apply the order to the West Coast’s Japanese American communities. Executive Order 9066 was a crucial part of the state’s process of racializing Japanese Americans as obstacles to winning the war. There were no

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27 Ibid.
attempts to distinguish between loyal and disloyal Japanese Americans or even between immigrants and American citizens – all people of Japanese descent were painted with the same broad brush. President Roosevelt used his executive power liberally to enact sweeping anti-Japanese policies, but he did not, and could not implement them alone. Under Roosevelt’s leadership, a wide array of state agencies came together to craft and execute the internment policy. In particular, a trio of state organizations – the Western Defense Command, the Wartime Civil Control Administration, and the War Relocation Authority – constituted the nucleus of the state bureaucracy that implemented internment.

The Western Defense Command (WDC) formed prior to the U.S. entry into World War II alongside the Eastern, Central, and Southern regional Defense Commands. Headquartered in the Presidio in San Francisco, the WDC was responsible for defending the western region of the United States (defined as California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona) “against attacks by land, sea, and air” – a very broad and far-reaching mandate. The WDC was led by Lieutenant General John DeWitt, an intensely paranoid man who was convinced that Japanese American saboteurs were planning to attack the U.S. from within, despite lacking evidence to support this claim. DeWitt’s powerful position gave him an outlet to codify his personal racist beliefs into government policies. Following the issuance of Executive Order 9066, General DeWitt issued Public Proclamation No. 1 on March 2, 1942. Using Executive Order 9066 as its basis, the proclamation created Military Areas 1 and 2 as restricted zones. Military Area 1 was defined as the western halves of Washington, Oregon, and California, and the southern half of Arizona. Military Area 2 was defined as the remaining portions of these four states. The proclamation encouraged Japanese Americans to “voluntarily” resettle outside of Military Area 1.

Even after Executive Order 9066 was issued and Military Areas 1 and 2 were formed, many government officials still believed that the process of Japanese Americans’ removal from the West Coast would be voluntary and self-imposed. However, government officials quickly realized that voluntary removal was an ineffective, unrealistic policy. Robert W. Frase, the assistant chief of the employment division of the War Relocation Authority, noted that within weeks of its implementation, “it became apparent that 112,000 people of all ages and occupations could not, within the short space of a few weeks, close out their economic affairs and find new homes and new methods of making a living in other parts of the country without considerable assistance and direction from the government.”

This quote illustrates the state’s shift in strategy to achieve its desired outcome. Because the state receives pushback and resistance from racialized groups, maintaining the unstable equilibrium hinges on the state enacting a balance of positive and negative measures, alternating between accommodating racialized groups and cracking down on them. At the outset of the internment policy, the state attempted to appear more reasonable and accommodating of Japanese Americans by making the “evacuation” policy voluntary, which gave it a flimsy veneer of benevolent non-intervention. However, it quickly became clear that few Japanese Americans would or could voluntarily displace themselves without the state bureaucracy’s mandate. Therefore, the state changed tactics and cracked down on the West Coast’s Japanese American communities by implementing a policy of forced removal. A network of government agencies was developed to revoke Japanese Americans’ rights and privileges, using displacement and detainment as tactics to achieve this goal. The expansion and sophistication of the government bureaucracy overseeing internment demonstrated the extent to which the state expanded and institutionalized Japanese Americans’ exclusion.

On March 11, 1942, General DeWitt formed the Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA), as an agency within the WDC. The WCCA was responsible for overseeing the on-the-ground process of Japanese Americans’ removal from their homes outlined in Public Proclamation No. 1. Headquartered in San Francisco, the WCCA rapidly established field offices across the West Coast and opened nearly 100 civil control stations, which would be the local hubs for organizing the Japanese American residents of each area. The agency also converted pre-existing public facilities, such as horse racetracks and fairgrounds, into 14 temporary detention facilities (euphemistically known as “assembly centers”). Rather than building all new facilities from scratch, the WCCA relied on identifying and repurposing pre-existing sites to serve the government’s new policy objectives. The state agency manipulated the nation’s pre-existing infrastructure in order to facilitate and expedite the execution of such a large project.

When it became clear that voluntary removal was not feasible, the WCCA began to issue Civilian Exclusion Orders to Japanese American residents of the West Coast. Using Census data, the WCCA divided the region into over 100 areas, each containing approximately 1,000 Japanese American residents, and issued exclusion orders to each area. The exclusion orders required Japanese American residents to report to a predetermined location on a specific day, usually about a week after the exclusion order was posted. Japanese Americans were only allowed to bring with them belongings they were able to carry to the temporary detention facilities. The first exclusion order was issued on March 24, 1942, for the residents of Bainbridge Island, Washington. Just as the WCCA expropriated racetracks and fairgrounds and redefined the function of these sites to advance the internment project, the state also harnessed Census data to enact anti-Japanese policies. Rather than acting as a neutral tool to measure the population, the Census was a powerful tool of state

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surveillance. The WCCA utilized demographic data to bolster the state’s racial project by identifying and targeting Japanese Americans for removal.

On March 18, 1942, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9102 to establish the War Relocation Authority (WRA), which was the federal agency in charge of building and operating the longer-term camps in which Japanese Americans would be incarcerated for the duration of the war. While the WCCA detained Japanese Americans in temporary facilities, the WRA searched for locations in which it would construct the more permanent detention facilities. Milton Eisenhower, the brother of General Dwight Eisenhower, was the first leader of the WRA. Under his short tenure, the WRA conceded that the only politically tenable option was to construct military-style concentration camps, as opposed to the possibility of facilitating a mass inland migration of Japanese Americans as free civilians. In several weeks’ time, WRA administrators selected 10 sites as the long-term camp locations. Eisenhower made an agreement with John Collier, the director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, to build one of the camps – which became the Poston War Relocation Center – on land of the Colorado River Indian Reservation. Although the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans was a new form of anti-Japanese discrimination, the logistics of the camps’ structures were influenced by the federal government’s entrenched policy of sequestering indigenous people on reservations.

Supporters of Japanese Americans’ removal and incarceration framed their position in terms of the war effort, justifying their position by highlighting the supposed threat posed by Japanese Americans’ proximity to key military bases in California and the West Coast’s proximity to the nation of Japan. However, this justification was based on more racialization and jingoism than legitimate national security concerns. As Donald Teruo Hata, Jr., and Nadine Ishitani Hata note, the U.S. military knew by the end of June 1942 that Japan posed no serious threat to Hawai’i and the
West Coast.\textsuperscript{31} According to the Munson Report, which was a military intelligence briefing conducted prior to Pearl Harbor, almost all Japanese Americans on the West Coast were pro-American.\textsuperscript{32} Government officials largely ignored the Munson Report and disregarded the measured assessments of the Navy and FBI officials. In the face of evidence to the contrary, the state nonetheless pushed ahead with internment as a method of safeguarding the imagined national community. The state apparatus had done so much to racialize Japanese Americans as dangerous enemy aliens that factual research, like the Munson Report, was unable to alter the state’s course of action. Racializing Japanese Americans as outsiders was such an integral part of the government’s wartime strategy that it could not be abandoned without upsetting the unstable equilibrium the state had constructed after Pearl Harbor. As a country at war, the physical and symbolic boundaries of the nation needed to be protected. The state redefined Japanese Americans as an enemy alien class, which was a potent justification for expelling them from the West Coast and denying them the rights and privileges of citizenship. Quarantining Japanese Americans allowed the state to foster a sense of national security and reinforced white Americans’ own sense of belonging and Americanness during the war.

While the state constructed a massive bureaucracy to expel Japanese Americans from the West Coast, other state bodies were frantically organizing to limit an influx of migration to the West Coast by southern African Americans. As African Americans moved to California cities, local and state agencies scrambled to limit and control their settlement. The internal migration of African Americans upset local racial hierarchies. African Americans’ persistent mobility exposed the permeability of the nation’s internal borders in a system that aimed to rigidly control racialized groups. As such, the West Coast states began implementing restrictions on property similar to those in place in the southern states from which African Americans were leaving. In this way, the state

\textsuperscript{31} Hata and Hata, “Asian-Pacific Angelinos: Model Minorities and Indispensable Scapegoats,” 79.

took steps to reassert the boundaries of belonging and community identity in order to exclude the incoming migrants. This exclusion reinforced the belief that, in an era of increased national unity, African Americans were ineligible for the full rights and privileges of citizenship.

During the war, California became the epicenter of the nation’s defense industry, with shipyards operating in many major coastal urban centers. In the San Francisco Bay Area alone, the wartime shipyards built and launched over 1,400 ships – approximately one a day for every day of the entire war. Operating the wartime shipyards required a massive labor force. Initially, defense contractors sought to hire only local workers from the Bay Area. The defense industries tried to quash interstate migration from unskilled laborers clamoring for jobs in the western shipyards, fearing that a massive influx of unskilled workers would increase the burden on local relief and social welfare agencies and flood the already overwhelmed housing market. Instead, the shipyard operators mainly sought to hire white adult men in the region who were unemployed as a lingering impact of the Great Depression. The California Federation of Labor even launched a public relations campaign to discourage interstate migration to California. Without explicitly identifying Black workers as their target, West Coast employers and government agencies used well-established racialized rhetoric and frameworks to block African Americans’ physical mobility in order to maintain the pre-existing racial order.

However, the war ramped up dramatically, and it became clear that the severe labor shortage necessitated a higher volume of workers. This shift in the war’s circumstances required the state to adapt its wartime approach to African Americans’ physical mobility. In order to accommodate the demands of the defense industry, shipyard authorities turned to unskilled laborers and out-of-state migrants, and the federal government helped to recruit laborers. Kaiser and other western shipyards

launched nationwide recruitment campaigns to bring hundreds of thousands of additional laborers from around the country to California. Federal and corporate labor recruiters traveled to poverty-stricken areas of the Dust Bowl region and southern states, targeting areas with high unemployment, such as Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, and North and South Carolina.\textsuperscript{35} By the end of the war, Kaiser had relocated 37,852 workers to Richmond with the help of recruiters, who covered the workers’ train fare to get to California, and an additional 60,000 workers came on their own with referrals from recruiters.\textsuperscript{36}

The West Coast shipyards advertised the California defense industry as a golden opportunity, drawing on the long history of California boosterism to entice workers. One Kaiser recruiting pamphlet extolled the virtues of the California climate alongside the economic stability the shipyards would provide workers:

With or without experience, there’s a job of vital importance to your country waiting for you in the Richmond shipyards. And it opens a rare opportunity. You can learn a trade, get paid while you’re learning, and earn the highest wages for comparable work anywhere in the world. … You’ll be living where the sun shines 275 days a year – never a snowstorm, never too hot for comfort. … [Y]our job will be for the duration [of the war] and indefinitely beyond. … There is every indication that shipbuilding has returned to the Pacific Coast to stay.\textsuperscript{37}

This rhetoric was effective at drawing many people to California, especially African Americans from the economically depressed South. During World War II, California offered the highest wage and income standards in the U.S. In 1942, per capita income payments in California were 41.2 percent higher than the national average. According to Keith E. Collins, the move to California was even more lucrative for Black southerners than this figure suggests: “Many Blacks … advanced from domestic servants to common labors in the civilian industry to production workers in defense plants

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\textsuperscript{36} Statistics from Johnson, \textit{The Second Gold Rush}, 38.
\textsuperscript{37} Pamphlet quoted in Johnson, \textit{The Second Gold Rush}, 38.
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by migrating and thus increased their income several fold.” 38 Most Black southerners were poor, and many of the migrants who flocked to the West Coast hoped that westward migration would offer a path out of the social, political, and economic marginalization they had experienced for generations in the South.

Despite the prevalence of wartime recruiters, most African American migrants came to California on their own accord. In fact, the War Manpower Commission found in 1943 that nearly 75 percent of all African Americans who migrated to the San Francisco Bay Area came to California without any direct contact with wartime recruiters. 39 This figure demonstrates the degree to which the state neglected African Americans and strategically excluded them from the opportunity to reap the benefits offered by working in the western defense industries. African Americans who did engage with wartime recruiters were urged to travel to California without their families for the duration of the war. Recruiters who interacted with African Americans tried to minimize the scope and impact of Black migration to the West Coast. Pushing back against the state agencies’ plans, African American workers came to California with their wives and children or summoned their families after acquiring jobs. 40 According to interviews conducted with Black Richmond residents, the most commonly cited factors for chain migration among African American southerners were letters written by family and friends encouraging people to move to the West Coast. 41 Another key factor in the westward migration was the role of Black porters and other railroad workers, who disseminated information about California job opportunities across the South through the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe railway lines. Church congregations also influenced Black migration to the West Coast. For example, the War Manpower Commission noted that a Black Baptist church in

40 Crouchett, Bunch, and Winnacker, Visions Toward Tomorrow, 46.
41 Interviews with Black Richmond residents conducted by Shirley Ann Wilson Moore.
Shreveport, Louisiana, served as an organizing hub for migrants heading out West. The strategy of relying on community-based networks reveals the non-state channels that Black communities used to sidestep the government’s attempts to prevent them from moving West. Blacks’ resistance and continued migration required the West Coast’s state agencies to recalibrate their plans for controlling African Americans.

The unparalleled scale of African Americans’ wartime migration stretched the physical and political boundaries that had organized the pre-war racial order. In the first three years of the war, 150,000 African Americans came to West Coast from the South. Between 1940 and 1945, the Bay Area’s Black population increased by more than 227 percent, growing from 19,759 people to 64,680 people. In Oakland, the Black community grew from 8,462 people before the war to 21,770 people by 1944. In Richmond, the Black population grew by an astonishing 2,001 percent. These figures were so enormous that it was virtually impossible to confine Black migrants to limited ethnic enclaves or ghettos. As Katherine Archibald noted in her study of the Moore Dry Dock Company shipyard, “Thousands of new Negro inhabitants, for the most part fresh from the South, were employed in the shipyards of the Bay Area – too many to be confined within the black belts already sanctioned by custom.” African Americans’ migration upset the unstable equilibrium and therefore could not be managed using the same pre-war strategies of exclusion and containment. To reimpose the status quo, the state undertook various projects to establish residential segregation across the West Coast and reinforce that African Americans did not belong there.

Inevitably, the influx of migrants to California urban centers strained the housing market and caused tensions between locals and newcomers. Residents expressed keen anxiety over the presence

of migrants, particularly regarding the fact that many of them were working class, rural, and Black. For southern African Americans migrants in particular, local California officials expressed doubt in their ability to be absorbed into the community: “The Negro who was born and reared here fits into our picture, but these Southern Negroes are a serious problem. They don’t get along with the Negroes who were born and reared here, nor with the white residents … If this in-migration is not stopped, until such time as these people can be properly absorbed into the community, dire results will insue.”

State officials and local residents made it clear that even if African Americans settled in the West, they would not be included in the community.

Beginning in late 1942, the government constructed war housing projects to accommodate the shipyard migrants who moved to California. The units established quotas for Black residents, capping them at 25 percent of total occupancy, and blocks of housing units were segregated. These housing projects were inadequate to accommodate the sheer number of African American workers. The government used spatial segregation in the housing projects to re-inscribe African Americans’ inferiority, deeming them unworthy of receiving an equitable share of the government’s social services and instead forcing most of them to figure out their own housing.

In the private sector, white property owners used restrictive covenants, which were a legally permissible form of housing discrimination, to block Blacks’ settlement. Although this form of exclusion was not directly mediated by the government, the decentered view of the state that Omi and Winant provide shows the ways in which these individuals’ actions were influenced and sanctioned by the federal, state, and local governments and inspired by the widespread practices of spatial segregation across the country and most notable in the Jim Crow South. In many California cities, “home improvement” associations led campaigns to ensure that all residential areas had

46 House Committee on Naval Affairs, Hearings, Izak Subcommittee, Part 8, p. 1764, quoted in Collins, Black Los Angeles, 26.
47 Crouchett, Bunch, and Winnacker, Visions Toward Tomorrow, 49.
restrictive housing covenants to lock African American migrants out of buying or renting property in the area. Pasadena and San Gabriel Valley underwent this process in 1941. By the end of 1943, the African American population of Los Angeles had doubled, with virtually no change in the residential resources available to them. African American migrants were only eligible to reside in approximately 5 percent of the city due to its rampant segregation policies. The state used residential segregation to exercise a level of control over the enormous population of migrants, limit their ability to establish roots in the communities, and entrench their racial subordination in a new region of the country.

Because of the limited housing options available, many African American migrants had to get creative to survive in their inhospitable new neighborhoods. In cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles, some African American families repopulated Japantowns from which Japanese Americans had been forcibly removed. North Richmond, which was mainly populated by immigrant families, people of color, and wartime migrants, was filled with trailers, tents, and other makeshift forms of housing. In West Oakland, up to 50 men would squeeze into dilapidated houses—often without indoor plumbing—that had been neglected during the Depression years. In some cases, men would sleep in shifts in “hot beds” to accommodate everyone. Policies of racial segregation forced African American migrants into dire circumstances as they struggled to settle on the West Coast. The state’s policies of exclusion and institutionalized neglect pushed African Americans to the physical and symbolic margins of western communities by denying them the ability to live comfortably in their new settlements. On the West Coast, a wide variety of state agencies came together to reinforce African Americans’ racial designation as an inferior class of Americans who were ineligible for full citizenship benefits.

48 An in-depth exploration of this phenomenon and its broader impact and implications will be the focus of the third chapter.
49 Crouchett, Bunch, and Winnacker, Visions Toward Tomorrow.
In both the case of Japanese internment and the case of African American migration to the West Coast, the state quickly responded to societal shifts by implementing new forms of control and modifying pre-existing frameworks to fit the wartime context and demands. Moreover, the state’s wartime actions demonstrate the ways in which different parts of the state apparatus borrowed and adapted policies from one part of the country and applied them to another. Before Pearl Harbor, California had been the nucleus of anti-Japanese sentiment and legislation. After Pearl Harbor, these ideologies and policies gained currency among a much larger public. Nativist organizations and California politicians shared their goals and frameworks with the federal government, which incorporated those perspectives into its broader wartime racial project in order to make anti-Japanese prejudice legible on a nationwide scale. Similarly, before the influx of African American migrants to the West Coast, few areas of the West Coast had developed comprehensive or explicit anti-Black policies. However, when African American southerners began moving there in significant numbers, local and state governments quickly drew upon the pre-existing frameworks that limited African Americans’ settlement in other parts of the country and applied them to the western context. The experiences of Japanese Americans and African Americans highlight the ways in which the state continued old practices while also introducing new strategies to maintain the racial status quo. In both cases, the goal of regulating citizenship and belonging by controlling racialized groups’ property rights and physical mobility – and the underlying legal mechanisms by which to achieve this goal – were the same; however, the state practiced its flexibility in terms of the new and modified forms deployed in order to enact this goal.

**Shifts in Economic Participation**

Although the state took actions to limit Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ citizenship and belonging during World War II, the demands of the wartime economy meant that the state simultaneously worked to harness these groups’ labor, while continuing to reinforce their
legal and social exclusion from the nation. The material circumstances of the war drew attention to a recurring tension: the state blocked people of color from belonging to the nation’s symbolic American community, while also depending on them as cheap, exploited sources of labor. During World War II, this dynamic was central to the state’s interactions with Japanese Americans and African Americans. Japanese internment precipitated the forcible severing of Japanese Americans’ relationships to their local communities, the dissolution of the Japanese American ethnic economy, and the redirection of Japanese Americans’ labor to benefit the war effort. Meanwhile, working in West Coast shipyards offered some unprecedented opportunities for African Americans to work in racially integrated settings, advance economically, and receive some legal protections from discrimination. However, these advances were only possible because they hinged on portraying African Americans as inferior and making them temporary measures that would only last for the duration of the war.

The war forced some shifts – albeit limited – in the widespread practice of racial segregation in the workplace. For example, Executive Order 8802, signed by President Roosevelt in June 1941, prohibited racial discrimination in all defense industries and established the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to enforce the order. However, despite these shifts, racism and subjugation against Japanese Americans and African Americans proliferated in the workforce. Focusing on wartime labor extraction emphasizes the ironies and contradictions of Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ labor being critical to sustain a country that discriminated against them. Moreover, this dynamic illustrates the state’s adaptability in maintaining the racial order by striking a balance between curtailing some rights and expanding others.

For Californians, World War II was “merely another chapter in a lengthy story of antagonism” against Japanese Americans in the workforce. Charles Kikuchi mused that the basis for anti-Japanese animus was primarily economic, noting, “Prejudice against the Japanese arose in large part from economic competition. The Japanese arose beyond the level of a ready available labor force to be exploited, whereas the Mexicans and Negroes in this state are still in a submerged status.” White workers and industry leaders viewed Japanese Americans as an existential threat, infiltrating the labor market and destabilizing white Americans’ economic hegemony. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Japanese workers tried to gain entry into a variety of industries – such as logging, mining, fishing, and railroad work – to many white labor unions’ outrage. Many unions believed Japanese workers were strikebreakers, like the earlier generation of Chinese laborers. By 1905, delegates representing more than 67 labor organizations convened in San Francisco to create the anti-immigration Asiatic Exclusion League.

White anxiety over economic competition resulted in employment discrimination against Japanese Americans. Many Japanese Americans were unable to find stable jobs, let alone lucrative positions. During his life, Charles Kikuchi worked a variety of low-wage, menial jobs, such as serving as a janitor at a Japanese beer parlor, a clerk at an art-store, a fish scaler, a window cleaner, a peach picker, a migrant farm worker, and a factory worker. By 1940, only 5 percent of Nisei worked for white employers in Los Angeles. The other 95 percent were either self-employed or were employed by other Japanese Americans. Japanese Americans were wholly barred from working in civil service jobs. As Matthew M. Briones notes, although Los Angeles’ Japanese American

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54 Briones, *Jim and Jap Crow*, 42.
population exceeded 30,000 people, on the eve of World War II, the city did not employ a single
Japanese American “fireman, policeman, mailman, or public school teacher.”\textsuperscript{55}

Locked out of working in white-owned businesses, Japanese Americans developed internal,
“ethnic economies.”\textsuperscript{56} In the Central Valley and Southern California, many Japanese American
laborers had saved enough money to purchase or lease land to cultivate crops, such as vegetables,
berries, and flowers. They contributed to the network of growing and distributing produce and other
agricultural products in California. Participation in agriculture was so high that 20 percent of all
Japanese Americans in Los Angeles worked at Japanese-owned and operated fruit stands.\textsuperscript{57} In urban
areas across the state, Japanese Americans owned small businesses concentrated in Japantowns.

Given this history of economic competition and workplace discrimination, some Japanese
Americans questioned the government’s rationale for internment, hypothesizing that internment was
an opportunistic step taken to strip Japanese Americans of their property and businesses to
neutralize a perceived threat to white economic interests. Kikuchi, typically cynical and probing in
his assessment of the underlying motivations for many government policies, argued that internment
was motivated by self-interested economic concerns and racial prejudice: “Many citizens, in the
name of loyalty, are using the present war as a weapon to shove all Japs out while they have a
theoretical legal chance. If we examine the motives behind many of the individual acts, I am sure
that we will find personal and selfish reasons why they want the Nisei property to be confiscated and
business competition eliminated.”\textsuperscript{58}

This was precisely the case. Many anti-Asian nativist organizations in California – such as the
California Joint immigration Committee, American Legion, and the Native Sons and Daughters of

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{56} Malcolm Collier, “Ethnic Economies,” last modified 2012,
\textsuperscript{57} Briones, \textit{Jim and Jap Crow}, 36.
\textsuperscript{58} Kikuchi to Adamic, February 21, 1942, 2 (LAP, box 59, folder 7, “Japanese” Subject File), quoted in ibid., 53.
the Golden West – had been advocating for policies that excluded Japanese immigrants and their descendants from the workforce for decades. Pearl Harbor provided a new justification for such policies and lent a new level of urgency to nativist organizations’ work. “This is our time to get things done that we have been trying to get done for a quarter of a century,” a member of the California Joint immigration Committee exclaimed. The managing secretary of the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California underscored that the anxiety over Japanese economic competition was based in a more existential fear: “We’re charged with getting rid of the Japs for selfish reasons. We might as well be honest. We do. It’s a question of whether the white man lives on the Pacific Coast or the brown man.” 59 Japanese Americans’ removal represented a way for white Americans to assert their economic dominance in the western economy, thereby reinforcing their own Americanness and first-class citizenship within the frameworks outlined by Harris and Welke.

The government’s treatment of people of Japanese descent in Hawai’i (then a U.S. territory) completely contradicted all the justifications for internment based on military necessity and concern for national security. Executive Order 9066 was not implemented in Hawai’i, and only a small number of people considered dangerous or troublesome were detained or evacuated, since the workforce in Hawai’i was comprised of a majority of Japanese people. Briones incisively highlights the hypocrisy of this policy: “[I]n a bald-faced, hypocritical policy exception … the government bowed to its elites in the tropics and exempted Hawai’ians of Japanese descent from evacuation, allowing the uninterrupted production of profitable crops on island plantations. Despite the Japanese having attacked naval assets in Hawai’i, authorities saw no need to rearrange the economic priorities of the American empire in that part of the Pacific.” 60 If the Japanese workforce in Hawai’i had been incarcerated, the island’s economy would have crashed. Japanese labor was crucial to the

59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 51.
production of many of Hawai‘i’s most profitable exports, such as sugar, pineapple, and coffee. Incarcerating the group would have jeopardized over $100 million worth of exports.\textsuperscript{61} The differential treatment of people of Japanese descent in Hawai‘i was one of the most striking demonstrations of state’s flexibility, which enabled it to deploy different strategies in different contexts to maintain the status quo.

W. E. B. Du Bois argued that internment was a brazen, greedy, coordinated attempt to manipulate the nation’s workforce and consolidate economic power within white ownership: “The driving out of people of Japanese descent on the West Coast was not only the attempt to confiscate their savings without return, but to foment and prolong racial antagonism. The persons back of this wanted to keep serf Japanese labor in the Hawaiian islands and prevent the Japanese from working anywhere in the United States outside the West Coast.”\textsuperscript{62} Rather than appearing contradictory, the state’s different strategies to control people of Japanese descent on the mainland and in Hawai‘i seemed to align when Du Bois analyzed them through a lens of racial control.

Bolstering this perspective on internment, a key feature of the internment policy was exploiting incarcerated Japanese Americans’ labor to benefit the war effort at a drastically reduced cost. The WRA and WCD worked in earnest to locate sites where Japanese Americans could be isolated in self-sustaining concentration camps. Government administrators strategically selected the locations of the camps to maximize their productivity, with hopes of converting many of the desert locations into arable agricultural sites when Japanese Americans were eventually released. Ultimately, the government agencies settled on sites for the concentration camps in Arizona, Arkansas, eastern California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming, “for the most part on publicly owned land which has possibilities of development for agriculture and other enterprises.”\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Myer, “Democracy in Relocation,” 44.
Rather than being static holding centers, the concentration camps can more accurately be seen as work sites – akin to indentured servitude or penal labor – intentionally and strategically crafted to maximize the economic benefits for the state. When Japanese Americans arrived at the concentration camps, which were mainly located in remote areas with harsh, arid climates, camp administrators put them to work doing construction and other outdoor labor: “land subjugation, building irrigation laterals and canals, and so forth.” The WRA’s emphasis on agricultural production and other manufacturing work made clear that the internment policy was engineered with the federal government’s economic interests at the forefront. The state used Japanese Americans’ detention to gain control over a racialized group that, in the pre-war era, had worked primarily in independent ethnic economies. Subordinating Japanese Americans and sequestering them in isolated camps enabled the state to harness the labor of a sizable class of people.

The labor programs at concentration camps were very productive. In 1942, incarcerated Japanese Americans planted and harvested approximately 2,700 acres of crops. At the Gila River War Relocation Center in Arizona, where Kikuchi and his family were incarcerated, detainees were put to work “[tilling] and [cultivating] seven thousand ‘profitable’ acres of crops through a vast, labor-intensive agricultural program.” At Gila, several hundred Japanese Americans commuted to the cotton fields every day to pick long-staple cotton, creating an unsettling, if perhaps unwitting, parallel to enslaved Black people’s forced cotton harvesting in the antebellum South, which was enabled by their systematic dehumanization. WRA director Dillon S. Myer noted, “Before the close of the production season in 1943, it seems likely that the relocation centers will produce all their

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65 Briones, Jim and Jap Crow, 139. Notably, this camp was built on the Gila River Indian Community, the sacred land of the Pima and Maricopa tribes, without permission from the reservation. Milton Eisenhower did not ask permission because he did not want the camp to be under the administrative purview of the Office of Indian Affairs, and he envisioned the camp ultimately being a source of lucrative agricultural production. Instead, the Office of Indian Affairs gave the WRA a five-year lease on 16,500 acres of tribal land.
own vegetables, all their eggs and poultry, and about half their meat requirements, largely in the form of pork and pork products.” He added, “This, of course, will help reduce the public expense of operating the relocation centers.”

The work done at concentration camps went beyond subsistence farming, and detainees’ labor greatly benefited the national economy. Incarcerated Japanese Americans worked to grow and harvest sugar beets, tomatoes, potatoes, beans, apples, cotton, and other crops for national consumption. Additionally, at Gila, two camp factories “completed projects for the military: one made camouflage nets and the other, model warships; the latter produced eight hundred models for the U.S. navy.” Some incarcerated Japanese Americans were even contracted out to work on offsite work projects that were in need of more laborers. When local farm workers left their homes to enlist in the military or join the defense industries, they left behind crops in need of tending and harvesting. This labor shortage was exacerbated by an inadequate flow of migrants to make up for the farmers who left. To fill in the gaps during the 1942 harvest season, “nearly 10,000 evacuees from ten relocation centers voluntarily assisted in saving thousands of acres of sugar beets. Among them were hundreds of workers who had never done farm work before – former office clerks and salesmen, mechanics and technicians, students, and even housewives.” During the 1943 harvest season, Japanese American farm workers traveled across the United States – extending as far as Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio – to produce a variety of products, including poultry, milk, corn, wheat, and other grains. The state used the camps’ work projects to strip Japanese Americans of their economic independence. Incarceration was a useful framework to

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67 Ibid., 46.
68 Briones, Jim and Jap Crow, 139.
69 Alan Cranston, “Friendship Through Food – Food Follows Our Flag,” Common Ground, Spring 1944, 75.
70 It is interesting to note that Japanese Americans’ physical mobility became acceptable when they were working as a detainee work corps. This shift suggests that subordination and coercion helped reshape Japanese Americans’ racial designation, or at least lessened the threat of having “enemy aliens” move around the interior of the country.
control and redirect Japanese Americans’ labor, since it forced detainees to submit to the camp administrators’ orders. Subdued through an inmate-guard relationship to the state, Japanese American laborers were finally seen as valuable to the economy.

In a May 15, 1942, diary entry, Kikuchi noted the exploitative nature of the labor configuration at the camps: “The thing that I have feared is going to happen. The WCCA and WRA announced today that thousands of Japanese would be granted special furloughs to help bring in America’s food crop … Japanese will be enlisted in a day or so to go to Eastern Oregon to harvest the sugar beet crop … This is nothing more than a work corps. What about resettlement?” As Kikuchi’s commentary suggests, the government’s emphasis on labor extraction prioritized the nation’s wartime interests over Japanese Americans’ wellbeing and resettlement opportunities. The state only seemed to value Japanese Americans when they were compelled to do work that suited the government’s economic needs. In the end, the Japanese American workers’ production was staggering: their efforts resulted in a yield of nearly one million tons of sugar beets, which provided approximately 297 million pounds of refined sugar for consumption in the United States.

Despite Japanese American workers’ misgivings about their exploitation, some white commentators, like Carey McWilliams, saw advantages to the government compelling its inmates to work. “[T]he WRA has a real opportunity,” McWilliams wrote. “It should provide not merely routine or commonplace jobs but devise a unique type of work for the Japanese – something that will enable the evacuees to make a special contribution to the war effort.” In this way, camp administrators and outside commentators simultaneously reified Japanese Americans’ difference from other Americans, while also signaling that they had an opportunity to shift their racial

72 Cranston, “Food Follows Our Flag,” 75.
73 McWilliams, “Japanese Evacuation,” 68.
designation through their forced labor. It is not coincidental that, in a nation built in part on enslavement, labor – and the degree of freedom associated with one’s labor – was a key site of racial formation. Japanese Americans’ racial identity was linked to foreignness and disloyalty, and the state identified labor as a tool to prove their loyalty and allegiance to the United States. In light of the revocation of their citizenship through internment, Japanese Americans were expected and encouraged to perform labor as a way to reassert their Americanness and demonstrate their commitment to serving the nation during the war.

African Americans also experienced significant economic exploitation and shifting forms of discrimination in the workforce during World War II. Despite the increased demand for labor, the southern workforce remained stubbornly and rigidly segregated. Many of the wartime shipbuilding and aircraft production industries operating in the South refused to hire African American workers or blocked them from being promoted to more lucrative skilled positions. If Black workers were able to gain employment, they were often barred from vocational training programs that were only available to white workers. In its final report published after the war ended, the FEPC concluded that “very little progress in upgrading Negroes were made in the Southern and Gulf yards. With few exceptions, the yards south of Virginia utilized Negroes in a limited number of occupations, most of which were unskilled.”74 African American southerners were excluded from reaping the benefits of shipyard employment as part of maintaining the racial order in the South.

Even when a few African Americans were able to gain entry into the southern defense industries, they experienced extreme hostility that made few of them stay in those occupations. The southern defense industries were plagued by racial violence. In May 1943, riots broke out in Mobile, Alabama, at the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Corporation after federal authorities ordered

the shipyard to integrate. According to one Black worker at the plant, “A lot of the colored workers got beat up, and I was afraid to go back to the yard. … White men rode around … [and] threw rocks at our houses.” White workers took extreme steps to preserve the pre-war southern racial order, and these violent measures influenced African American workers’ migration out of the South. Immediately following the riots in Mobile, the quoted worker and a group of other Black workers left to go to Richmond, California, to try to find better employment opportunities out West.

Without any clear opportunities for upward mobility in the South, some African Americans gambled on encountering different circumstances on the West Coast. According to the FEPC’s final report, in contrast to the southern shipyards, “the employment policies of the Maritime yards in the Northeast and on the West Coast were sufficiently flexible to permit a considerable utilization of nonwhites in a wide variety of skills.” This flexibility, indicative of the state’s decentered nature, was part of a strategy to harness the products of African Americans’ labor without resulting in long-term social progress for African Americans.

Katherine Archibald vividly portrayed the defense industry as growing and operating on a grand scale, whose need for a workforce was seemingly boundless. She wrote, “For months after December 7, 1941, the shipyards of the West Coast were ravenous for men, and they used effective propaganda to lure workers from all corners of the land. … [T]he shipyards absorbed them all. Color, age, sex, soundness of limb did not matter; whoever could walk or lift a welder’s stinger was welcomed.” At the peak of wartime employment, 20 percent of the personnel at the Moore Dry Dock were African American. About 80 percent of those workers were estimated to be from South.

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78 Ibid., 60.
While the employment possibilities of the western shipyards seemed remarkable, some workers were skeptical of the wartime boom’s long-term impact on African Americans’ economic prosperity. Louis Campbell, an African American Bay Area resident who lived in the region before the war began, wrote an article in the California Voice, an Oakland-based Black newspaper, in which he “urged black men to ‘look before they leaped’ warning that when the war was over, they would be ‘cast adrift in the army of the unemployed.’”79 Campbell feared that this employment boom was temporary, and that once the rapacious demands of the wartime defense industry receded, Black workers would likely be the ones to suffer most harshly from the cutbacks, harkening back to the adage of “last hired, first fired.” Campbell’s fear was rooted in a recognition of the state’s adaptability and the likelihood that the racial order would shift form again in the post-war era.

Although the fear of future unemployment might have loomed in the back of Black workers’ minds, the demands of the war shifted the West Coast’s pre-war social and workplace norms in ways both large and small. The shipyards brought together people from vastly different backgrounds and social positions who “ordinarily were separated by geographical and social barriers” and put them to work together.80 This was a disorienting shift for white migrants who came from regions where segregation was customary in all sectors of public life. As Archibald noted, for many white workers who came to the West Coast, “Most, if not all, of these people had never used the same toilet facilities or eaten at the same tables or sat in the same streetcar seats with a Negro until they migrated to the shipyards.” However, Archibald reported that these white workers “accepted it without open revolt.”81

This unity was not indicative of a sudden about-face or a decrease in racist attitudes. Many parts of Black society had been pushing for economic advancement during the early to mid-

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80 Archibald, Wartime Shipyard, 3.
81 Ibid., 94.
twentieth century through projects like the March on Washington Movement of the 1940s, organized by A. Philip Randolph. Militant African American activism that called for desegregation put pressure on the racial order and earned some concessions from the state, such as the creation of the FEPC in 1941. Black resistance led to some shifts in their position in the workforce. However, Archibald credited the social unity of integrated shipyards to a more practical answer: “Ships had to be built.” 82 The workers were drawn together not by affinity, but by the reality of the war and the desire to win it. “The only bond that held together” the workforce, Archibald argued, “was the chance and temporary pressure of a wartime need.” 83

Before the U.S. entered World War II, Bay Area unions were the main driving force behind Black workers’ exclusion in the region’s shipyards. The region’s shipbuilding industry was “dominated by closed-shop agreements,” which meant that union membership was a requirement of employment at many shipyards, such as Oakland’s Moore Dry Dock. 84 Only two of the major unions at Moore’s shipyard (the C.I.O Machinists’ Union and the A. F. of L. Laborers’ Union) welcomed Black members fully without resistance. The other unions only changed their policies once management and government policies made it clear that the only other choice was to lose the shipyards’ closed-shop status. Some, like the Boilermakers’ Union – whose local 513 chapter was the largest trade in the Contra Costa and Alameda County region, with 38,000 members – had no Black members before the war. Rather than integrating the union, the union created a segregated auxiliary unit in response to Black workers’ demands at the Kaiser shipyard, the “shameful” Auxiliary Unit A-36, which granted “separate-and-unequal” membership to Black workers. 85 Archibald noted that,

82 Ibid., 2.
83 Ibid., 1-2. Emphasis added.
84 Ibid., 130.
when these unions did open membership opportunities to African Americans, they “usually did so with reservations calculated to hasten a return to exclusiveness when the demands of war should slacken.” The unions’ changes in policy represented begrudging accommodations to the wartime racial order. Many unions attempted to make the changes temporary in an effort to re-establish the previous racial order as soon as possible.

Given the tensions surrounding union membership at the shipyards, a key priority for the federal government was ensuring that any disagreements between management and union membership did not result in work stoppages that would negatively impact the war effort. Shipbuilding and other defense industries were governed by the National War Labor Board (NWLB), a federal agency President Roosevelt established through Executive Order 9017 in early 1942. The purpose of the NWLB was to resolve wartime labor-management disputes. Similarly, shipyard leaders came together to formulate policies that would ensure that production continued in the face of all the federal policy changes and demographic shifts in the workforce. Kaiser and other shipyard employers met with the unions to form the Shipbuilding Stabilization Committee.

Together, the committee developed “an eight-point agreement designed to increase production, control migration, and smooth labor relations.” The various state agencies made it clear that these new policies and organizations were not the start of a new social order, but rather, an adjustment of the norms for the duration of the war, in service of winning the war. For the war effort, there needed to be a “subordination of cherished localisms to larger social unities,” and a major part of this was lifting restrictions on union membership and workplace segregation.

Despite the tangible and symbolic changes in shipyards’ policies, anti-Black discrimination and hostility still pervaded nearly every aspect of the workforce, from individual interactions

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between white and Black workers to systematic policies. The inclusion of African American workers in the western shipbuilding industry caused extreme stress to the white laborers and managers. White workers and industry leaders feared that Black workers would overtake and dominate white Americans in every sense:

The Negro, shipyard workers were acutely conscious, was not content in his place. He was relentlessly pushing upward, and it was the obvious burden of shipyard fear that he might not be satisfied with standing at the white man’s side, but would push farther still to dominate his dominators. Southerners had especially dire predictions to make. The Negroes, they warned, would come in ever greater numbers to the lenient West; even after the war they would keep swarming to its cities to settle. They would crowd the white man from his homes, neighborhoods, places of social gathering and entertainment. “It’s the niggers who are taking over California,” an Okie remarked. “Pretty soon a white man in this state won’t stand a chance.”

The integration of the defense industry seemed to represent an existential crisis for anxious white workers and management. White workers’ fears manifested in their day-to-day interactions with the Black colleagues. Many white workers individually protested and expressed disapproval with Black workers’ presence. Unable to re-establish the segregated racial order of the pre-war era, many white workers resorted to asserting their racial superiority by denigrating Black workers. According to Katherine Archibald, white shipyard workers complained incessantly about their Black coworkers, emphasizing their supposedly ingrained laziness, unintelligence, criminality, and moral and cultural deficiency: “The inferiority of the black man, as the white shipyard worker conceived it, was all-pervasive and a fit subject for infinite argument and example. After the scorching wind of prejudice had passed by, the Negro was desiccated of every gift of nature.” White workers attempted to designate African Americans as inferior in order to secure their place atop the racial hierarchy in an integrated workforce.

89 This rhetoric of existential crisis closely mirrored that of the managing secretary of the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California. Ibid., 75.
90 Ibid., 71.
91 Ibid., 66.
In the face of racial integration, occupational segregation and discrimination did not totally dissipate but instead took on different forms. Marginalized groups, such as women and people of color, were allowed into new fields for the duration of the war, but they were still slotted into jobs and tasks that aligned with the stereotypes and preconceived notions about each group’s skills. For example, African American workers – believed by shipyard employers to be best suited for strenuous physical labor due to the stereotype of the Black brute – were often relegated to the hull trades, which required workers to do grueling labor outdoors, year-round. Black workers at the Moore Dry Dock mainly did menial labor, such as custodial and maintenance work, rigging, and welding.\(^\text{92}\) By contrast, Chinese Americans often were hired to electrical work because they were believed to be better suited for more detail-oriented, less physically demanding labor.\(^\text{93}\) This internal reorganization of the shipyards demonstrated state’s flexibility in terms of incorporating previously excluded groups into the workforce, while also maintaining an internal hierarchy that perpetuated the prevailing social order by reinforcing deeply ingrained logics about racial identity.

For both Japanese Americans and African Americans, World War II dramatically changed their relationship to the national economy and their place in the workforce. Historically, Japanese Americans and African Americans had been targets of extreme resentment, anxiety, and consequent exclusion in the western and southern labor markets, respectively. During the war, different elements of the state apparatus dislocated both groups from their previous positions in the economy and redirected their labor to serve the war effort. For Japanese Americans in concentration camps, internment destroyed their pre-war ethnic economies and led to their subsequent absorption into the national economy. For African Americans, working in the West Coast defense industries provided new opportunities to work in integrated environments and granted them an unprecedented degree

\(^{92}\) Ibid., 60-61.

of recognition for their role in serving the national economy. However, their economic advancement was coupled with extreme hostility from their white colleagues and supervisors. Despite the rhetoric of inclusion, the wartime shipyards upheld old modes of exclusion and only begrudgingly lifted some restrictions, which signaled that the expanded opportunities were temporary and would contract after the war's end. Both the case of Japanese Americans and the case of African Americans reveals the endurance of the state in maintaining the racial order and its adaptability under pressure.

World War II required the state to carefully recalibrate its deeply embedded legal and social structures in order to maintain continuity in the face of enormous societal changes. To construct and reproduce Japanese Americans’ wartime designation as enemy aliens, the federal government expanded and intensified its control over Japanese Americans’ movement and labor, drawing on the long history of immigration exclusion, alien land laws, and urban spatial segregation to shape the emergent internment policy. For African Americans, the government strategically eased some of political and economic barriers, but various state agencies also extended and expanded anti-Black policies to the West Coast. This environment ensured that, despite some wartime accommodations, African Americans were still largely consigned to and trapped at the bottom of the West Coast’s social, political, and economic hierarchies. The state refined the tactics it used to regulate racialized groups’ citizenship during the war, underscoring the state’s entrenched commitment to sustaining a racial hierarchy. The state reoriented both Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ relationships to property ownership, physical mobility, and the national economy in order to redefine and limit their citizenship and belonging.
Chapter II

“Colored folks has got to stick together”: World War II and the Emergence of Afro-Asian Connections

One afternoon in the winter of 1942, Charles Kikuchi was walking around the Gila River War Relocation Center where he was incarcerated. While he was out, he stopped to talk to a young Black worker who was digging post holes to put up the fence around the camp. In his diary, Kikuchi recounted that the worker asked him about Japanese Americans’ loyalty and was disappointed when Kikuchi explained that most Nisei were pro-American. The worker responded, “Boy, you are making a mistake. Why should you be loyal to a country that don’t want you?” He continued, “This is a white man's country and all the colored peoples of this world has got to change this so that I can get a good job just like a white man and I don’t have to dig post holes to lock you Japanese up who are born in California. You help this country out and they will turn around and give you a kick in the pants afterwards.”

1 Kikuchi gently countered the worker’s pessimistic perspective, expressing hope that Allied victory in the war would change the status quo for the better, but the worker dismissed him. “The white man don’t ever give you a chance. I should know that,” the worker retorted. In his diary, Kikuchi reflected on the interaction, pointing out the ironies and significance of his encounter with the Black worker: “Here I am, a person conceited enough to think that I am just as good an American as anybody, but I have to be put behind a fence dug by a black man who doesn’t even feel that this is his country … It just doesn’t make any sense.”

Kikuchi’s interaction with the Black worker at Gila illuminates many of the complex racial dynamics at play during World War II. The shifting norms of the war, such as the mass internal migrations of Japanese Americans and African Americans, created new opportunities for racialized


2 Kikuchi, diary entry, December 15, 1942, quoted in ibid.
people to interact and share their perspectives with one another. Kikuchi and the Black worker came into contact as a direct result of the war. Their communication highlights the similarities and differences in their outlooks on race relations in the United States based on their different experiences of racialization and state power. The conversation covered many salient issues: loyalty, interracial unity, the war’s role in affecting equality, and the nature of the relationship between Japanese Americans and African Americans. Talking to the Black worker clearly had an impact on Kikuchi, who seemed to internalize and mull over the worker’s perspective. This brief encounter was part of a broader trend during the war. Japanese Americans and African Americans began developing nascent forms of cross-racial identification and alliances with one another. These relationships provided forums for racialized groups to reconceptualize the state’s role in their oppression and generate strategies to push back against the established racial order.

According to Carey McWilliams, “[I]t was the war that set the racial revolution in motion.”

McWilliams was a prominent white liberal journalist, author, and politician from California whose work addressed the state’s many cultural and political issues, including migratory farm work and Japanese internment. Witnessing the many injustices of the war era radicalized him and sensitized him to the nation’s issues of racism and inequality. Like McWilliams, many people in the United States and around the world viewed the war through the lens of race, especially regarding the status and unity of the “darker peoples” of the world, Japan’s imperial ambitions, and Hitler’s oppression of European Jews in his quest to achieve Aryan supremacy and dominance. Questions about the relationship between race, citizenship, and democracy were at the forefront of ideological battles that accompanied fighting on battlefield across the globe.

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4 McWilliams went on to write Brothers Under the Skin, a treatise on the racism and oppression different communities of color have faced throughout U.S. history.
The primacy of these issues compelled many Americans to grapple with how these topics fit into their daily lives, but also with their ideas of the nation. The United States’ participation in a war to eradicate fascism abroad threw into stark relief the central contradiction of wartime domestic politics and practices that allowed for—and, indeed, relied on—the infringement of racialized groups’ citizenship rights. The state’s wartime efforts to restrict Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ belonging was clearly out of alignment with national leaders’ professed commitment to the values of democracy around the world. Increased scrutiny of the gap between the state’s rhetoric and its actions led to demands from racialized groups that the state live up to its ideals of democracy and freedom.

This chapter explores how Japanese Americans and African Americans responded to their state-sanctioned wartime oppression by forming alliances, developing a cross-racial identification and empathy with one another, and co-opting national discourses of democracy and Americanness. The redrawing of national “borders of belonging” that positioned both Japanese Americans and African Americans outside conventional definitions of “American citizens” led members of both communities to identify with the other’s plights. Wartime shifts in the definitions and experiences of citizenship caused these groups to reconceptualize their relationship to the state and to each other, since both groups experienced a profound sense of alienation from the nation.

Historians, social scientists, and Ethnic Studies scholars have researched the dynamics of Afro-Asian solidarity in the United States. However, much of the scholarship situates this phenomenon in the context of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly the Cold War-era Third Worldism movement and the domestic alliances such as “Yellow Peril Supports Black Power.” This chapter reveals collaboration and alliances that reach back much earlier, and I argue that World War II was a watershed moment in modern U.S. race relations because it marked a point at which these racialized groups began to identify and analyze the power the state and its
representatives had over their lives and their freedom. Theorizing a common root to their oppression allowed Japanese Americans and African Americans to look beyond the particularities of their experiences and see the same underlying structures, perpetrators, and motivations. Japanese Americans and African Americans centered their cross-racial identification on their shared experiences of exclusion. They attempted to identify and critique the flexible tactics used to elevate whiteness and privilege the rights and superiority of the dominant class at their expense.

These cross-racial relationships were significant because the state’s treatment of Japanese Americans and African Americans often took different forms based on the groups’ racial designations. Being designated as either an “enemy alien” or an “inferior American” resulted in different relationships to the state, based on the distinct tactics the state used to regulate various racialized groups’ property ownership, physical mobility, and economic participation. In many cases, Japanese Americans and African Americans recognized that their social positions and racial designations were both motivated by the state’s attempts to maintain control and establish a racial hierarchy. However, in some instances, the distinct expressions and impacts of state-sponsored racism obscured the commonalities in Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ experiences. These differences could sometimes lead to resentment, tension, and even antagonism between members of the two communities. Moreover, members of both groups had internalized some of the ideas the state promoted about the other group’s racial identity: Japanese Americans were not immune from harboring anti-Black attitudes, and African Americans were also susceptible to anti-Japanese beliefs. Such perspectives made people fear that working together would be a liability rather than a benefit.

Despite encountering some challenges to their incipient cross-racial identification, Japanese Americans and African Americans began to develop a potent framework for solidarity during the war. For these two racialized groups, the jarring shifts that occurred during World War II exposed
the state’s attempts to maintain a racial hierarchy. The state’s actions to restrict Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ citizenship during the war led to common experiences of disenfranchisement and exclusion, even though different tactics were used to accomplish this. In the wake of the wartime shifts, both groups began to identify parallels between their experiences of not belonging to the nation. Working together and looking at their situations in comparison to one another enabled Japanese Americans and African Americans to identify the depth and breadth of the state’s role in shaping and perpetuating the racial hierarchy. Identifying the state as a common oppressor and an arbiter of citizenship helped racialized groups formulate theories and tactics to push back against the state.

**Pre-War Connections**

Although World War II marked a turning point in the breadth and depth of interactions between Japanese Americans and African Americans, it was not the first time that these communities had engaged with one another or contemplated the nature of their relationship. Before the internal migrations of the war era, the relationship between Japanese Americans and African Americans was limited by their geographical distance from one another. In some instances, Japanese Americans and African Americans interacted with one another in shared urban communities as economic competitors. For example, in Seattle, Japanese Americans and African Americans were both positioned at the bottom of the social hierarchy, albeit for different reasons. According to western historian Quintard Taylor, Japanese immigrants were excluded because they “allegedly acted as clannish foreigners who resisted assimilation,” while African Americans were considered “unmotivated, uneducated workers.” Taylor explains that although “other Americans had specific rationalizations for ostracizing each group, African Americans and Japanese Americans experienced
strikingly similar treatment” in Seattle. Local customs and policies intended to maintain the white supremacist racial order prevented both groups from acquiring lucrative jobs or patronizing white-owned establishments, and the city’s spatial segregation policies confined the two racialized groups to ethnic enclaves.

Despite the similarities in their treatment, Japanese immigrants and African Americans were not naturally inclined to identify with one another because, at this point in time, immigration status – rather than race – was the defining marker of Japanese identity. As such, immigration was a central flashpoint issue that created tension and divergent goals between the communities. Immigrants from Japan were legally ineligible for citizenship, and this differentiated them from Blacks in the U.S., who were racialized as inferior, but Americans nonetheless. These differences in social position obscured the connections and overlaps in the state’s treatment of each group.

African American newspapers grappled with the issue of restrictions on Japanese immigration in the early twentieth century. Early coverage treaded a fine line between arguing that limiting Japanese immigration would benefit African Americans by reducing the pool of labor competition, while also acknowledging that much of the anti-Japanese rhetoric and laws – especially those being promoted by nativist politicians and organizations on the West Coast – was deeply racist and discriminatory against Asian immigrants and their American-born descendants. On April 19, 1924, the Chicago Defender published a cartoon that illustrated this precarious situation for African Americans. The image depicted a brick thrown by a California landowner – labeled “Land Shall Be Sold to Caucasians Only” – bouncing off a Japanese American and hitting an African American. The cartoon’s caption read, “Perhaps It Wasn't Intended for Us, But ______.”

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captured the complex situation and conflicted sentiments of many African Americans, who may have felt that limiting immigration from Japan and other countries would give African Americans an economic advantage, while also fearing that the rabid nativism and xenophobia of white immigration opponents could pose severe, unintended consequences for African Americans as well. Similarly, the same month that this cartoon was published in the *Chicago Defender*, the *Baltimore Afro-American* reported that it was crucial for the U.S. to place limits on immigration to maintain the country’s economic and political order. However, the newspaper argued that a full ban on Asian immigrants went beyond what restrictions were necessary and veered into hateful and discriminatory treatment against a marginalized population. According to the *Afro-American*, the ban on Asian immigrants “would keep Jesus Christ out of the United States today, should He return, just as effectively as the injustice [sic] towards Negroes is shutting Him out of the hearts of many white Americans.”

The *Chicago Defender* cartoon and the *Afro-American* article suggest that some Black community leaders already had a nascent understanding that the fates of the two groups were linked in significant ways.

As the Japanese American community established roots in the U.S., the state’s racialization of the group solidified. In particular, as the American-born Nisei came of age, it became increasingly evident that even assimilated Japanese Americans with legal citizenship rights were subsumed within the racial designation of untrustworthy, perpetual foreigners. War with Japan and the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans made people of Japanese descent the targets of revulsion, fear, and consternation from the government and civilians alike. In the pre-war era, anti-Japanese sentiment was racialized, but it was also fundamentally shaped by xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments. However, during the war, the government codified anti-Japanese sentiment in broad racial terms by categorizing all Japanese Americans as inherently disloyal and alien, regardless of

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7 *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 27, 1924, quoted in ibid., 96.
their immigration status, level of assimilation, or political affiliation. Japanese Americans, as the main social “problem” of society during the war years, came to inhabit a space that African Americans were accustomed to occupying by themselves. This shift created new points of connection between Japanese Americans and African Americans and facilitated their cross-racial identification during the war.

As analyzed in the first chapter, the federal government rapidly created and deployed an expansive legal framework after Pearl Harbor that curtailed Japanese Americans’ legal citizenship rights as well as their cultural belonging to the nation. Simultaneously, federal, local, and state governments took steps to staunch the flow of Black migration to the West and limit African Americans’ social and economic mobility. While many of the wartime anti-Black policies represented an expansion of pre-existing forms of control and racial formation, internment seemed to represent a new iteration of state power, whose apparent departure from previous modes of control shocked and concerned many civilians, including African American political leaders. The state’s ability to forcibly displace and incarcerate citizens on such a large scale demonstrated its flexibility and broad, decentered power to enact new policies and alter pre-existing policies to maintain a system of white supremacy that boosted white Americans’ power and sense of belonging. Recognition of the adaptability of federal power to assume authority over its citizens of color drove some Japanese Americans and African Americans to reconsider their own social positions as well as think about the broader implications of the policy and what it meant for racial identity in the United States.

**Cross-Racial Ideological Exchange**

Before and during the United States’ involvement in World War II, there was a sustained pattern of Japanese Americans and African Americans recognizing the similarities and differences between the two groups’ experiences with racism and learning from these perspectives. Japanese internment had a major impact on Japanese Americans’ understanding of their racial identity and
position in society. In the pre-war era, Japanese Americans – both the immigrant Issei and the American-born Nisei – experienced employment and housing discrimination, economic hardships, harassment, prejudice, and violence. However, despite the clear markings of second-class citizenship (and the more literal legal denial of citizenship for Japanese immigrants), many Japanese Americans hoped that by working hard and trying to assimilate into white American culture that they would gain acceptance and belonging. For many Issei, their status as immigrants clearly marked them as outsiders in a nation with a strong nativist presence. Many of the legal frameworks of exclusion – the ban on immigration from Japan, alien land laws, and the ban on naturalization – were targeted towards those born outside of the United States. As such, the Issei looked toward their American-born children, whose birthright citizenship could, in theory, enable them to gain access to the privileges and rights denied to Japanese immigrants. Yuji Ichioka, a preeminent scholar of Japanese American history and identity, writes that in the pre-war era, the Issei hoped that through an Americanized upbringing, the Nisei could serve as a “bridge of understanding” between their immigrant parents and white American society. Issei believed that learning English and assimilating to normative white American customs, while still developing a positive sense of their Japanese heritage, could enable Nisei to overcome the discrimination their parents faced. They hoped that these steps would prove the Nisei were worthy citizens and help them gain acceptance in the U.S., paving the way for future generations and overcoming the marginal status that their immigrant parents were unable to shed.

The federal government’s forced removal and mass incarceration of all people of Japanese descent – approximately 60 percent of who were U.S. citizens by birth – demonstrated the state’s homogenization and racialization of the Japanese American community. All Japanese Americans on

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the West Coast, regardless of immigration status or professed national loyalty, were condemned after Pearl Harbor; their ethnic identity was the defining factor that determined their treatment by the state. The government’s collective punishment of people of Japanese descent forced Japanese Americans, especially the assimilated Nisei, to reckon with their racial identity.

Japanese Americans contemplated and negotiated their shifting racialization and altered citizenship status by considering the racialization of other marginalized groups, including African Americans. Throughout American history, people of African descent have been marked as the most visible and persistently marginalized racial Other in the nation. On October 8, 1939, the *Los Angeles Japanese Daily News* published an editorial by Dr. Yasuo Sasaki that compared the experiences of Niseis and African Americans and analyzed the African American community’s responses to their racist treatment. Sasaki highlighted several African American figures known for being outspoken and politically engaged, such as assemblyman Augustus Hawkins, composer William Grant Still, and actor Clarence Muse. Sasaki argued that Japanese Americans should follow these leaders’ examples and become more politically engaged and militant.9 Similarly, in his June 7, 1942, diary entry, Charles Kikuchi recounted a statement Bill Sasagawa made during a panel discussion on Christian Niseis’ attitudes toward the U.S. government. In stark contrast to the speakers who suggested that pacifism and belief in Christianity were the solutions to Japanese Americans’ current problems, Sasagawa argued to the group of Nisei college students that the incarcerated Japanese American community should learn from African Americans’ experiences with racism and emulate their militant reactions to it. Kikuchi wrote, “[Sasagawa] said that the Negroes only get things because they fought for their

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rights and we should do the same.” He continued, “we should fight for what was ours and we would if we really felt like Americans and believed in the democratic principles.”¹⁰

While detained at the Tanforan Assembly Center, located at a racetrack south of San Francisco, some of the more socially conscious Japanese Americans were beginning to view their wartime incarceration in relation to African Americans’ longstanding experiences of abuse, neglect, and second-class citizenship in the U.S. In his speech, Sasagawa referenced an earlier historical precedent set during World War I and connected it to Japanese Americans’ present situation of intense persecution. Sasagawa argued that, like African Americans, Japanese Americans were being mistreated and that it was necessary to stand up and fight for their rights. He foregrounded the importance of self-advocacy and adherence to the democratic ideals that the state often promised but rarely granted to its citizens of color. In a later diary entry, Kikuchi showed that Japanese Americans’ careful attention to African Americans’ social position persisted throughout the period of internment. On October 25, 1943, Kikuchi proudly reported that his sister, Bette, was beginning to get “much more socially conscious now,” as she was “discussing [the Negro problem] in her social problems class. She bought a recent New Republic magazine because there was a very interesting section in it on the whole Negro situation.”¹¹ These examples suggest that for some Japanese Americans, looking to African Americans’ situation was a way to make sense of the confounding experience of racial discrimination and the revocation of citizenship they were in the midst of processing.

There was also a history of African Americans looking towards Japanese Americans for guidance in their quest to gain social acceptance. Before Pearl Harbor and the intensified nationwide vilification of Japanese Americans, some African Americans believed that Japanese Americans’

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modest successes provided a template that African Americans could adopt in order to elevate their social, political, and economic status. Although Japanese Americans experienced discrimination from white society, especially on the West Coast, some African American leaders observed that Japanese Americans had developed several key bulwarks that seemed to insulate them from some of the harshest forms of racism to which African Americans were subjected and helped them to advance economically while African Americans were locked in a permanent underclass. Booker T. Washington noted, “The Japanese race is a convincing example of the respect which the world gives to a race that can put brains and commercial activity into the development of the resources of a country.” The Japanese American community’s ability to operate self-sufficient businesses and community organizations appealed to African American leaders, who did not necessarily recognize or acknowledge the ways in which many Japanese Americans’ independent businesses and insular community organizations were products of the ghettoization and exclusion they faced.

Blacks who praised Japanese Americans were impressed by the community’s ability to conform to tenets of respectability politics, seemingly pulling themselves up by their bootstraps to develop businesses and community organizations. African American leaders and writers lauded Japanese Americans for their independence and work ethic. George S. Schuyler, a columnist for the Pittsburgh Courier, went as far as to call the Japanese Americans the “most industrious, thrifty and best behaved citizens in this country.” Other noted figures, like W. E. B. Du Bois and California Eagle publisher Charlotta Bass, echoed this sentiment and encouraged African Americans to model their behavior on that of Japanese Americans. African American leaders’ admiration for Japanese

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13 Several decades later, this type of rhetoric was mobilized against African Americans in the form of the model minority myth, which pitted East Asian Americans against African Americans. See Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013) for further analysis of this phenomenon.

Americans was based on the belief that Japanese Americans’ successes could serve as a catalyst to dismantle the prevailing social order that prioritized whiteness. James Weldon Johnson observed that Japanese Americans’ social and economic clout could topple white Americans’ monopoly on the nation’s social, political, and economic norms. Calling Japan “perhaps the greatest hope for the colored races of the world,” Johnson stated matter-of-factly that “if industry and thrift on the part of the Japanese farmers mean the end of the white race in California, well, let it end.” If Japanese Americans could hasten the demise of white supremacy, it seemed prudent for African Americans to align themselves with Japanese Americans and follow their lead.

In addition to the emphasis on Japanese Americans’ economic self-sufficiency and self-help in the U.S., some African Americans looked to Japan as a leader for global racial liberation. In the buildup to World War II, pro-Japanese discourses sometimes represented the nation’s imperial ambitions as a more benevolent campaign to lead people of color around the world. In the spring of 1942, Roi Ottley, an African American journalist, wrote in Common Ground, “When the Back-to-Africa movement collapsed, it left a residue of fierce race- and color-consciousness which has propelled many a Negro movement since. Stimulated as they were, many Negroes turned to Japan as the messianic race and the hope of the darker peoples of the world.” There was a widespread admiration for Japan among African Americans, who saw the East Asian nation as an ally in the fight against white supremacy in the United States. Grassroots campaigning done by several Asian men working in the economically depressed areas of the United States, including the Midwest and the sharecropping regions in Arkansas, helped to bolster this image of Japan. Naka Nakane, who came to the United States from Japan at the end of World War I, organized African Americans in the Detroit area in the early 1930s. Nakane’s activism made him a target of the U.S. Department of

Justice and government intelligence agencies, which believed he was a “mouthpiece for Japanese propaganda asserting that Japan would protect black Americans in their struggle against white supremacy.” U.S. authorities deported him in 1934.\(^1\)

One of Nakane’s colleagues, Ashima Takis, worked to recruit members of Chicago’s African American community to Nakane’s organization, the Pacific Movement of the Eastern World.\(^2\) In 1933, a federal informant reported that Takis gave a fiery speech to a Black crowd in St. Louis that addressed the injustice of their oppression and called them to action. “Negroes! You are too easy to be fooled by anybody and especially by white people,” Takis began. “White man pushes you ahead as cattle in any war and uses you as a shield, but when the spoils of the war are to be divided, white man is then in front and if any Negro raises only a finger of disapproval of white man’s actions, white man cuts off not only Negro’s finger, but whole hand! … Why should you respect the white man when the white man has nothing for you but a bloody whip.”\(^3\) Takis’ fierce rhetoric appealed to some African American midwesterners, like Burt Cornish, a Black elevator operator in St. Louis who reported that Takis was encouraging African Americans to immigrate to Japan, where they might find better paying jobs and social equality. Cornish was one of thousands of African Americans in St. Louis who joined the pro-Japan movement.\(^4\) The appeal of figures like Takis and Nakane suggests that some African Americans looked to Japan as an example of a powerful, independent, non-white nation that could help African Americans achieve their goals of racial justice at home in the United States.

\(^{17}\) Kenneth C. Barnes, “Inspiration from the East: Black Arkansans Look to Japan,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (2010), 205-206.
\(^{18}\) Interestingly, Ashima Takis was not actually of Japanese descent. His given name was Policarpio Manansala, and he was a Filipino man who assumed this false identity during his work organizing African Americans in Chicago.
\(^{19}\) Barnes, “Inspiration from the East,” 207.
\(^{20}\) Burt Cornish’s recollections about Takis were included in a lengthy article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 6, 1942. Ibid.
In his *Common Ground* article, Roi Ottley clarified that, although African Americans had developed close bonds with Japanese Americans and felt an affinity with Japan, many African Americans were somewhat critical of Japan and did not fully agree with the nation’s actions. Ottley explained that African Americans “to a man are outraged by the treacherous assault upon their country” following Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor, and he pushed back against the notion that African Americans felt allegiance with Japan as a result of “having digested Japanese propaganda whole cloth.” African Americans, he argued, were critical and conscious observers who were sympathetic to Japanese rhetoric “because the ‘yellow Aryans’ drew no color line.”

Ottley’s perspective balanced the many different outlooks of African American leaders and thinkers. He reasoned that African Americans who felt common cause with Japanese Americans or supported Japan did so because the United States took actions and implemented policies that harmed them. Betrayed by their own country, African Americans looked to other sources to seek their freedom and try to obtain the rights and privileges of full citizenship.

Some Japanese Americans and African Americans developed relationships and friendships prior to any affinities inspired by the war. These pre-existing relationships between individuals cultivated a sense of empathy and mutual care that made people personally invested in achieving equity and justice for all. While many communities were racially segregated in disparate neighborhoods and regions of the country before the war, there is a documented pattern of Japanese Americans and African Americans coming together in urban centers on the West Coast, particularly in Southern California and Seattle, Washington. Charles Kikuchi, who vocally advocated for the rights of African Americans and other people of color, was raised in a multiracial orphanage in Healdsburg, California, an experience which shaped his outlook on race relations going forward.

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Matthew M. Briones writes that Kikuchi “created a surrogate family of his own” at the orphanage, explaining that Kikuchi had “‘brothers’ who were African American, Native American, Mexican, Chinese, and white.” Briones argues that this formative experience sensitized Kikuchi to the experiences and needs of people different from him: “Kikuchi was earnestly hypersensitive to the predicament of those most severely abused and violated in the proverbial American family: minorities in general, but African Americans in particular.” The personal relationships Kikuchi cultivated while at the orphanage gave him a personal connection to and investment in the wellbeing of those he considered to be part of his extended family.

**The Slippery Slope of Internment**

Government officials’ decision to displace and incarcerate Japanese Americans set a powerful legal and social precedent for state-sponsored racial discrimination by treating Japanese Americans as foreigners. The state’s ability to strip American citizens and residents of their citizenship and national belonging signaled to African Americans that, under the right circumstances, authority figures might be able to craft a justification for denationalizing them, too. As for Japanese Americans, internment shockingly indicated their status as outsiders and second-class citizens. The undeniable currents of racial hostility that undergirded internment forged a new racial consciousness among Japanese Americans, who began to more vocally and intentionally connect their experiences of oppression to African Americans’ parallel experiences. Likewise, for some incarcerated Japanese Americans, the pain of internment allowed them to empathize with African Americans’ long history of exclusion and alienation from the nation. Japanese Americans and African Americans were keenly aware of the shifting policies and attitudes of the state during the war, and they recognized and drew attention to the ways in which many disparate institutions

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23 Ibid., 22.
worked together to serve the common goal of maintaining power structures which subordinated both groups.

Many African Americans found the ease and speed with which the state erected the legal framework for Japanese internment alarming. Leading Black writers predicted that the precedent set could have broad implications that impacted other racialized groups. Writing in the midst of Japanese Americans’ forced removal from the West Coast, George S. Schuyler warned his Black readers that the incarceration of Japanese Americans “may be a prelude to our own fate. Who knows?” Likewise, in June 1942, the Post War World Council, composed of many different activist organizations, met in New York to discuss internment and strategize the best way to respond to the policy. During the meeting, Mike Masaoka, of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), appealed to the other activist organizations assembled by emphasizing the potential for internment to have wide-ranging, devastating consequences. Records of the meeting note that Masaoka “pointed out that, if this can be done to Japanese citizens, no one could tell what group might be affected next.” Schuyler and Masaoka suggested that Japanese internment represented a slippery slope that could portend further revocation of rights for people of color.

Black political thinkers also worried that the legal framework set forth to justify internment could be used directly to target African Americans, since measures like Executive Order 9066 targeted people of Japanese descent without explicitly referring to their race. Such policies established a framework that could be adapted to use against other racialized groups. In April 1942, Roy Wilkins, a civil rights activist and journalist who would go on to serve as the executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1964, wrote an

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article in the *New York Amsterdam Star-News* that detailed his uneasiness about the swiftness and severity of the ongoing forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans. He wrote, “[T]he steps which have been taken to move thousands of Japanese American citizens from their homes into virtual concentration camps do not reassure thoughtful Americans who love this democratic ideal of ours above all else.” He then floated the possibility that “internment for Japanese now [could mean] internment for African Americans later.” The piece closed with Wilkins’ genuine distress about the ease with Japanese Americans had been stripped of their rights and citizenship: “Does it mean anything to be an American citizen?”

Matthew M. Briones suggests that Wilkins may have been somewhat sarcastic about the likelihood of Black internment; however, figures like Schuyler also considered this to be a plausible outcome. In his “Views and Reviews” column, Schuyler fiercely critiqued Japanese internment, characterizing it as a push by “viciously reactionary elements to take away the citizenship of native-born citizens of Japanese ancestry.” Schuyler dismissed official claims that Japanese internment had been a military necessity, arguing it was a calculated step to “take away the citizenship of native-born Americans simply because of ‘race.’”

His comments alerted readers to the possible ways in which racially discriminatory revocations of citizenship could be applied to African Americans. Schuyler pointed out that the Native Sons of the Golden West, a xenophobic nativist group based in California, had suggested that African Americans be stripped of their citizenship in addition to Japanese Americans. Introducing another parallel between the experiences of Japanese Americans and African Americans, Schuyler noted, “There has been talk of sending these citizens ‘back’ to Japan (where most of them have never been) after the war. This is exactly what Senator Bilbo has been contending for the Afro-American citizens. We should get out of our heads immediately the

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idea that this program cannot and will not be carried out.”

Here, Schuyler alluded to Senator Theodore Bilbo, a staunch segregationist from Mississippi, who was intrigued by the “Back to Africa” movement of the 1930s because he saw it as a method to maintain racial segregation. During a filibuster of a proposed anti-lynching bill in 1938, Bilbo suggested the mass “deportation or repatriation” of the United States’ entire African American population to Liberia.29 Several weeks later, Bilbo announced that he would propose an amendment to the next New Deal public works appropriations bill that would implement a deportation/repatriation policy for African Americans.30

Schuyler’s concern stemmed from the fact that African Americans were beginning to be considered a “nuisance and a social liability by many influential white people and organizations.” The characterization of African Americans as national burdens or threats could be possible grounds to “denationalize millions of Afro-American citizens” because such depictions categorized Blacks as un-American and even anti-American. Japanese internment relied in part on characterizing Japanese Americans as subversive, foreign elements who were not contributing to the overall national economy, which served as a justification for their expulsion from the West Coast.31 Because of the risk of segregationists using Japanese internment as a gateway to enact other policies of racial discrimination, Schuyler concluded that it was prudent for African Americans to fight against internment and other forms of anti-Japanese racism.

**Burgeoning Cross-Racial Relationships and Empathy**

The concerns expressed by Schuyler, Masaoka, and Wilkins revealed that some community leaders felt that there was an intrinsic cause for unity between Japanese Americans and African

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28 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
Americans by virtue of both being non-white. The racial meanings and social positions ascribed to different racialized groups changed over time, but the emphasis on people’s physical appearances anchored the racial order in something that seemed tangible and immutable. Japanese American or African American racial identity could be associated with many different things based on the social context, but people’s external features were used as a shorthand to indicate their relative social position: white or non-white. The state rigidly segmented and categorized racial groups according to physical features, but in reality, people were not so easily confined to these boxes. This perspective was poignantly captured in the writings of leading African American writers like Langston Hughes and Chester Himes, both of whom used the subtle spectrum of skin color to express a sense of familiarity between their racial identity and Japanese Americans’.

Hughes, writing in the *Chicago Defender*, evocatively argued that all racialized groups shared a linked fate because of their similar status as oppressed groups: “From the saffron-skinned Japanese-American citizens of Los Angeles to brown-skinned Mexican-American citizens is only a step … From the brown Mexicans to the vari-colored Negroes is only a step, too … Logically speaking, color has nothing to do with citizenship or democracy. But prejudice and the mob-spirit pay logic no mind.”32 Hughes argued that, although racial groups are rigidly defined and demarcated in name – placing Japanese Americans, Mexican Americans, and African Americans into different siloes – their skin colors reveal their fundamental similarities and unities. Hughes emphasized that there was very little that separated the situations of Japanese Americans, Mexican Americans, and African Americans. As such, he reiterated the importance of sticking together. Likewise, in Chester Himes’ seminal novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, the protagonist Bob Jones comments, “I was the same color

as the Japanese and I couldn’t tell the difference. ‘A yeller bellied Jap’ coulda meant me too.” With this declaration, Himes, like Hughes, blurred the line between the experiences of Japanese Americans and African Americans, demonstrating the fragility and permeability of the borders that distinguished the two groups. Hughes and Himes pointed to the malleability of state-sponsored racial oppression and the state’s shifting targets for racism and discrimination. This recognition enabled African Americans to foster an emotional, personal connection to the plight of Japanese Americans.

When the WCCA and WRA ordered Japanese Americans to go to temporary detention facilities and concentration camps, African Americans came out to demonstrate their support and extend a helping hand to their friends and acquaintances. Quintard Taylor describes an incident in Seattle, in which an unnamed African American man drove a Japanese American family to the train they would take to go to a detention center. The man assisted the family with their luggage and waited with them as they boarded the train. Thomas Bodine, a Society of Friends interpreter, witnessed the interaction and recalled that the African American man said to the Japanese American woman, “You know that if there’s ever anything I can do for you whether it be something big or something small, I’m here to do it.” Turning to the woman’s husband, he continued, “Goodbye now and good luck.” Before the family left on the train, the Black man got on his knees and hugged the Japanese American couple’s three children. This touching display of friendship, support, and connection between Japanese Americans and African Americans was echoed in the writing of Himes, who also referenced his personal connection to an incarcerated Japanese American family in *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. Himes moved into the same house that Mary Oyama, the Nisei woman from Los Angeles mentioned in the first chapter, was so worried about losing during the internment

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order. In a pseudonymous account, the protagonist in Himes’ novel laments the internment of his former neighbor, “Little Riki Oyana,” a character whose inspiration was drawn from one of Mary Oyama’s sons, Rickey.\textsuperscript{35}

In his book *New World A-Coming*, Roi Ottley also commented on the amicable friendships between Japanese Americans and African Americans and noted African Americans’ neighborly response to Japanese Americans in the wake of internment. Ottley wrote, “A friend of mine who visited the main evacuation center in Los Angeles frankly reports that he was amazed to see that almost a fourth of the visitors were Negroes.”\textsuperscript{36} In his diary, Kikuchi recorded a similar impression of the African American community’s strong presence while he was incarcerated at the Tanforan racetrack. In a June 14, 1942, entry, Kikuchi observed that there were many African American visitors: “This afternoon we went up to the grandstands to look at the visitors. … The Negroes are coming down here in increasing numbers.” Kikuchi noted that some prominent African American figures – like Peter Ray, a “dancer who used to perform with Duke Ellington’s band,” and Walt Gordon, Jr., a football player at U.C. Berkeley – came to visit some of their detained friends.\textsuperscript{37} Kikuchi also wrote about his friend, Melvin Stewart, who he had met while they both attended San Francisco State College. According to Kikuchi, Stewart was impacted by seeing the number of African American visitors to Tanforan and said in response to the turnout:

> You know who are your real friends now. A lot of use are behind any movements that will fight this thing because we have had to face a lot ourselves and so are opposed to anything so un-American. … [W]hen we actually see you people in camp, we go out mad as anything and want to do something about this great injustice because we know you Nisei are just as loyal as we are. The color of the skin is no indication of loyalty – we can testify to that.\textsuperscript{38}


\textsuperscript{37} Kikuchi, *The Kikuchi Diary*, 126.

\textsuperscript{38} Melvin Stewart, as quoted in ibid., 127.
Stewart’s heartfelt statement underscored the depth of his identification and empathy with Japanese Americans. As white Americans disavowed Japanese Americans, many African Americans stepped in to show their support.

The war also brought together Japanese Americans and African Americans who had previously experienced no relations with one another. Before the war, there were virtually no Japanese Americans living in the South. However, during the war over 16,000 Japanese Americans, from both the mainland U.S. and Hawai‘i, came to Arkansas and Mississippi. Japanese Americans were incarcerated at two concentration camps in Arkansas (Jerome and Rohwer), and Nisei soldiers trained at the Camp Shelby military post in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. While in the South, Japanese Americans witnessed firsthand the system of Jim Crow segregation for the first time. Upon encountering the South’s entrenched Black-white binary system of racial hierarchy, many Japanese Americans were deeply unsettled by the anti-Black racism they witnessed and also confused about how they, as neither white nor Black, fit into the South’s racial schema. As historian Jason Morgan Ward argues, Japanese Americans confounded the rigid racial binary of Jim Crow, and their presence in the South had the potential to destabilize the system of segregation. As such, white city officials in Hattiesburg attempted to prevent Japanese American soldiers from forming relationships with local African American residents. To try to prevent interracial alliances from forming, the local government classified Japanese Americans as white, which would constrain them from using the Jim Crow facilities designated for African Americans. Furthermore, city officials “prohibited Nisei soldiers from entering black neighborhoods and socializing with local African Americans” in their attempts to quash friendships and alliances.

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40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 93.
Horrified by the routine anti-Black discrimination and violence they witnessed, Japanese Americans often defied the policies put in place by white government officials and struck up friendships and relationships with African American civilians and soldiers. Japanese Americans stood up for African Americans by occasionally lashing out against the unjust system in place and siding with Black southerners. Segregated buses were one setting in which Japanese American soldiers repeatedly pushed back against the racism of Jim Crow. Mike Tokunaga, a soldier from Hawaiʻi, remembered an incident in New Orleans, when he witnessed a bus driver push over an elderly Black woman. “I grabbed the bus driver by the shirt and dragged him off the bus,” Tokunaga recalled. “Six of us kicked the hell out of him for knocking that poor black woman down.”

Exposure to the indignities of the South’s racial hierarchy radicalized some Japanese Americans and compelled them to fight back against white supremacy, sometimes literally. Bill Hosokawa, a Nisei journalist for the *Des Moines Register*, traveled to the Arkansas Delta region during the war to report on the region’s WRA camps. Hosokawa noted that the African Americans he met during his time in the South frequently expressed that “colored folks has got to stick together.”

Tokunaga and Hosokawa’s reflections highlight that both Japanese Americans and African Americans found value in building relationships and sticking together.

Japanese American soldiers would intentionally disobey the racial decorum they were expected to uphold in order to side with Black southerners. In the South, Japanese Americans were awkwardly slotted in the middle of a racial hierarchy in which they did not have a clearly defined role, and many of them chafed at their indeterminate position. Although they were classified as white, Japanese Americans would disregard this designation and use the segregated facilities meant for African Americans. According to Joseph Hattori, “It was beyond our power to change” Jim

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43 Bill Hosokawa quoted in ibid., 79-80.
Crow, “so when we sat in the back of the bus on purpose, we were making a statement.” As Hattori’s comment suggests, some Japanese Americans living in the South felt conflicted about the discriminatory and contradictory system of Jim Crow that placed them as Japanese Americans above African Americans, and they resisted the attempts to keep Japanese Americans and African Americans separated and in opposition to one another. By willfully disregarding and distorting Jim Crow, some Japanese Americans forcefully shifted their racial designation in order to ally themselves with African Americans.

A Holistic Racial Consciousness

The personal relationships that Japanese Americans and African Americans had before the war or developed as a result of their wartime circumstances gave people insight into the lived experiences of other racially marginalized groups. This proximity enabled Japanese Americans and African Americans to analyze the mechanisms of the state that kept both groups locked in subordinate positions. In the Los Angeles Tribune, Homer Jack, a white clergyman who helped found the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), argued that people needed to move beyond superficial expressions of interracial cooperation – such as visiting Japantowns or “slumming it in Negro nightclubs” – and begin engaging in more substantive coalition-building and activism by “reading pamphlets, distributing literature, organizing meetings, and protesting discriminatory institutions.”

Jack urged readers to realize that true solidarity – or, “brothership” – was not easy to attain or put into practice, but it was vital for mutual survival. People of color must “live as brothers or perish,” Jack concluded. Rhetoric like Jack’s helped expand the analysis to a structural, institutional level.

44 Joseph Hattori quoted in ibid., 98.
46 Ibid.
rather than just an interpersonal level. This shift in perspective enabled Japanese Americans and African Americans to formulate and articulate deeper, more compelling expressions of solidarity based on an understanding of their shared oppression as non-white citizens.

Some Japanese Americans developed a relatively holistic racial consciousness that emphasized the linkages between the problems affecting Japanese Americans, African Americans, and other racialized groups and the interconnectedness of their solutions. Larry Tajiri’s searing and incisive article, “Farewell to Little Tokyo,” published in the Winter 1944 issue of *Common Ground*, proposed a new framework with which to deal with racism in the U.S. that illustrated this shift in mindset. Tajiri chronicled the experiences of Japanese Americans as they prepared to be released from concentration camps and outlined the ideological shifts that had occurred within the community as a result of their years-long incarceration. In his article, Tajiri deftly reframed the question of racism, emphasizing that it was not caused by the Japanese American community’s failure to succeed economically and politically but rather was a product of the “racial attitudes of the dominant white majority.”

Recognizing this fact, Tajiri argued, “The problem of Japanese Americans being predominantly one of color and race, its ultimate solution will depend on correlation with other problems of color and race in America today. This fact is slowly seeping into the consciousness of the group.” The intense anti-Japanese hostility of this era – combined with “intensified … racial hypersensitivity” developed in the “mono-racial world of the relocation camps” – resulted in a substantial shift in Japanese Americans’ conceptualization of their social status. Tajiri argued, “Before evacuation, there was little in the way of a common color consciousness felt by Japanese Americans in their relationships with other colored groups. … But the racial nature of evacuation developed a recognition among many Japanese Americans that they

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48 Ibid., 90.
were inescapably relegated to a place on the color wheel of America, that their problem was … and is part of the unfinished racial business of democracy.”

Notably, Tajiri’s analysis emphasized that Japanese Americans’ newfound racial consciousness extended beyond the borders of their own community and included an awareness of other racialized groups. Tajiri concluded his article by juxtaposing the situation of Japanese Americans with that of African Americans in the Jim Crow South: “With this realization came a corresponding awareness of the urgent and demanding color problem of the American Negro … Thus, fact by fact and incident by incident, Japanese Americans are coming to the realization that theirs is only a part of the nation’s race problems.” Tajiri urged readers to recognize that internment and Jim Crow were “synchronized parts of the whole ‘American problem’” rather than isolated or wholly disparate systems of the state. With this reconceptualization, Tajiri articulated a powerful framework that Japanese Americans and African Americans could use to express meaningful gestures of solidarity with one another.

Like Tajiri, Charles Kikuchi underwent a profound shift in his perspective on race during the war era, and he began to see Japanese Americans’ oppression as one component of a much larger system of racial hierarchy and white supremacy operated by different parts of the state apparatus. Reflecting on what he learned from his pre-war and wartime relationship with Louis Adamic, who wrote prolifically about ethnic diversity and immigrants’ experiences in the U.S., Kikuchi explained in a 1988 interview, “I guess what [Adamic] wanted me to do was to break out of this ‘Japanese American solution,’ which I was seeing as the only problem [and] to put it into its proper perspective in terms of … other minority groups in this country that were having many problems,

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49 Ibid., 93.
50 Ibid., 93-94.
51 Briones, Jim and Jap Crow, 72.
including Blacks, Indians, and other groups.”

Like Tajiri, Kikuchi’s rhetoric on race emphasized recognizing and empathizing with the experiences of others.

Kikuchi did not view race through the prism of just Japanese American identity. Briones suggests that Kikuchi’s holistic mindset toward race relations in the U.S. was a form of “double consciousness,” a term coined by W. E. B. Du Bois to describe the sensation of feeling that the many facets of one’s identity are fragmented or at odds with one another, which prevents individuals from establishing a singular, unified identity. As Du Bois explained in the context of Black identity, African Americans view the world from their own perspective and also view themselves as they might be seen by white Americans. Briones argues that Kikuchi’s “ability to relate to marginalized members of society – migratory workers, gang members, laborers, African Americans and other ethnics – stemmed in large part from his own status as a marginal man.”

Kikuchi’s understanding of his own marginalization and oppression compelled him to care deeply for others who also experienced the devastating consequences of racial prejudice and systematic discrimination.

To make sense of the anti-Asian racism that characterized Japanese internment, Kikuchi and Tajiri looked beyond the confines of the Japanese American “problem” to see if they could identify the overarching state frameworks that linked racism against Japanese Americans to racism against other groups. Likewise, for some African American leaders and thinkers, recognizing the dire consequences of internment was a catalyst that pushed them to expand their focus to address the pressing reality of American racism against non-Black communities of color. A unified theory of racial oppression in the United States reframed the issue of racism to look at the underlying root of white supremacy rather than just its effects on people of color. This shift was significant because it formulated a method to make sense of racism and attempt to change people’s circumstances by

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52 Charles Kikuchi, interview by Arthur Hansen, 1988, quoted in ibid., 105.
53 Ibid., 44.
going directly to the source of the problem, which demonstrated that all these “problems” – the “Oriental problem,” the “Negro problem” – were inseparable because they, in fact, were products of the United States’ problem of white supremacy. United by their oppression, Japanese Americans and African Americans joined forces to achieve a mutually beneficial goal: upsetting the ideologies and structures that undergirded their oppression.

This unified theory of oppression led to a proliferation of comparisons between the situations of the two groups, based on the analysis of the common root problem of the state-sanctioned racial hierarchy. Many Black leaders’ critiques of the government’s treatment of Japanese Americans relied on comparing Japanese internment to Jim Crow. Situating these experiences within a common rubric helped to make legible the common actors and motivations driving both internment and anti-Black racism. In a fiery editorial titled “A Contagious Disease,” the Chicago Defender argued that African Americans’ concern for Japanese Americans stemmed from the similarities they identified between the state’s treatment of Japanese Americans and its treatment of African Americans. “As Americans, the Negroes have but one genuine concern for the Japanese,” the article explained. “That relates to the native-born Nipponese of the West Coast who today are as much the victims of racial prejudice as any Negro in the South. The current issue of Time Magazine gives a revealing picture of the Pacific Coast witch-hunt that differs little from the Rankin-brand anti-Negro propaganda in the South.”\footnote{\textit{A Contagious Disease}, Chicago Defender, December 25, 1943, 10.} The article went on to decry the “furious wave of race-baiting on the [West] Coast that rivals a lynching bee in Mississippi.”\footnote{Ibid.} Likewise, in a 1940 report, Floyd Covington, the Los Angeles Urban League director, raised the alarm that he believed that California’s treatment of its residents of color put it on track to “[relive] almost identically the same experiences that imprinted themselves upon the historical South during the slave period.”\footnote{Floyd Covington quoted in Varzally, \textit{Making a Non-White America}, 205.}
attempts to contextualize the situation of Japanese Americans within a framework of American anti-Black racism helped to make visible the common actors that perpetuated racial oppression against both groups.

Central to the comparisons made by the Defender and Covington was the role of the state in coordinating and maintaining a white supremacist hierarchy. Anti-Japanese and anti-Black politicians borrowed tactics, rhetoric, and legislative agendas from one another. Jason Morgan Ward notes that Southern segregationist politicians were some of the most vocal and ardent supporters of Japanese internment outside the West Coast. Aside from John Rankin, who is perhaps the most well-known example in the historiography of internment, there were also figures like Senator Arthur Thomas Stewart from Tennessee, who argued that Japanese Americans were “utterly unassimilable” and should be stripped of their rights. Historian Kevin Allen Leonard emphasizes the case with which state proponents of anti-Japanese racism and anti-Black racism learned from each other and used a common framework to demonize and discriminate against racialized people. Pointing to the fear of miscegenation and the practice of implementing school segregation, Leonard argues, “After 1880, the rhetoric of anti-Asian activists increasingly resembled that of white southerners.” These comparisons demonstrate that the similarities between Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ experiences were not limited to individuals’ racial prejudice but were part of a coordinated racial hierarchy kept in place by a vast state apparatus that transcended sectional boundaries. Enacting white supremacy, in various forms, was a central goal of the state. With this recognition, being dedicated to unity, rather than succumbing to divide and conquer tactics, had the potential to help people of color defeat white supremacy.

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57 Ward, “No Jap Crow,” 90.
Tensions and Obstacles to Interracial Alliances

Despite the profundity of the connections between Japanese American and African American communities, the wartime relationship between the two groups was also turbulent at times. Some Black proponents of civil rights did not think it was prudent for African Americans to focus on another community’s needs before their own problems had been resolved. Kelly Miller of Howard University, for example, was a notable exception to the trend of African Americans’ identification with and affinity for Japanese immigrants. He rejected the claim that African Americans naturally had common cause with Japanese immigrants, instead arguing that, unlike immigrants from Asia, African Americans had a greater stake in American citizenship given their long history in the country. Miller forcefully differentiated between the positions of African Americans and Japanese Americans, arguing that Japanese Americans were trying to gain acceptance they had not earned. “The Negro is an American citizen whose American residence and citizenry reach further back than the great majority of the white race … and his claims to patrimony are his just and rightful due,” Miller wrote. “The Japanese, on the other hand, is the eleventh hour comer, and is claiming the privilege of those who have borne the heat and burden of the day.”

Although blunt and perhaps callous, Miller’s argument does highlight that African Americans had suffered at the hands of the state for centuries, enduring a variety of brutal and oppressive social orders that in turn enslaved, subjugated, exploited, and disposed people of African descent. Given this history, he thought it seemed unfair or undeserved for Japanese Americans to be able to reap the benefits of citizenship more quickly and with more ease than those racialized groups who were supposedly more “American” and who had been waiting for much longer to get their citizenship rights.

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Miller questioned whether it was wise or self-serving for African Americans to take up issues relevant to the Japanese American community before the needs of African Americans had been met. Miller argued that it was strategically unwise to focus so much on problems affecting non-Black communities. He feared that addressing the issues of Japanese immigrants would distract from fixing African Americans’ problems. Instead, Miller argued that dealing with the particular concerns of African Americans should come first before trying to take on other groups’ specific issues. Miller’s mindset and concerns stemmed in part from the fear that that associating with another racialized group would harm African Americans’ own chance for acceptance from the state and white society.

Although Miller’s conclusions were self-serving, there was some merit to the reasons for his apprehension. Alliances between racially marginalized groups signaled to the state that there could be intense pushback against its policies, which could result in a crackdown or intensification of state oppression to maintain the equilibrium. Especially after the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924—which banned immigration from Japan—it seemed self-evident to some African American leaders that publicly aligning with such an intensely stigmatized and shunned group like the Japanese would only hurt their cause. From a strategic perspective, it seemed that Japanese exclusion had prevailed. It appeared foolish to link African Americans’ struggle to an intensely unpopular cause, especially since anti-Japanese prejudice was inextricably bound up in the belief that people of Japanese descent were perpetual foreigners. As David J. Hellwig summarizes the situation, “The Japanese had lost their long struggle. Blacks would serve neither their cause nor that of the Japanese by continuing to equate the plight of the two groups.”

Likewise, Japanese Americans feared that aligning themselves with the “confrontational tactics associated with African American civil rights organizations” would impede rather than advance their “campaign for human dignity.” Both Japanese Americans and

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60 Ibid.
African Americans feared that aligning themselves with another racially stigmatized group would undercut their attempts to gain a place in the national community and make them seem like cultural outsiders.

**The Fear of Disloyalty**

The state positioned both Japanese Americans and African Americans outside the nation’s borders of belonging, and those who chose to associate with racial Others were at risk of also losing their belonging. As such, the state framed many of the attempts at interracial activism as examples of a disloyal fifth column, since both racialized groups were believed to harbor un-American (or not properly American) tendencies. As Kenneth C. Barnes has detailed in his research on African American Arkansans’ history of political exchange with Japan, the specter of a disloyal, treasonous alliance between Japanese Americans and African Americans was a trope that preceded World War II, but the wartime fixation on the loyalty of citizens of color heightened white authorities’ preoccupation with the formation of an Afro-Asian fifth column. State agencies, the press, and nativist groups constantly questioned Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ loyalty during the war.

Government officials, like General John DeWitt of the WDC, accused Japanese Americans of being saboteurs, enemy aliens who supposedly were orchestrating plans to attack the U.S. from within and reveal their allegiance to the Axis powers. African Americans, although not immigrants or clearly linked to a particular country of origin, also faced the stigma of being considered disloyal to the nation. Newspaper columnists churned out a high volume of alarmist articles about the existence of a fifth column, often based on flimsy evidence. Arthur Caylor of the *San Francisco News* boldly announced, “My story is that, whatever the philosophy involved, the enemy’s agents in our

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town are not neglecting an attempt to create a Japanese-Negro anti-white-race fifth column,” basing his broad conspiracy on the mere fact that the “Japanese colony and the Negro colony in San Francisco are close enough neighbors to provide many contacts. They share some things in common.”63 Government officials also made unsubstantiated claims of a vast conspiracy between Japanese Americans and African Americans. In the government’s national investigation of race riots during the war, Congressman Martin Dies, Jr., of Texas, the chairman of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, “ordered the seizure of JACL files and specifically cited Japanese agents as fomenters of disorder and violence in Detroit.” John Rankin backed up Dies’ baseless claims, asserting that Japanese infiltrators were “stirring race trouble” in the U.S.64 These claims of a fifth column conspiracy justified the government’s attempts to keep Japanese Americans and African Americans separated and enabled the state to undermine any alliances that emerged. Divide and conquer “bolstered the legitimacy of white authority, helping to cement a relationship that hinged on control and containment.”65

In instances where Japanese Americans and African Americans had a more substantial history of working together, white authorities’ apprehension about the potential for a fifth column was even more heightened. For example, several months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, an FBI agent came to Mississippi County, Arkansas, to check up on African American residents’ political activities to see if they harbored any pro-Japan sentiments. Eight years earlier, an Asian man, a Mexican woman, and two Black men had been arrested and convicted on the charge of anarchy for attempting to organize African American residents to form a chapter of the pro-Japan group, the Original Independent Benevolent African Pacific Movement of World.66

64 John Rankin quoted in Ward, “No Jap Crow,” 100.
65 Ibid., 86.
66 Barnes, “Inspiration from the East,” 201.
The preoccupation with a fifth column demonstrated the state’s inability to reckon with its own actions and policies that had drawn Japanese Americans and African Americans into interracial alliances with each other. “In attributing black unrest and low morale to Japanese agents and propaganda,” Mark Gallicchio writes, “[federal agencies] fell back on a time-worn tradition of defenders of the racial status quo by blaming outside agitators.”67 The condemnation of Japanese Americans and African Americans as disloyal was a powerful tool to crush dissent and the stifle legitimate grievances of citizens of color. Because of the increased emphasis on loyalty during the war, being branded as disloyal was a major obstacle to achieving equality or receiving government support for their campaigns. As Cheryl Greenberg argues, “Federal officials … used ‘military necessity’ to hide racism and disarm potential critics. Such transformations have marked many important policy discussions with the use of rhetorical masks such as ‘national security’ or ‘law and order.’”68 Military necessity was used as a powerful blanket justification for many wartime policies, and it was used a cudgel to silence critics and bend skeptics into submission.

The state was able to shield itself from valid criticisms by tarring dissenters as opponents of the U.S. war effort. This strategy was somewhat successful at suppressing the concerns of civil rights groups and racial justice advocates because many of these organizations relied on government support to enact their policy preferences. Being seen as opponents of the government’s agenda could lead to these organizations’ ostracization or provoke an intense crackdown on the racialized groups they represented, which was one of the worst possible outcomes for those engaged in the struggle for justice. Therefore, it was prudent for organizations and public figures to publicly express their allegiance to the government, even if the government’s policies were at odds with their principles. For example, the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) had repeatedly criticized

the government’s plan to forcibly remove and incarcerate Japanese Americans in 1942, but less than two years later, the Council effectively reversed its position, voting to publicly praise the WRA for its handling of internment, despite the depth of its initial concerns. As one NCJW delegate noted during the internal debate over the WRA resolution, “[A]s a minority group it is of great advantage … and certainly it is a wise policy to commend our government for acting in a democratic fashion towards another minority group.”\(^{69}\) This sentiment was, at its core, pragmatic: many organizations felt that they depended on the state for recognition and approval, so it was necessary to curry favor with the state and publicly make clear where their loyalties lay. Being branded as disloyal or anti-American was a powerful strategy to silence Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ legitimate concerns and coerce them to comply with the state’s wartime policy agenda. Opposing the government could further marginalize stigmatized groups or justify more discrimination against them. Being painted as disloyal was dangerous for people already considered un-American and disdained.

### A People’s War for Democracy

Japanese Americans and African Americans wanted to counteract the accusations of fifth-column activity and disloyalty to the nation. To do this, many of them framed their expressions of solidarity with other racialized groups to fit within the rubric of patriotism outlined by the state during the war. The U.S. government characterized World War II as a global war for democracy, freedom, and equality. Japanese Americans and African Americans emphasized these same principles in their organizing efforts. Criticizing the government in an oppositional way may not get them far, but if groups were able to affirm their commitment to the same principles which the government professed, they could promote their cause as a larger part of the American war effort.

\(^{69}\) Proceedings of the NCJW Convention, 1943, quoted in ibid., 21.
The Double Victory movement – also known as the Double V movement – was one of the most effective examples of mobilizing the state’s rhetoric to promote the rights of African Americans and people of color more broadly. The Double V movement took the state at its word that it was committed to fighting for democracy and called the government to put this goal into practice domestically as well as internationally. In his Master’s thesis on the Double V movement in Los Angeles, Harlan Dale Unrau explains the origins of the movement: “Many black Americans had gone into World War I with high morale, because they believed that the democratic slogans with which the war was fought … but the race riots, lynchings and continued rigid segregation following the war left bitter memories in the minds of Negroes that would linger in the future.”

World War I had exposed the gap between the government’s words during a national crisis and its actions. When the U.S. entered World War II, many African Americans – especially those who remembered the previous war – were apprehensive, recognizing that the state was not likely to put its lofty wartime rhetoric into practice at home. Instead of taking the government’s commitment to democracy at face value, African Americans decided to more forcefully advocate for racial justice during World War II by explicitly linking “their racial demands to the American war aims” in hopes of bringing about meaningful change.

With the heightened emphasis on these principles, some writers asserted that the nation’s internal contradictions were a hindrance to the war effort, arguing that it was necessary for the state to remedy its internal inequalities and racial discord to boost its legitimacy as a global leader for democracy. In a fiery editorial in the New York Amsterdam News, Julius J. Adams challenged the government to live up to its promises and grant full citizenship rights to African Americans. “Either Negroes are citizens and are entitled to all the rights guaranteed all other citizens,” he wrote, “or

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71 Ibid., 5.
they are not citizens and have no rights in law or equity, except that which is given through the mercy of the majority. Certainly it would be embarrassing and world-shaking for the United States to announce to the world that it doesn’t consider its Negro residents full citizens entitled to all privileges and opportunities and protection granted American citizens under the law.”72 Kikuchi shared Adams’ sentiment, musing in his diary, “It does seem a little inconsistent that our war aims conflict with what is carried on in this country in many states. Evacuation of the Japanese is just one small, but important part of it. The problem of our 13 million Negro population is much larger. … Treatment of colored people in this country is directly connected to our ‘aim’ to free the colored people abroad.”73 Roi Ottley was more blunt in his analysis: “Race conflicts in the United States are of undoubted propaganda value to the Nipponese.”74 This statement was a direct challenge to the United States to re-examine its own policies. For example, perhaps a fifth column was not the cause of the United States’ wartime struggles, but rather it was the state’s own mistreatment of its citizens of color. M. Margaret Anderson of Common Ground framed the issue in more positive terms than Ottley, but she reached the same general conclusion. “Freedom for the world and freedom for the Negro at home in America are not mutually exclusive concepts,” she wrote. “[I]nstead, they reinforce each other, they give good conscience to our world crusade.”75 Figures like Adams, Kikuchi, Ottley, and Anderson argued that it was in the nation’s best interest to resolve its internal contradictions around race and citizenship for people of color.

Some organizations and writers embraced the rhetoric of World War II as a war for democracy, positioning themselves as effusively patriotic in hopes of making a convincing case for

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73 Charles Kikuchi, diary entry, September 12, 1942 (CKP, box 11, 3:687–8), quoted in Briones, Jim and Jap Crow, 154.
74 Ottley, “A White Folks’ War?,” 51.
racial justice that was compatible with the state’s own goals. In its defense of Japanese Americans, the *Chicago Defender* preempted its critique of the government’s actions by shutting down the notion that its perspective was a product of disloyalty. Instead, the editorial professed the depth of African Americans’ patriotism by asserting, “The facts are that the Negro people have been proved through every war to be the most loyal and patriotic segment of America simply because they have no loyalties or links to any other land. The Negroes of America represent proportionately the largest native-born group in the land.”

Likewise, the NAACP released a statement one day after Pearl Harbor affirming African Americans’ unwavering loyalty to the U.S. and arguing that part of this loyalty was to fight for full civil rights for citizens of color: “Though 13 million American Negroes have more often than not been denied democracy, they are American citizens and will as in every war give unqualified support to the protection of their country. At the same time we shall not abate one iota in our struggle for full citizenship rights here in the United States.”

The NAACP statement linked their two wartime goals as being congruent with one another, not at odds as the state would try to suggest.

In a February 28, 1942, *Pittsburgh Courier* article, Horace Cayton embraced the language of the war effort, arguing that “The Negro is engaged in a struggle to make this a peoples’ war for democracy, not just a white man’s war.” Writing in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, Tooru Kanazawa made a poignant, almost imploring appeal for Japanese Americans’ loyalty and commitment to democracy to be recognized, echoing much of the same rhetoric deployed by Cayton. “We are all engaged in this war for democracy,” Kanazawa wrote. “We believe in it. We want to see it stamp out prejudice and discrimination which are symptoms of the very thing we are


77 NAACP Board of Directors Meeting, December 8, 1941, quoted in Greenberg, “Black and Jewish Responses to Japanese Internment,” 23.

fighting – fascism. And when the war is finally over, we know it will be found that we Japanese Americans have acquitted ourselves creditably and honorably in the defense of our country.”

Roi Ottley affirmed this emphasis on a war fought for the principles of democracy and put the onus on the state – rather than its subordinated citizens – to put this policy into practice: “If, as we declare daily, the United States is fighting a war to extend democracy to all peoples, then the Federal officials must fall into step and dictate policies which envision a new and democratic era. They must lead the way, not pander to backward localities.” These appeals were a savvy rhetorical strategy, because they fit the war effort into a teleology of progress, framing it as part of the American narrative of its ascension to fulfill its core promises and uphold its most cherished principles as a nation. This was a compelling tactic to use, even if some people did not truly feel a deep well of patriotism or loyalty to the U.S., as certainly many disillusioned and mistreated Japanese Americans and African Americans would be justified in feeling.

World War II increased the breadth and depth of interactions between Japanese Americans and African Americans. During this era, people came into closer physical proximity with one another and learned more about the situations the other racialized group faced. These personal relationships fostered a sense of common ground between Japanese Americans and African Americans. During this period of adjustments to and shifts in the racial order, members of both racialized groups expressed that they were sympathetic and supportive of others who also experienced racism, alienation, and exclusion. People looked beyond their interpersonal relationships during this period and began to develop an incipient sense of solidarity, empathy, and identification with one another. Japanese Americans and African Americans recognized that the state was implementing policies that harmed them during the war. The experiences of the war sharpened

80 Ottley, “A White Folks’ War?,” 53.
people’s racial consciousness and expanded their focus to look beyond their immediate communities and examine the state’s role in maintaining the racial order. The war also provided a lexicon and framework of democracy and universal equality that cross-racial alliances harnessed, arguing that these principles must be applied universally and consistently to all marginalized groups. This rhetoric allowed Japanese Americans and African Americans to fit their goals within a patriotic framework while still expressing sentiments critical of the state. World War II was a watershed moment for cross-racial relationships. During the war, racialized groups collaborated with one another to strengthen their calls for freedom and full citizenship rights, subscribing to the notion that there is strength in numbers and that working together to achieve shared goals would advance their cause. Japanese Americans and African Americans laid important groundwork during the war that influenced later expressions of interracial activism and solidarity.
Chapter III

“The Race War That Flopped”:
The Rise and Fall of Afro-Asian Ethnic Enclaves in San Francisco and Los Angeles

In John Okada’s seminal 1957 novel *No-No Boy*, the protagonist, Ichiro “Itchy” Yamada, is a young Japanese American man struggling to navigate life in the post-war U.S. and grappling with his relationship to the state after spending the past four years incarcerated – the first two years in a WRA concentration camp and the next two in prison for refusing to fight in the U.S. military. The novel opens with Ichiro returning to his hometown of Seattle, Washington, and attempting to acclimate to his surroundings. The narrator describes Ichiro’s perspective as he walks down Jackson Street, the main thoroughfare of Seattle’s pre-war Japantown between Fifth and Twelfth Avenues:

> Being on Jackson Street with its familiar store fronts and taverns and restaurants, which were somehow different because the war had left its mark on them, was like trying to find one’s way out of a dream . . . The war had wrought violent changes upon the people, and the people, in turn, working hard and living hard and earning a lot of money and spending it on whatever was available, had distorted the profile of Jackson Street. The street had about it the air of a carnival without quite succeeding at becoming one.¹

Ichiro’s reaction to his former neighborhood testified to the significant changes the war had caused in Seattle’s Japantown. Central to these changes was a change in residents. Absent were the Japanese Americans who used to live there. In their place were African Americans, who are implicated in the above passage as the people who “distorted” Jackson Street. The characterization of Jackson Street as being reminiscent of a carnival demonstrates the uncanny, unsettling effect the drastic wartime shifts had on returning Japanese Americans. These changes forced former Japantown residents to reconceptualize their relationship to their surroundings and exposed them to new situations and challenges in the post-war era.

The beginning of No-No Boy describes a phenomenon that occurred across the West Coast after the United States declared victory in 1945. In fewer than five years, the war had left an indelible, lasting impact on the American homefront. Neither the changes outlined in the first chapter, nor the emergent interracial solidarity outlined in the second chapter, dissipated immediately once the United States entered a new phase of peacetime. Rather, Japanese internment and African American migration to California continued to have significant intersections and ramifications in the post-war era. In fact, some these connections became apparent only after the war’s end, as the two groups began to inhabit shared spaces in West Coast cities.

This chapter focuses on the immediate post-war era to analyze the war’s lingering impact on Japanese Americans and African Americans in West Coast ethnic enclaves. During the war, many African Americans who migrated to the West Coast settled in the empty neighborhoods from which Japanese Americans were forcibly removed. When the period of Japanese internment ended, the state oversaw the resettling of 110,000 Japanese Americans. Rather than return to the West Coast, the federal government advocated for a policy of dispersal to encourage Japanese Americans to assimilate. ² Despite this policy, and perhaps not surprisingly, many Japanese Americans chose to go “home” instead. Those who did choose to return to Japantowns in West Coast cities encountered profoundly changed environments.

Using a case study approach, this chapter traces the evolution that the neighborhoods of the Western Addition in San Francisco and Little Tokyo-Bronzeville in Los Angeles underwent as a result of the relocations compelled by circumstances of the war. In both of these cities, the pre-war Japantown (known as “Nihonmachi” in San Francisco and “Little Tokyo” in Los Angeles) transformed into a predominantly Black neighborhood during the war (known as “the Fillmore” in

San Francisco and “Bronzeville” in Los Angeles). The post-war situations in San Francisco and Los Angeles were distinct, and circumstances in each city were hardly identical. However, there were also evident patterns of state intervention and non-intervention in the Western Addition and Little Tokyo-Bronzeville. As a result, the Japanese American and African American communities in both cities faced similar trajectories in their composition, evolution, and eventual dissolution in the months and years following the war.

After the war, African Americans and returning Japanese Americans struggled to navigate the changes in their neighborhoods. Questions of ownership over the space and belonging to the local community were paramount, as both groups tried to create and maintain a coherent yet multifaceted communal identity in the spaces they shared. The post-war years in the Western Addition and Little Tokyo-Bronzeville were marked by both interracial cooperation and clashes. Residents formed alliances and established interracial institutions, but also experienced friction, due in part to the competition for limited resources. The histories of the Western Addition and Little Tokyo-Bronzeville illuminate how the state mechanisms outlined in the first chapter operated and provide concrete examples to evaluate whether the lofty rhetoric of Afro-Asian solidarity analyzed in the second chapter was put into practice after the war. The evolution of the ethnic enclaves after World War II illustrates the precariousness of Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ relationship to their physical environments as they navigated and pushed back against their limited belonging on both the local and national level.

**Pre-War Japantowns**

Before World War II, many urban Japantowns up and down the West Coast were marginalized, somewhat insular ethnic enclaves, with Japanese-owned businesses, social institutions, and rented homes and apartments. In both San Francisco and Los Angeles, the city’s Japantown was located just on the outskirts of the downtown political and commercial center. The Western
Addition was immediately West of San Francisco’s City Hall and civic center, and Fillmore Street was its main commercial thoroughfare. Throughout San Francisco’s history, the neighborhood has been a highly contested “muddle in the middle” of the city, with people assigning it different names, different associations, and different significance.³ For 40 years after the 1906 earthquake, the Western Addition was considered the “Little United Nations” of San Francisco because of its multiracial composition and many immigrant residents. By the mid-twentieth century, it was one of the most racially diverse neighborhoods in the western half of the U.S., with large populations of Japanese Americans, Jewish Americans, Filipino Americans, African Americans, and Mexican Americans all settling there.⁴ In the pre-war era, there seemed to be a sense of racial harmony in the neighborhood, where “race didn’t seem to matter much” to residents.⁵

Although extremely multiracial, the neighborhood held particularly strong significance for its Japanese American residents. Western Addition’s pre-war Nihonmachi neighborhood was bounded by Pine and O’Farrell Streets to the north and south and by Octavia and Buchanan Streets to the east and west. By 1940, there were more than 200 Japanese-owned businesses in the neighborhood, which catered to a wide variety of interests and clients.⁶ There were “hotels, bath houses, laundries, confectionaries, pool houses, general merchandise stores, dressmakers, tailors, tofu vendors, dentists, the YWCA, and the Hashimoto Hospital.”⁷ In addition to the commercial ventures, there were 40 churches and 17 schools.⁸ Nihonmachi was the heart of the local Japanese American

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⁵ The Fillmore.
⁸ Gary Kamiya, “Western Addition.”
community, serving as a lifeline to connect people to their culture, language, and kin. Many people found a sense of rare belonging in Nihonmachi, which provided a haven from the racism and xenophobia of the predominantly white areas of San Francisco.

Los Angeles’ Little Tokyo had a similar pre-war history to that of San Francisco’s Nihonmachi. Like the Western Addition, Little Tokyo was located adjacent to the city’s downtown area, just east of the Los Angeles city center. In the pre-war era, the neighborhood was bordered by Temple and Fourth Streets and stretched from the Los Angeles River to City Hall. The neighborhood began to take shape in 1885, when a man named Kame opened a restaurant on the west side of Los Angeles Street. By 1908, there were 300 Japanese-operated businesses and nearly 100 boarding or lodging houses in the city, with the majority clustered around Little Tokyo. Many Japanese Americans in Los Angeles worked in the agriculture sector, operating a network of growers, distributors, and sellers. The money earned through agriculture was typically spent within the Japanese American community at Japanese-owned businesses in Little Tokyo. James M. Omura described the neighborhood in the 1920s and 1930s as “a jumble of poor establishments and a few nice-looking businesses like the Asia Company, and hotels on both sides, and bigger Nisei-operated pharmacies, like Iwaki Drug and Tenshodo across the street.” On the eve of World War II, Little Tokyo was the “biggest and busiest” Japantown in California, a bustling community of families and business proprietors. In both San Francisco and Los Angeles, Japanese Americans had eked out a somewhat comfortable, yet precarious, existence in their ethnic enclaves.

11 James M. Omura quoted in ibid., 36.
Although many pre-war residents felt deeply at home in their ethnic enclaves, these neighborhoods also faced many structural obstacles, such as overcrowding, poverty, and so-called “slum” conditions. Most significantly, Japanese American residents in Japantowns were in a vulnerable position prior to the war because many of them were ineligible to own property or hold long-term leases. California’s 1913 Alien Land Law prohibited all Issei from buying land. This legal framework consigned many Japanese Americans living in Japantowns throughout the state to rent from white landlords rather than own their own houses and apartments. Therefore, when the state forcibly removed Japanese Americans from the West Coast, many of them lacked the standing to retain their homes and businesses while they were incarcerated. Doris Morimoto, who was a resident of the Western Addition since 1927, recounted: “When we had to leave San Francisco, we had to sell everything. We had to sell the store, our truck. We sold everything we had for $400.”\(^{13}\) While incarcerated, the Morimoto family business became a warehouse and their apartment was occupied by other people.\(^{14}\)

**Japantowns’ Wartime Transformations**

As author Gary Kamiya writes, “Sometimes the silences left by cataclysmic events are the loudest reminders.”\(^{15}\) Kamiya researched San Francisco’s city directories and compared the pre-internment 1942 listing to the 1943 listings, focusing on the section from “Yamada” to “Yamazaki.” In the 1942 listings, he found 32 listings – “Yamada, Yamagata, Yamaguchi, Yamamoto, Yamasake, Yamazaki.” In 1943, there were no listings under these names.\(^{16}\) Similarly, Maya Angelou – who, as a

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\(^{15}\) Kamiya, “Western Addition.”

\(^{16}\) Ibid.
teenager, lived with her family in the Western Addition – noted that it seemed as though the Japanese American community completely disappeared after the internment order. “No member of my family and none of the family friends ever mentioned the absent Japanese,” she recalled. “It was as if they had never owned or lived in the houses we inhabited.”\textsuperscript{17} The internment order erased the existence of an entire community in the city, and the legal framework of alien land laws facilitated the quick and near-total replacement of the community in the aftermath of Japanese Americans’ forced removal, as new residents were able to move in and begin renting the commercial and residential buildings that Japanese Americans had been forced to vacate.

The Western Addition and Little Tokyo were quickly repopulated and developed as predominantly African American neighborhoods. Architectural historian Lynne Horiuchi situates this phenomenon within a broader context: “Historically lacking capital and legal rights for the acquisition of new property, communities of color have often re-used older existing housing and adapted it to suit their particular needs.”\textsuperscript{18} As detailed in the first chapter, there was an extreme housing shortage on the West Coast during the war, as hundreds of thousands of interstate migrants poured into California, Oregon, and Washington looking for work in the defense industries. In a November 4, 1943, letter to California Governor Earl Warren, Little Tokyo Committee Chair Katherine Kaplan calculated that there were at least 175 African American migrants moving to Los Angeles every day.\textsuperscript{19} The issue of housing for these Black newcomers was compounded by the prevalence of racially restrictive housing covenants and discriminatory racial quotas in war housing projects, which introduced additional barriers to settlement and made African American migrants particularly desperate for housing. African Americans faced extreme obstacles to obtaining stable

\textsuperscript{17} Maya Angelou quoted in ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Horiuchi, “Mobility and Property,” 138.
housing, and in these dire circumstances, “the empty apartment buildings and houses in [Japantowns] were a godsend.”

Japantowns were some of the only neighborhoods to which African Americans could move. The Western Addition was one of the few neighborhoods in San Francisco without racially restrictive housing covenants, which made it a prime location for African American migrants. Additionally, since it was already a mixed-race neighborhood, many landlords were more willing to rent to African American migrants than landlords in other areas of the city. Likewise, Los Angeles’ Little Tokyo fell within the measly 5 percent of the city that did not have restrictions on Black residency. The lack of restrictions in the Western Addition and Little Tokyo facilitated the transition from predominantly Japanese American neighborhoods to predominantly Black ones. African Americans were no longer restricted by the confines of Jim Crow as they had been in the South, but they had entered into new dynamics of spatial segregation, restricted movement, and barriers to property ownership, predicated on the West Coast’s unique history of Asian exclusion. As Horiuchi explains, “African American migrants slipped into an unacknowledged pattern of racial discrimination directed at Asian immigrants who preceded them.” Horiuchi’s analysis is prescient because it recognizes the reality that African Americans’ migration – and the state’s responses to it – did not occur in a vacuum, but rather was profoundly structured and affected by the West Coast’s prevailing anti-Asian, nativist status quo.

20 Kamiya, “Western Addition.”
21 “Fillmore Timeline 1860-2001.”
23 Horiuchi, “Mobility and Property,” 133.
24 Interestingly, before Little Tokyo transitioned into a predominantly African American neighborhood, the Los Angeles local government considered converting it into a Latin American quarter. Since Japanese Americans did not own most of the buildings in the neighborhood, the building owners met to plan the neighborhood’s future. One proposal suggested that Little Tokyo become a Latin American neighborhood, which would hold the consulate general offices for Latin American countries. This proposal was not enacted. Instead, Los Angeles’ Deputy Mayor Orville Caldwell directed African American migrants to settle in Little Tokyo. See Jenks, “The Politics of Preservation,” 37.
The high volume of African American newcomers settling in the Western Addition and Little Tokyo precipitated the development of African American businesses in these neighborhoods. In Los Angeles, Leonard Christmas – an African American business owner originally from Cambridge, Massachusetts – was the first African American to open a business in the neighborhood. Christmas opened the Digby Hotel at 506 ½ East First Street in early 1943. He was also the proprietor of the Digby Grill next door. In September 1943, the Crown Point Department Store, a cooperatively owned business run by 19 women, opened on the corner of First and Los Angeles Streets. It sold a wide variety of goods, including groceries, meats, medication, and clothing. The store’s leader, Clara W. Brown, had previously owned a retail store in New Orleans before heading out West. In October 1943, Christmas declared that the neighborhood of Little Tokyo no longer existed; it was now Bronzeville. In December, Christmas and three other residents founded the Bronzeville Chamber of Commerce. The group distributed placards to newly established businesses, which read, “This is Bronzeville. Watch us grow.” Within two months of its establishment, the Bronzeville Chamber of Commerce had 125 members. The residents’ assertive and proactive entrepreneurship in the neighborhood helped Bronzeville transition from a crowded settlement of migrants into a more unified Black community with established institutions.

Another vital element of the creation of the Fillmore and Bronzeville neighborhoods was the establishment of African American churches, which were some of the main communal organizations in the neighborhoods. In both San Francisco and Los Angeles, African American migrants bought and repurposed churches and Buddhist temples that had been vacated by the Japanese American community. In San Francisco, membership in Black churches in the Fillmore swelled from

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approximately 100 to over 1,000 between 1942 and 1943. In Bronzeville, the Providence Missionary Baptist Association undertook the neighborhood’s most ambitious project. The Association worked to convert the Los Angeles Hompa Hongwanji Buddhist Temple into a multipurpose Christian institution that housed a theology school, the Providence Baptist Institute, and the First Street Baptist Church. Rev. Dr. L. B. Brown oversaw both the institute and the church, which opened for its first sermons on January 30, 1944. In addition to religious services and theology classes, the Association partnered with the Los Angeles City Board of Education to offer non-religious services, including adult classes on typing, shorthand, bookkeeping, art, and handicrafts. The first floor of the building also housed the First Street Clinic, a medical center run by Dr. George Hill Hodel. During the war, most of the temple space – as at many other temples and churches in Little Tokyo – was used to store incarcerated Japanese Americans’ suitcases and furniture while they were in concentration camps. Establishing churches helped African Americans put down roots to sustain the community and develop a sense of belonging in these neighborhoods.

In both San Francisco and Los Angeles, the small ethnic enclave of African American wartime workers became known for its restaurants, nightclubs, and the vibrant music scene. Arguably the most significant and enduring legacy of the Fillmore and Bronzeville was their status as laboratories for jazz and bebop music to proliferate during the war years. Both neighborhoods became major hubs of music and culture, with many nightclubs and music venues popping up during and immediately after the war. In San Francisco, the Fillmore was home to the New Orleans Swing Club, Club Alabam, Jackson’s Nook, and the California Theater Club, among others. The music scene in the Fillmore during the war was compared to the Harlem Renaissance, and famous

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27 *The Fillmore.*

musicians including Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Dexter Gordon, and Billie Holiday, played at the jazz venues in the neighborhood.²⁹

Similarly, Bronzeville had a bustling music and entertainment scene, due in part to the disposable income available to defense industry workers. Many African Americans were earning higher wages than they had ever received before, and they took advantage of this newfound economic mobility by patronizing nightclubs and music venues. Bronzeville residents frequented local nightclubs, known as “breakfast clubs,” since they were open through the night until breakfast time. These clubs were concentrated on San Pedro Street between First and Fifth Streets and 42nd and Central Streets. Shepp’s Playhouse, located on First and Los Angeles Streets, was the one of the most well-known of these clubs. Shepp’s famous patrons included Count Basie, Helen Humes, Heavyweight Champion Joe Louis, Judy Garland, Gene Kelly, and Pearl Bailey. Other popular breakfast clubs included the Creole Palace, Cielito Lindo, the Cobra Room, the Finale Club, and Club Rendezvous.³⁰ The local Los Angeles government tried to crack down on the wildly popular breakfast clubs in the fall of 1944. The L.A. City Council prohibited businesses from operating between midnight and 6 a.m. unless they had a special permit. Breakfast club owners were often turned down when they applied for the special permits stipulated by the City Council.³¹ Such steps by the local government were attempts to shut down or at least slow the growth of the neighborhood’s businesses and activities. Many city officials associated breakfast clubs with vice, and they believed that the neighborhood was fostering unsavory behavior and hosting disreputable figures. The local government was anxious about the development of a lively Black community, especially one so close to the city center.

²⁹ “Fillmore Timeline 1860-2001.”
³¹ Ibid.
As African American migrants continued to move into the Fillmore and Bronzeville, government officials expressed consternation at the neighborhoods’ overcrowding and slum-like conditions. In San Francisco, the number of African American residents in the Western Addition jumped from 2,144 to 14,888 during the war. In comparison, the pre-war Japanese American community in the neighborhood was composed of approximately 5,000 people.\textsuperscript{32} In Los Angeles, the Bronzeville-Little Tokyo district swelled from an estimated 30,000 Japanese Americans before the war to an estimated 80,000 residents during the war, according to the Los Angeles County Health Department.\textsuperscript{33} The massive upswing in residents stretched the neighborhoods to their physical limits, as people crowded into houses, apartments, vacant storefronts, garages, and other temporary living spaces. In some cases, up to 40 people shared a single bathroom, and hot beds were common.\textsuperscript{34} In a June 6, 1944, letter to the manager of the San Francisco Housing Authority, Frank J. De Andreis, the California Division of Immigration and Housing assistant chief, decried the state of San Francisco’s former Nihonmachi: “The house is one of those former places evacuated by the Japanese. That the place should have been condemned, there is not a question of doubt. … With no water, of course, there are no bathing facilities and the resulting odors are conclusive of the fact that bathing is an unfrequent \textit{sic} luxury.”\textsuperscript{35} In her letter to Governor Earl Warren, Katherine Kaplan commented on the dangers posed by the extreme overcrowding in Bronzeville, noting that “such conditions, including unsatisfactory sanitary conditions and general tenseness, constitute conditions that are ripe for epidemics, vice, and race riots.”\textsuperscript{36} These concerns targeted African Americans as a threat to the local social order. The emphasis on public health and safety implied that

\textsuperscript{32} Kamiya, “Western Addition.”
\textsuperscript{33} Nakagawa, “Housing Shortage.”
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Nakagawa, “Housing Shortage.”
the local authorities feared that Black residents’ supposedly disreputable character would spread sickness, violence, and disorder across the city.

The issue of overcrowding and the attendant public health and safety concerns were used as justifications for the local and state governments to intervene and exert control over the Black neighborhoods. Leonard Christmas attempted to shift the blame for the conditions on the previous Japanese American tenants, arguing that rather than causing the problem, African American residents were upstanding tenants attempting to clean up a mess they had inherited: “The proprietors found filth when they moved into the community, and have been trying ever since to clean the premises.” Christmas questioned “why such filth was allowed among the Japanese.”

However, in the absence of Japanese Americans (who, in the pre-war era, had also been subject to these sorts of charges), most white state officials blamed African American migrants for the squalid conditions. According to a 1943-1944 Biennial Report by the California State Division of Immigration and Housing, there was immediate need for policies to neutralize the alleged social and health concerns posed by predominantly African American neighborhoods:

The matter of housing the thousands of Negroes who have recently migrated west to work in war jobs is rapidly crystallizing into a problem that calls for immediate attention. This colored exodus is unprecedented in the annals of our time, and while the Federal Government, through various housing projects, is trying to alleviate the need, that effort is only a miniature one in the light of the number of colored people that are flocking here…

The report is significant in that it called for the federal government to take responsibility for handling this issue, as well as for advocating for abatement as one of the primary strategies for dealing with neighborhoods like the Fillmore and Bronzeville. These suggestions demonstrated the state’s power to intervene and use the guise of city planning to control residents of color. As


38 1943-1944 Biennial Report quoted in Nakagawa, “Other Japantowns.”
scholars like Nayan Shah have asserted, the discourses of public health in American cities were often incredibly racialized, and the expressed concerns were often tied to racist, xenophobic fears about contagion, social unrest, and moral and physical decay. Local governments in San Francisco and Los Angeles framed their actions as attempts to modernize the cities, which relied on racially coded concepts of efficiency, cleanliness, safety, and organization. This shift in tactics worked to limit the settlement of Black residents and those who were perceived as “foreign” by classifying them as detrimental to the city’s health and wellbeing.

Some concerned residents and government officials proposed easing racial quotas on wartime housing as a way to alleviate the overcrowding and blight found in African American migrants’ enclaves. Early in the war, a coalition of community organizations – led by the Negro Victory Committee, the NAACP, the National Negro Congress, the California Eagle, and the Los Angeles Sentinel – hosted a community-wide meeting at the First AME Church on December 13, 1942. More than 1,500 people attended. According to journalist and researcher Martha Nakagawa, “At the meeting, attendees heard about an African American war worker, who had been evicted from a rat-infested home by the City Health Department but was refused housing at a vacant housing project because the racial quota for that housing project had been met.” Attendants criticized the unfairness of the racial quota system. The next year, the Los Angeles Housing Authority announced that racial quotas would be relaxed, but there were still reports of African Americans being denied housing in wartime projects. Towards the end of the war, Floyd Covington, the Los Angeles Urban League director, testified in an unsuccessful legal challenge to restrictive housing covenants that the only reliable source of housing that had become available to African


40 Nakagawa, “Housing Shortage.”
Americans in the city was Little Tokyo and the housing left behind by incarcerated Japanese Americans.\(^{41}\)

During the war, African Americans occupied a tenuous social position in these neighborhoods. In addition to physically replacing Japanese Americans, they took on some of the Japanese American communities’ social position and became a substitute for state concerns about contagion and invasion. Although they were not immigrants, African Americans from the South represented a dangerous foreign presence because local government officials and civilians saw them as infiltrating and contaminating the cities in which they tried to settle. Japanese Americans living in pre-war Japantowns had been subject to similar scrutiny of their ethnic enclaves, but the presence of a large number of African Americans drew attention to these neighborhoods in new and different ways. During the war, local governments in San Francisco and Los Angeles began laying the groundwork to target and control residents of predominantly Black neighborhoods, whose presence disrupted the cities’ unstable equilibrium. The end of the war and the return of Japanese Americans further destabilized the local racial order, created new circumstances that alarmed white officials, and led to further state intervention in these neighborhoods.

**An Uneasy Homecoming**

In the Summer 1942 issue of *Common Ground*, Carey McWilliams expressed doubt over the post-war fate of Japanese Americans. “I find it extremely difficult to imagine that the Japanese will eventually resettle again in large numbers on the West Coast,” he wrote. “In California, at least, the doors have been locked behind them. … Mass evacuation is drastic economic and social surgery; once a group has been forcefully removed, they cannot by mere executive fiat be restored.”\(^{42}\) When the government displaced Japanese Americans from the West Coast, it put no safeguards in place to

\(^{41}\) Ibid.

ensure that they would be able to return to their former homes. As such, the question of where incarcerated Japanese Americans would settle after they were released from concentration camps was a major issue that preoccupied detainees and state officials alike. In an Autumn 1942 *Common Ground* article, Robert L. Brown, the Public Relations Director of the Manzanar Relocation Center, reported that “[t]hrough all the standard pattern of life at Manzanar … runs the river of doubt – the fear of the future. … ‘But after the war – what happens?’ is the question in every adult mind.”

Many Japanese Americans anxiously awaited their eventual release, but they also worried about how they would fit back into the communities from which they had been removed. One elderly leader interviewed in Brown’s article argued in favor of dispersal and assimilation after the war: “We must scatter, spread ourselves thin over the country … We have lived too long in Little Tokyos all over the country. Our Caucasian neighbors do not know us. We trade among ourselves, have our own friends, and live apart from the country we are now frantically trying to cling to. No one knows us.”

Towards the end of the war, even some prominent Japanese American organizations and leaders advocated for dispersal, including the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL). In late 1944, Saburo Kido, the JACL president, elaborated on this position, stating, “Since [African Americans] occupy the former Japanese residential district, they will resent being displaced by returning evacuees.” From a practical perspective, figures like Kido and McWilliams did raise valid points: once Japanese Americans had been displaced, other people had quickly overtaken their former neighborhoods, businesses, and role in the economy. Japanese Americans could not simply move back into their former houses and apartments and go about their lives as they had before the war; the war had profoundly and irrevocably altered their ethnic enclaves. Furthermore, the forced

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44 Ibid.
45 Kamiya, “Western Addition.”
removal and period of internment had left many Japanese Americans in debt, or with significantly less savings than before the war, which complicated the prospect of resettlement. As Japanese Americans were released from internment camps, they were “more alienated than ever from the mainstream American polity,” having spent the past several years physically removed from the rest of the nation and held in isolated camps, which made social integration back into their pre-war communities more challenging.46

On December 17, 1944, the Western Defense Command (WDC) issued Public Proclamation No. 21, which lifted the exclusion order and allowed Japanese Americans to return to the West Coast, effective January 2, 1945.47 With a single legal statement, the state reversed several years of federal policy and began dismantling the expansive government bureaucracy that had been put in place to oversee the removal and incarceration of the West’s Japanese American population. The ease with which the state withdrew the exclusion order underscores the precariousness of citizenship and how quickly the government could grant or revoke people’s rights. Moreover, it demonstrates the power with which the state is invested to define and redefine people’s citizenship in ways that contradict previous articulations of citizenship and belonging. The state’s ability to shift dramatically instilled a sense of vulnerability and fear among Japanese Americans that the government could take action against them at any time, which made it challenging for people to regain confidence and trust in the nation’s leaders and institutions.

By April 1945, fewer than 1,300 Japanese Americans had returned to California. Instead, many chose to settle on the East Coast or in the Midwest, with small but robust communities forming in New York City and Chicago. However, for many Japanese Americans, the West Coast was their home, and they were determined to return to their pre-war neighborhoods. According to

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Doris Morimoto, “I’ve lived on Fillmore Street all my life. This is the only place I know, the only place I feel comfortable living. … It’s my home.”

By 1946, approximately half of the pre-war Japanese American community had returned to San Francisco’s Nihonmachi, and approximately 60 percent of Los Angeles County’s Japanese American population had come back.

This homecoming was bittersweet for many Japanese Americans. Returning to their pre-war neighborhoods was an exciting prospect for people who had been incarcerated for the past several years far away in unfamiliar, impersonal, and inhospitable quarters behind barbed wire fences. For some, like Fumi Manabe Hayashi – who lived in Berkeley, California, before the war – returning home was a mostly positive experience: “The Berkeley fog was cold, and we tried to stay warm even within our house, yet we were overjoyed to be in our own home again, living in our beloved city among friends who were familiar to us.” During the war, the family’s home was rented to many wartime workers from Richmond’s Kaiser Shipyards, and they found the home in disrepair upon their return, but overall Hayashi and the rest of her family were delighted to be back.

Others returning to San Francisco’s Nihonmachi and Los Angeles’ Little Tokyo, however, found it disorienting and overwhelming. Many Japanese Americans hoped that upon their return to the West Coast they could quickly forget the trauma of internment and fit back into their communities. However, in their absence, the neighborhoods had visibly changed, making such a seamless reintegration impossible. Reflecting on his return to Little Tokyo after internment, Archie Miyatake expressed confusion at the unfamiliarity of his former neighborhood, stating, “One of the first places I went to see was the place where I was born. But all the houses were gone, and it was a

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48 “Doris Morimoto.”
51 Ibid., 65.
playground called the Bronzeville Playground.”52 The actor George Takei recounted a similar experience upon his family’s return to Little Tokyo: “I looked up at Mama to watch her reclaim another memory. But instead of the happy anticipation I had expected, she looked shocked. I heard her whisper to Daddy, ‘So many black people here now.’”53 It was confusing and disheartening for Japanese Americans seeking familiarity and stability in their pre-war communities to find that these spaces had been repurposed for another group during their absence. Returning Japanese Americans yearned for a sense of belonging after the indignity and alienation from their surroundings in the concentration camps. Back on the West Coast, however, Japanese Americans also encountered alienation in the spaces they considered their own. That sense of alienation came both from the physical changes and the disidentification with Black residents, who were considered a racial Other by many Japanese Americans.

As the reflections from Miyatake and Takei indicate, Japanese Americans’ transition into predominantly Black neighborhoods after the war was fraught with racial tensions and contestations over the neighborhoods’ post-war identities. Most of the interracial conflict in the post-war Western Addition and Little Tokyo-Bronzeville stemmed from two main sources: racial ignorance and competition over scarce resources in the neighborhoods. These sources of friction led to clashes between Japanese Americans and African Americans, as the two groups struggled to claim ownership over and assert their belonging to the space.

There are no recorded incidents of overt racial hostility or violence between African Americans and Japanese Americans upon the post-war integration of Little Tokyo-Bronzeville. This was remarkable, considering that many Japanese Americans experienced isolation, animosity, and

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even attacks from white Americans upon their return to the West Coast. Racial violence was the most visceral, aggressive way to dominate, intimidate, and subordinate people of color, both symbolically and physically. The lack of racial violence in Little Tokyo-Bronzeville can be explained in part by the cross-racial identification and empathy explored in the second chapter. During the war, African Americans reconsidered their relationship with Japanese Americans and began to more deeply empathize and identify with their plight as people who also experienced racism. This cross-racial consideration made Black people disinclined to harass or commit violence against returning Japanese Americans. Even if African Americans did hold prejudiced views of Japanese Americans, the depth and breadth of wartime interactions and identification between the two communities could temper the hostility, because people were able to put themselves in the other groups’ shoes.

While violence was not a problem, there are many accounts of racial ignorance and bigotry emerging as Japanese Americans returned to the West Coast. Like almost all Americans, many returning Japanese Americans held some form of anti-Black racist bias, which they expressed during their return. Moreover, this prejudice was exacerbated by the fact that most Japanese Americans had been completely secluded in a monoracial society during the war years, kept in concentration camps with little to no access to the outside world, and, in some cases, kept intentionally segregated from local African American communities.

In an interview for an oral history project, Rev. Art Takemoto recounted his thoughts and feelings when he came back to Little Tokyo-Bronzeville in early 1945. Takemoto was apprehensive of the changed neighborhood, where he was to take over the Nishi Hongwanji temple. Takemoto recalled his experience of coming back to the temple and encountering an unfamiliar group of African Americans sitting on the steps:

When your first impression is to see all the bars and all that, it’s relatively frightening. You’re the only Japanese American there, aside from the Chinese restaurants. And I lived in the temple, and it’s a big building, and I’m the only one there … I just froze … they were sort of inebriated. So they’re sitting there, but to have them there and –
oh what are they going to do next? You keep wondering and finally, after waiting, well I went to the door, opened it, and closed it. Nothing happened ... You know, appearances are often deceiving.\textsuperscript{54}

Takemoto’s reflection on his fear of the African Americans outside the temple “demonstrates the degree to which many Japanese Americans had absorbed stereotypes of black criminality and violence from mainstream Anglo discourses.”\textsuperscript{55} The quote also suggests that Takemoto resented or was disconcerted by the prospect of sharing a space he felt that he owned. However, Takemoto also makes clear that, in hindsight, he recognizes that his concerns were based on misguided stereotypes, and he expressed that he began to question and change his mindset as he lived in the racially mixed neighborhood.

John Okada dramatized these circumstances in \textit{No-No Boy} through his protagonist Ichiro, who, like Takemoto, is overcome upon his return to his former neighborhood in Seattle with a profound sense of inner turmoil regarding its new Black residents:

A shooting gallery stood where once had been a clothing store; fish and chips had replaced a jewelry shop; and a bunch of Negroes were horsing around raucously in front of a pool parlor. . . He walked past the pool parlor, picking his way gingerly among the Negroes, of whom there had been only a few at one time and of whom there seemed to be nothing but now.\textsuperscript{56}

Ichiro’s disorientation at seeing the changes to his once-familiar neighborhood is exacerbated by the unpleasant interaction he has with some of the neighborhood’s new residents. As he walked past his new Black neighbors, one says: “Go back to Tokyo, boy.” Ichiro’s reaction was intense, racial, and confused: “Friggin’ niggers, he uttered savagely to himself and, from the same place deep down inside where tolerance for the Negroes ... abided ... the hate which was unrelenting and terrifying seethed up.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 214-215.
\textsuperscript{56} Okada, \textit{No-No Boy}, 6-7.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
The racial epithets hurled by both the nameless African American character and Ichiro demonstrate that there was some degree of hostility at the prospect of sharing the space. The African American heckler tells Ichiro to leave the neighborhood – to go back to Japan, a place that is not Ichiro’s home – which denies Ichiro the right to exist and belong to the community in Seattle in which he was raised and considers his home. Ichiro viciously replies to this comment with an anti-Black slur, making clear his own displeasure at sharing the space with African Americans. Notably, Okada’s text complicates the notion that Ichiro’s words and feelings are borne purely from an ingrained racial animus. By framing Ichiro’s response as coming from the same part of himself that tolerates and sympathizes with African Americans due to his own experiences as a victim of prejudice, the passage ties together Ichiro’s intimate understanding of how it feels to be belittled and othered with his conflicted feelings of sympathy, anger, and hatred towards the African American characters. The passage portrays the African American characters negatively, implying that they are responsible for the neighborhood’s decline in the detainees’ absence, but it is unclear whether this is due to a deeper racial bias within Ichiro, his emotional gut response to feeling alienated from a space that used to be intimately familiar to him and in which he now feels like an outsider, or a combination of the two.

Toru Saito, who was a boy when he and his family returned to San Francisco after the war, writes of a similar encounter and more fully elaborates on the complexities of navigating race and racism in post-war, racially mixed neighborhoods. Saito recounts the experience of walking down Third Street in San Francisco with his younger brother, Jiro. Saito notes that the two boys felt “trapped by the harsh stares of bakujin (white) strangers on the street” and ducked into a grocery store, where they were excited by the wide variety of options newly available to them, since they did not have access to items like Coca-Cola or 7Up while they were incarcerated. Suddenly, the shopkeeper berated the two boys and pointed to a sign that said, “NO JAPS ALLOWED.” Saito
and his brother began to walk away, crestfallen at the racism they had experienced. Saito explains that, on their way home, the brothers had another charged interaction, this time with a Black man on the street:

[W]e see our first kokujin (black) man, our eyes wide with shock and wonder. … The sight of this young, dark-skinned man horrifies us. His chocolate-brown face and arms, his black woolen hair — they scare us to tears. … Now, many years later, I realize he must have been offended by our reactions, at how we ran away as fast as we could.\(^{58}\)

Reflecting on the situation decades later, Saito was filled with anguish and guilt about his childhood response to encountering the Black man because he feels empathy and identifies with the man he saw on the street. Saito ran away from the man because he seemed unfamiliar and foreign, which was degrading experience to which Saito could personally relate. Directing his reflection to the man from that day, Saito writes, “Did I hurt you that day or have you forgotten? I know I haven’t. Can you forgive me? Before you do, I can’t feel real freedom in my heart.” Saito’s account is particularly powerful because it juxtaposes his experience as a victim of anti-Japanese racism with his perpetuation of anti-Black prejudice. Saito explains that his ignorance stemmed from being incarcerated for much of his childhood; the system of internment had blocked him from experiencing “the benefits of an open society with multiple cultures and differences.” Moreover, Saito and his brother were deeply hurt by the racism, alienation, and marginalization they faced while walking down the street, and then Saito found himself responsible for making someone else feel similarly. He writes, “I know a stare can make you feel unwanted and a stranger. I meant no harm.” Saito tries to find common ground with the Black man by acknowledging their mutual experience of being excluded and seen as outsiders.\(^{59}\)

\(^{58}\) Toru Saito quoted in *Making Home from War*, ed. Brian Komei Dempster, 127.

\(^{59}\) Ibid.
As these anecdotes demonstrate, there were racial prejudices and missteps between Japanese Americans and African Americans as they struggled to get used to interacting with and living alongside people of other races. These incidents were often a result of ignorance or fear rather than malice, but they nonetheless had a harmful impact on those affected. Incidents like those above created a sense of alienation from other community members or the neighborhood itself. Interracial tensions had the potential to damage residents’ sense of belonging to the community, which was part of the reason that it was crucial for Japanese Americans and African Americans to try to work through these issues and find common ground. Furthermore, Japanese Americans and African Americans had to figure out how to work together because they had nowhere else to go. In the immediate post-war era, an interconnected system of restrictive housing covenants, alien land laws, individual prejudice, and poverty kept Japanese Americans and African Americans locked out of homeownership and settlement in predominantly white neighborhoods. By custom and design, both communities were trapped in these ethnic enclaves and had few options except to figure out how to coexist.

Forced into ethnic enclaves and excluded from many job opportunities, Japanese Americans and African Americans found themselves occupying a similar social position after the war, which put them in direct competition for limited resources in their ghettoized neighborhoods. Suddenly, the lofty visions of interracial solidarity and cooperation pledged by both communities during the war were put to the test by the real-world insecurities and constraints that both groups faced. Even before incarcerated Japanese Americans were released, there were limited housing options in both San Francisco and Los Angeles. When Japanese Americans returned, it was an additional group of people that needed housing. Moreover, as part of their desire to regain a sense of normalcy and re-establish their pre-war social standing, many Japanese Americans sought to reclaim the houses, apartments, and storefronts that they had been forced to vacate several years before.
As Japanese Americans returned to the West Coast, some communities of color were anxious about how they would be affected. One survey reported that African Americans were both afraid of “losing hard-won improvements gained during the war and evacuation” and of “losing all rights eventually if they did not unite with other minorities to defend the evacuated minority.” The *Pacific Citizen* corroborated reports of anxiety about Japanese Americans’ return, writing that African Americans and Filipino Americans “resisted changes to their neighborhoods” because they worried that “the returnees will furnish further competition to them in their already difficult search for housing and the better class of jobs.” For African Americans living in Japantowns, their settlement and increased social mobility was a result of Japanese Americans’ incarceration, and for some African Americans, the prospect of Japanese Americans’ reintegration into the community threatened their sense of control, stability, and ownership over the space.

In the November 1945 issue of the *JACL Reporter*, one of the League’s wartime publications, Saburo Kido urged Japanese Americans to be respectful and accommodating of Japantowns’ African American residents, though he acknowledged that “there is bound to be some resentment against the returning Japanese property owners by those who are displaced.” Kido raised the case of a Japanese American purchasing a hotel’s lease in Little Tokyo and attempting to evict all the African American tenants, although the buyer was ultimately encouraged to make changes “gradually instead of abruptly.” Actions like those of the hotel owner, Kido warned, would be disastrous to the community’s wellbeing. In the article, Kido stressed, “Even if there is a right to take action, it is important that tact be applied. The Negroes on the whole are sympathetic towards the Japanese.

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They understand that the district they are occupying belonged to the evacuees.” Kido argued that it was unwise to sow discord with a group that had been a consistent and generous ally to Japanese Americans. Moreover, Kido predicted that Japanese Americans and African Americans likely would be sharing the neighborhoods because of African Americans’ wartime property investments and purchases. Therefore, it was prudent for the two groups to remain on good terms.

Despite Kido’s calls for “tact” and consideration of the salient factors at hand, some Japanese Americans went ahead and displaced African American residents in their attempts to regain their position in the community. In some cases, this was done gradually, through a process known as “unobjectionable infiltration,” in which Japanese Americans would replace African Americans when the latter’s leases were up. However, there were also many cases in which Japanese Americans would take more aggressive measures to regain property. For example, in 1945, returning Japanese Americans began eviction proceedings for the Buddhist temple on First Street and Central Avenue, which had been used as a Baptist congregation serving African American war workers. The church’s pastor “believed he had already placed a down payment on the building,” but the eviction proceedings nonetheless continued.

A significant factor that facilitated Japanese Americans’ ability to take over property inhabited and/or used by African Americans was the fact that neither African Americans nor Japanese Americans owned many of the properties in the districts in the first place. Instead, they were both subject to the whims and preferences of white landlords. In many cases in the post-war period, landlords chose to rent to Japanese Americans over African Americans. This was done in

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part because, according to Rev. Unoura, the landlords “had experience with both the Japanese
tenants, and the Negro tenants, and they preferred the Japanese because they kept the buildings up
better, and boosted the land value.” Kango Kunitsugu echoed this sentiment by explaining that
“property owners had this prejudicial point of view that the Japanese tenants always paid on time.”
This preferential treatment led to resentment from displaced African American residents, although
many of them also recognized that the true cause of their misfortune was the white landlords, not
the Japanese Americans who benefited.

As Japanese American communities became more well-established in their former
neighborhoods, tensions continued to simmer between the returned internees and African American
residents as the two groups jockeyed for control over the neighborhoods’ affairs. In 1947, as the
crime rate in Little Tokyo-Bronzeville rose, the Japanese Businessmen’s Association hired two Nisei
veterans to patrol the neighborhood at night. This decision provoked anger and consternation
among the neighborhood’s Black residents, who saw the veterans’ hiring as a measure meant “to
force the Negroes out of Little Tokyo.” In an attempt to de-escalate tensions, the Council for Civic
Unity organized a meeting for community members to voice their opinions on this issue. At the
forum, Kenji Ito, a Nisei attorney, tried to assuage African Americans’ fears by saying that the
patrols were not meant to target African Americans. Ito was asked whether Japanese Americans did
want to displace African Americans, and he succinctly shut down this idea, connecting it back to the
injustice of internment: “Japanese don’t believe in evacuation.” This incident reflected the fraught

Records, Bancroft Library, quoted in Jenks, “Bronzeville, Little Tokyo, and the Unstable Geography of Race in Post-
World War II Los Angeles,” 221.
66 Kango Kunitsugu, interview by Dave Biniasz for the Japanese American Project, November 28, 1973, California
State University, Fullerton, quoted in ibid.
68 “Los Angeles Minority Groups Join Hands to Make Brotherhood Reality,” Daily News, March 4, 1947, Box 76,
Negro Relations - 1947 Folder, JAF Collection, Huntington Library, quoted in ibid.
endeavor of trying to determine who was in control of the neighborhood, who had the authority to make decisions about the community’s wellbeing, and how to implement policies that were respectful and cognizant of all the community members’ different needs.

In addition to physical displacement and the strain caused by limited housing, the post-war economic situation also caused tension between the groups, as Japanese Americans’ ascendance in the local economy coincided with African Americans’ downward turn. As the national and state economies readjusted for peacetime, African Americans suffered the most severe consequences, losing their jobs at higher rates than their white counterparts and earning lower wages than during the war years. Black-owned businesses suffered as the financial base of the African American community withered. Complicating matters, African Americans patronized Japanese-owned businesses, but Japanese Americans rarely shopped at Black-owned businesses. According to Rev. Harold Merrybright Kingsley, “[W]hen a Japanese comes into town, they go to a Japanese store or restaurant. The Negro will go into either Japanese or Negro owned shops.”

Although Japanese-owned stores’ multiracial patronage enabled Japanese American business owners to quickly re-establish themselves in the community, some African Americans felt like their contributions to Japanese Americans’ economic base were not recognized. An anonymous African American resident of Little Tokyo-Bronzeville sent a letter to the editor of the Los Angeles Tribune complaining about the way that African Americans were received by the Japanese American business owners, writing, “[I]n some Japanese business places, we are coldly received as if our trade wasn’t wanted, and in others they serve us with a grain of contempt.”

Historian Allison Varzally contextualizes these economic slights within a broader dynamic occurring in the neighborhood, noting, “Making matters even worse, more and more Japanese store

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69 Interview with Rev. Harold Merrybright Kingsley, quoted in ibid., 223.
owners moved their residences out of the neighborhood. African Americans interpreted this choice, to live in one place and work in another, as disrespectful to, even destructive of, the immediate community.  

Like the conflicts over housing, tensions between Japanese Americans and African Americans over business ownership and patronage were rooted in a desire to exert control and ownership over the space. The pressure of economic competition created the sense that Japanese Americans and African Americans were diametrically opposed in the local economy; under such a formulation, Japanese Americans’ economic gains came at the direct expense of African Americans. Of course, such a formulation fails to recognize that the competition was a result of white intervention to limit both groups’ full participation in the national economy. Japanese- and Black-owned businesses were relegated to ethnic economies, borne from exclusion. This economic marginalization kept Japanese Americans and African Americans poorer than their white counterparts and fostered desperation as people were anxious to stay afloat and survive. The state interventions in racialized groups’ economic participation was, in part, a tactic to impose divide-and-conquer rule upon citizens of color. Working together in the business sector would be beneficial for both groups, as it had the potential to sidestep the state’s tactics and create a system based not on hierarchy and subordination but rather on mutual support.

Post-War Alliances

As Japanese Americans and African Americans settled into the newly-shared neighborhood spaces, many community members drew on the legacies of the wartime connections between the two communities to make sure the Western Addition and Little Tokyo-Bronzeville would be bicultural, welcoming spaces in which Japanese Americans and African Americans could coexist and belong as equals. The war created new priorities and perspectives for members of racialized groups,

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71 Varzally, Making a Non-White America, 188.
as they recognized the role of the state in orchestrating both anti-Japanese and anti-Black racial oppression. This recognition motivated groups to work together, hoping that unity could help them overcome their subordination. Allison Varzally describes these neighborhoods as sites of “compromise and cooperation” that were committed to interracial harmony and “facilitated joint civil rights activities.”

Although the post-war era was undoubtedly marked by tensions, many community organizations – both Japanese American and African American – tried to preemptively release statements demonstrating their commitment to building interracial neighborhoods in order to ease the transition. For example, the Home Protective Association, headed by Charlotta Bass, the Los Angeles-based publisher and editor of the California Eagle, passed a resolution prior to Japanese Americans’ return recognizing the Japanese American community’s right to their pre-war properties. Additionally, an editorial published in the California Eagle on January 4, 1945, chastised mainstream media publications for their negative portrayal of Japanese Americans and discouraged readers from doing the same. In the November 1945 issue of the JACL Reporter, Saburo Kido wrote, “‘The Negro-Japanese relationship in Los Angeles and elsewhere must be guarded carefully.’” Similarly, the Los Angeles Tribune published an article that encouraged all people of color to “be sympathetic toward one another” during the post-war adjustment period and keep in mind their shared “interest in justice and the triumph of conscience.” These actions drew upon the patterns of collaboration and sense of common cause developed between Japanese Americans and African Americans during the war. As outlined in the second chapter, the war served as a catalyst

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73 Nakagawa, “Housing Shortage.”
74 Nakagawa, “Transition.”
75 Ibid.
that drew Japanese Americans and African Americans into greater contact with one another and sensitized both groups to the plight of the other. Many African Americans were sympathetic to the hardships Japanese Americans faced as a result of their displacement and incarceration, and they did not want to further harm the community as it tried to reintegrate into civilian life. Likewise, Japanese Americans became more aware of and sensitive to African Americans’ struggles for citizenship during the war, and they did not want to be responsible for creating more obstacles for the community. By publicizing their goodwill towards one another, Japanese Americans and African Americans drew on the wartime emergent interracial solidarity to avoid and overcome any simmering tensions.

The strategy of publicly declaring a commitment to interracial cooperation was undertaken in part to counter frenzied portrayals in the white press that anticipated an impending race war when returning internees and the Black war workers encountered one another. Preceding incarcerated Japanese Americans’ release, many white newspapers and magazines published articles that appeared to intentionally agitate for or draw attention to the possibility of interracial clashes and outright violence in Japantowns that had been repopulated by African Americans during the war. In a 1946 feature cheekily titled “The Race War That Flopped,” Ebony magazine countered the “glum predictions of both social scientists and Hearst headline writers” who “huffed and puffed for a race war” by fomenting hysteria about “Japs [re-invading] Little Tokyo.” Rather than resulting in a “Negro-Nisei battle,” Ebony reported that the transition to the post-war Little Tokyo-Bronzeville neighborhood was characterized by “a heartfelt kinship … between the two minorities, both victims of race hate.” As Allison Varzally notes, “In discovering and publicizing positive interactions, Blacks and Japanese dismissed or at least downplayed stories of confrontation that could themselves

78 Ibid.
sew discord. As significant, by blaming Whites for inventing or exaggerating interracial animosity, they offered new reasons for collaboration among minorities.”

Identifying white media agitation and racist state policies as the main sources of tensions between the groups gave more justification for why Japanese Americans and African Americans should work together rather than in opposition to one another.

The *Ebony* feature highlighted the successful interracial cooperation at the First Street Clinic, the American Veterans Committee, and Pilgrim House, in addition to chronicling the ways in which Little Tokyo-Bronzeville residents shared spaces at churches, night clubs, barber shops, grocery stores, and on the playground. This rosy picture of an integrated, harmonious bicultural community praised the residents for avoiding the pitfalls of racism and infighting and overcoming prejudices. The *Ebony* feature suggested that it was possible – and, in fact, preferable – for Japanese Americans and African Americans to work together in post-war multiracial enclaves, where they could synthesize their institutions, businesses, and cultures so that everyone could belong and stake a claim to the neighborhood.

Additionally, many Japanese Americans and African Americans sharing the neighborhoods recognized that both groups were in this position because of their common struggle to obtain quality housing as a result of institutionalized racist barriers to their settlement outside of the inner-city ethnic enclaves. The *Ebony* feature acknowledged that “the ghetto restrictions placed around Negroes and Japanese alike in economic, housing matters, made cooperation essential for even a degree of happiness.” Japanese Americans and African Americans recognized that the other racialized group was not the cause of their limited social or economic mobility and that infighting between the two groups would not advance their cause for fair and equal housing. There was no use

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80 “The Race War That Flopped,” 5.
in sowing divisions and hostilities within the community. With limited options and few other neighborhoods open to their settlement, that would only make the living situation in shared spaces intolerable for both groups. In contrast, working together and building community would benefit both groups and would allow them to both belong to the neighborhoods.

These post-war alliances took a different form and tone than the expressions of solidarity cultivated during the war years. The rhetoric during the war focused on the injustices of internment and emphasized the common goal of democracy, which lost some urgency and rhetorical power after the U.S. emerged victorious in 1945 and released detained Japanese Americans. Moreover, during the war, many of the most potent expressions of interracial solidarity were abstract and theoretical declarations of people’s high-minded values, often published in newspapers or magazines. However, in the post-war era, people had to translate those ideals into practice on the ground, as they navigated sharing physical spaces with their new neighbors. Nonetheless, the language of common cause extolled by Japanese American and African American leaders and writers during the war undoubtedly influenced people’s perspectives after the war. By working together, Japanese Americans and African Americans rejected the common divide-and-conquer strategies and policies of the state, which relied on infighting and competition between racialized groups as a mechanism of maintaining a racial hierarchy.

The recognition of common cause resulted in individual community members making gestures to help members of the other racialized group feel welcome and at home in the neighborhood. In Little Tokyo-Bronzeville, both Japanese American and African American stores displayed signs in their windows that read, “We respect all,” as a token of their “commitment to peaceful coexistence.”

Likewise, some African American residents invited returning detainees into

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81 Jenks, “Bronzeville, Little Tokyo, and the Unstable Geography of Race in Post-World War II Los Angeles,” 204.
their homes to get to know one another. A man named John Allen hosted an informal brunch at his home where four Japanese Americans – Yoneko Gotori, Ruth Horikawa, Agnes Ito, and Tom Masamori – were the guests of honor.\(^82\) These outreach efforts help foster positive interpersonal relationships between Japanese Americans and African Americans.

In addition to individuals’ expressions of solidarity and commitment to cooperation, several major community institutions shifted their programming to help ensure that both Japanese Americans and African Americans felt a sense of belonging in their shared neighborhoods. One particularly notable institution that promoted interracial solidarity was Pilgrim House, which was established in September 1943 as a social services center to assist the thousands of African American newcomers that had moved to Bronzeville. It was founded by the Little Tokyo Committee, which was a special committee within the Welfare Council of Metropolitan Los Angeles, the Social Service Department of Los Angeles County. Pilgrim House was located at 120 North San Pedro Street, which served as the Japanese Union Church building before the war. Pilgrim House also stored the belongings of Japanese Americans during the war.\(^83\) Pilgrim House provided the Black community with a wide variety of social services during the war, including “health, sanitation, education, housing and employment referrals.” Pilgrim House also coordinated many activities for adults and children, such as “a nursery school; Boy Scout and Cub Scout troops; a basketball team; ceramics classes; luncheons; counseling; playground space; a toy loan program; meeting space for various organizations; free immunization service through the city Health Department; play performances; and off-site camping activities.”\(^84\) In February 1944, Rev. Harold Merrybright Kingsley – a nationally

\(^82\) Nakagawa, “Transition.”


\(^84\) Ibid.
renowned African American minister from Chicago – was appointed the Executive Director of Pilgrim House.85

As evidenced by its extensive, wide-ranging public programming, Pilgrim House was committed to the neighborhood’s holistic wellbeing, and when Japanese Americans began moving back to the Little Tokyo-Bronzeville district, Pilgrim House adapted its programming to meet the needs of the returning community members. In 1945, Pilgrim House formed the Common Ground Committee to foster positive interracial relations between Japanese American and African American residents. The Committee hosted several gatherings to facilitate interactions between community members of different races. Pilgrim House also employed Sam Ishikawa to undertake outreach efforts to the neighborhood’s returned Japanese American community. Ishikawa also served as an advisor on the Common Ground Committee. To further demonstrate its commitment to creating and maintaining a bicultural community, Pilgrim House also began sharing its space with the members of the Japanese Union Church, which held religious services and hosted Japanese language classes. Several members of the church – Rev. Sohei Kowta, Rev. Arnold Nakajima, Rev. Seido Ogawa, and Chikashi Tanaka – also served on the Pilgrim House board. These steps showed Pilgrim House’s genuine flexibility and evolution as an organization to better serve the community.

One of the Common Ground Committee’s most popular community meetings was an event featuring W. E. B. Du Bois that was well-attended by the neighborhood’s African American, Japanese American, and Mexican American residents. Du Bois discussed the need for people to “[get] acquainted” with one another and the issue posed by different communities of color only being familiar with one another “through the hysteria of the majority.” He argued that the separation and alienation between different groups of color disempowered people of color and

solidified the power of white supremacy. The solution to this problem, as Du Bois conceived of it, was for different communities to “[know] each other.” This proposed solution mirrored the wartime experiences that drew Japanese Americans and African Americans together. As analyzed in the second chapter, cross-racial friendships and interpersonal relationships helped facilitate deeper interracial alliances and inspire a holistic racial consciousness among people of color.

In 1947, the owners of 120 North San Pedro Street voted to shift the building’s ownership from Pilgrim House back to the Union Church. During a December 17, 1947, board meeting, a Pilgrim House special committee affirmed that “the building belongs to the Japanese Church and should be returned to them in accordance with the original understanding.” As such, Pilgrim House did not contest the building owners’ decision and instead began the process of relocating. Pilgrim House also reached out to the Black press to preemptively clarify that the organization was leaving willingly and was not being displaced by Japanese Americans. On September 1, 1948, Pilgrim House relocated to 150 North Los Angeles Street. This concession of power was a massive symbolic gesture that illustrated the organization’s empathy for Japanese Americans’ precarious position and a commitment to building a new community that reflected the changed demographics of the neighborhood.

Similar to Pilgrim House, both the Booker T. Washington Community Center and the Buchanan YMCA in the Western Addition worked to cultivate interracial coalitions and common understanding between the neighborhood’s Japanese American and African American residents. Before the war, both of these sites were used primarily by Japanese Americans, but after the war, they transitioned into shared spaces. In 1945, the community center’s director invited Japanese Americans and African Americans to a discussion-based event entitled “Test of Democracy.” As

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87 Nakagawa, “Pilgrim House.”
part of the organization’s programming, members of the NAACP, JACL, and African American publications came together to reflect on the “strains and gains” of coexisting in the Western Addition. Likewise, at the YMCA, many people initially were hesitant to share the space, but over time the organization developed programming, such as language classes and bridge games, that brought people together, and eventually the YMCA became known and accepted as a space for both Japanese Americans and African Americans. A major theme running through this type of programming was a call for communities of color to bridge the gaps between them and seek unity. Compromising and sharing were necessary to maintain a spirit of interracial cooperation in the neighborhood.

Although there was some economic competition, the commercial sector also proved to be a space where Japanese Americans and African Americans could work together. On January 19, 1945, African American business owners in Bronzeville hosted a gathering at the Rendezvous Club to welcome Japanese Americans back to the neighborhood. On March 30, 1945, Kiichi Uyeda became the first returned Japanese American to open a business in Little Tokyo-Bronzeville after the war. To celebrate the opening of Uyeda’s business, the Bronzeville 5-10-25 Cents Store, a group of African American business owners gifted him with flowers. Hillary Jenks argues that African American business owners’ hospitality represented both genuine gestures of goodwill and a sign that African Americans felt a sense of ownership over the space. She writes, “[The gestures] were also symbolic spatial practices that demonstrated African Americans’ claim to Bronzeville in their appropriation of the right to welcome Japanese Americans back to their old neighborhood.”

Nonetheless, such proactive and generous examples of cooperation contributed to positive relationships among business owners and patrons. Moreover, even if African Americans felt that

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89 Ibid., 191.
they were the rightful owners of the neighborhood’s commercial sphere, their gestures made clear that they were open to facilitating Japanese American businesses’ inclusion and sharing the space.

Another major sign of the neighborhoods’ integration and dedication to collaboration was the phenomenon of the multiracial workforces and patronage in both Japanese- and Black-owned businesses. In Little Tokyo-Bronzeville, some business owners hired members of the other racialized group to work at their businesses, such as Kiichi Uyeda, who hired African American clerks to work at his five-and-dime store, and Samuel Evans, who hired Japanese American waitresses to work at his restaurant, the Bamboo Room. The racially mixed staff of these businesses also reflected the multiracial base of customers that they served. In the pre-war era, most Japanese-owned businesses’ customers were European immigrants and other Japanese Americans. By contrast, after the war, Japanese American business owners reported that they had “lots of colored trade.”91 Another Japanese American business owner commented that “75% of my business now is with the colored people who are good spenders and they don’t quibble so much.”92 This changed situation was ultimately positive for Japanese American business owners, although it did lead to some struggles for African American business owners.

The Unifying Power of Jazz

Jazz music was a significant and special mode of connection between Japanese Americans and African Americans in the Western Addition and Little Tokyo-Bronzeville after the war. In these neighborhoods, culture became a site of solidarity and friendship as people developed affinities by playing and listening to music together. Returned Japanese Americans who grew up in Little Tokyo-Bronzeville after internment “have fond memories of discovering jazz and gospel music in black storefronts, recalling especially that they were treated as welcome participants in these locations

91 Quoted in Varzally, Making a Non-White America, 187.
92 Tom Sasaki, Daily Reports from Los Angeles, July 1946, JAERR, quoted in ibid.
rather than interlopers.”

Japanese American musicians were welcomed into the jazz scene in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Drummer Paul Togawa played with pianist Hampton Hawes and with Lionel Hampton’s band, and Tetsu Bessho interacted with Dexter Gordon, Teddy Edwards, and Billy Higgins in the Los Angeles jazz scene. Even when Japanese American jazz musicians were eligible to perform with white ensembles, many chose to work with African American musicians instead, such as George Yoshida, who joined the segregated Black union, San Francisco Musicians Union Local #669, and Harry Kitano, who played with all-Black ensembles.

According to Earl Watkins, a jazz drummer in the Fillmore, music was a key part of developing community and friendship across races:

\[\text{[Jazz] did a lot to help integrate the races, to bring them together socially. There was discrimination and separation of the races but with the music, it's an international language. It had a way of bringing the white, black, and Asian communities together. I made many friends from all races while I was working in nightclubs. If our music hadn't exploded the way it did, we probably wouldn't have had the mixing of the races, or as much of the camaraderie as we did. The Fillmore jazz had a wonderful social impact.}\]

Watkins fondly recalled the power of jazz in the post-war era, praising it for its unifying power. Jazz clubs provided a fun forum where people of different races could come together with a common interest and cultivate relationships based on mutual respect for the music. This was perhaps due in part to the fact that, as a musical genre, jazz emphasizes improvisation and collaboration as its central tenets. This attitude towards music translated into people’s interpersonal relationships as musicians and listeners, and jazz proved to be a sufficiently flexible and accepting medium to bring people together. Jazz music was recognized as a key part of African American culture in the Western Addition and Little Tokyo-Bronzeville, but musicians’ and clubs’ openness and inclusivity towards

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players and listeners of different races created an environment where both African Americans and Japanese Americans felt like they belonged.

In 1949, a Victorian building at 1690 Post Street in San Francisco – which was once Nippon Drugs, a Japanese-owned neighborhood pharmacy in operation since before 1920 – was reopened as Vout City, a nightclub run by Slim Gaillard, an eccentric jazz singer, composer, pianist, and composer. Gaillard’s club was short-lived, and after the business went under, the building’s owner, Charles Sullivan, sought out John “Jimbo” Edwards as a new tenant. Edwards was one of the first African American car salesman in the city, and he decided to convert 1690 Post into a cafe called Jimbo’s Waffle Shop. Shortly thereafter, musicians discovered an unused back room in Jimbo’s, which they began using for jam sessions. Edwards renamed the space Bop City in 1950, and it became one of the area’s preeminent jazz clubs. Incidentally, the club was located “right next to one of the oldest Japanese businesses in the city, Uoki Sakai’s fish market.” This juxtaposition exemplified the way in which jazz became deeply intertwined with Japanese Americans’ lives in the post-war era.

Many Japanese American residents who grew up in the Western Addition after the war were profoundly shaped by the neighborhood’s jazz scene. According to Steve Nakajo, who lived in the Western Addition during the 1950s, Bop City was a touchstone in his conception of the neighborhood. Nakajo fondly recalled the multiracial landmarks of the neighborhood:

> My world starts from Octavia and Bush at Morning Star Schoolyard. … By the time you get down to Bush Street and Laguna, the commercial community starts to appear. You’re passing African American churches. You’re passing Victorian storefronts that were part of tofu or bean cake factories. … Then as you descended down Post Street from Laguna, you started to see barber shops, merchandise shops, Japanese artifacts, and all of a sudden, there’s Jimbo’s Bop City. If you were really hip in this community, you’d try to sneak out of your house at about 2am to be able

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96 Kamiya, “Western Addition.”
97 Kamiya, “Western Addition.”
Jazz became an integral part of some Japanese Americans’ lives. Like Nakajo, Daisy Uyeda Satoda’s sense of the world was shaped by the neighborhood’s jazz scene. Satoda’s mother opened the King Café in 1948, which became a hangout spot for jazz figures. In an essay about her post-war experience, Satoda recalls one particularly memorable encounter at the café:

One afternoon, my sister Elsie, who was attending Lowell High School, dropped a coin in the jukebox of the King Café and played, for the hundredth time, her favorite song: “Gloomy Sunday” by Billie Holliday. Elsie sang and swayed to the music as a tall and attractive woman came up, stood behind her, and said, “Um, do you like that song?” Elsie, snapping her fingers and swinging her hips, said, “Oh, yes, this song is sooo good.” The lady added, “Did you know that’s me singing on that record?”

This anecdote underscores the depth and frequency of connections between Japanese Americans and African Americans in the shared spaces, as well as the power of jazz to build connections between people. Like Bop City, King Café became a community institution known for being a shared space for people of all races to frequent. Satoda characterized the café as a “a melting pot where people of different races and backgrounds could mix,” and where musicians, Japanese Americans, and “society’s misfits” all belonged. It was, Satoda writes, “like a second home to [Mama],” where Japanese Americans and African Americans “coexisted in this small area of San Francisco, not just as neighbors but as friends.”

Satoda’s mother welcomed people of diverse backgrounds into her café with open arms. According to Satoda, “She let everyone in through the doors of her café,” and “anyone at anytime could come to Mama and confide in her.” Her most loyal customer was Harry, a handsome African American beat cop with a “huge grin,” who would come to the café several times a day to

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100 Ibid., 154-155.
101 Ibid., 156.
Satoda’s mother welcomed both law enforcers and law breakers into her café, such as Lois, another regular customer, who was an African American sex worker in the neighborhood. Lois would help out around the café by doing dishes and waiting tables. She refused any payment Satoda’s mother offered her. Lois lived with George, a Nisei bartender and musician, who was also a customer at the café, and she called herself Mrs. Lois Sasaki. Satoda’s mother’s inclusivity, open-mindedness, and dedication to hospitality modeled the best elements of interracial cooperation in these neighborhoods during the post-war era. She recognized her customers’ differences but did not judge them based on their backgrounds. Instead, she built and maintained a space where people felt comfortable happily coexisting together.\(^{103}\)

In the years immediately after the war, Japanese Americans and African Americans created bicultural communities in the Western Addition and Little Tokyo-Bronzeville. The state’s wartime and post-war policies forced the two racialized groups into close physical proximity and drove them to figure out how to get along with one another in the newly shared spaces. People struggled to find housing and employment and jockeyed for control over the neighborhoods’ sense of identity. These spaces were not immune from tensions, but in many cases, members of both communities drew upon the wartime legacies of cross-racial identification and empathy to try to work together. Japanese Americans and African Americans took steps to ensure that members of both racialized groups felt a sense of belonging to the bicultural neighborhoods. However, the interracial alliances in these neighborhoods raised the concerns of state officials, who began mobilizing new policies of control to maintain the racial order and displace residents yet again.

\(^{102}\) Ibid., 155.
\(^{103}\) Ibid., 156.
The End of an Era

Several years after the war, things began to change in the Western Addition and Little Tokyo-Fillmore. In its 1948 *Shelley v. Kraemer* case, the Supreme Court ruled racially restrictive housing covenants unconstitutional. The decision facilitated some Japanese Americans’ migration from urban ethnic enclaves and assimilation into predominantly white neighborhoods from which they had previously been excluded. Likewise, with rise of suburbia in the post-war era, most of Western Addition’s white residents moved away.\(^{104}\) By the 1950s, the Western Addition and Little Tokyo-Bronzeville were becoming predominantly African American neighborhoods again. This demographic shift coincided with the state’s increased post-war emphasis on modernizing and rehabilitating the United States’ cities. After the war, the federal government began prioritizing “urban renewal” and allocating funds to redevelop “blighted” property and neighborhoods.\(^ {105}\) President Truman signed the 1949 Housing Act, which allocated money to redevelop cities across the country, largely in areas that were populated by poor residents and people of color.

The new political agenda of promoting urban renewal appeared non-racial on its surface, but it was yet another expression of state power deployed to control, dictate, and limit the permanent settlement of people of color. City governments described redevelopment policies using rhetoric that emphasized structural improvements and modernization, but in reality, these policies had racialized negative impacts on the targeted neighborhoods. Urban renewal policies were intended to “fix” the problems of social unrest, vice, blight, and moral decay, which were all racially coded ideas that portrayed people of color as threats to the cities’ health and wellbeing. Urban renewal mobilized the state apparatus to target and displace marginalized residents and constrict the borders of belonging to exclude people of color on the local level.

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\(^ {104}\) “Fillmore Timeline 1860-2001.”

\(^ {105}\) *The Fillmore.*
In the twentieth century, people of color accounted for 75 percent of those displaced as a result of urban renewal projects. Local governments in San Francisco and Los Angeles targeted both the Fillmore and Little Tokyo-Bronzeville with urban renewal programs, and ultimately the racialized policies practically destroyed both communities through eminent domain and urban planning. Less than 20 years after Pearl Harbor set Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ internal migrations in motion, the government was again telling residents that they had to leave their neighborhoods. The dismantling of these neighborhoods through local governments’ interventions reveals the cyclical nature of the state’s actions to disrupt the settlement of racialized groups in order to limit their citizenship. Redevelopment was a new method for the state to retain the racial order.

The Western Addition was the San Francisco city government’s top priority under its urban renewal plans. The Fillmore was targeted in part because of the size and vibrancy of its Black community. In 1948, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency was formed. To evaluate which areas of the city should be targets for redevelopment, each neighborhood of San Francisco was scored with “penalty points” for things like dilapidation, number of traffic accidents, cases of tuberculosis, and, tellingly, its number of non-white residents. In 1956, the Fillmore neighborhood targeted for redevelopment with the Western Addition A-1 Redevelopment Project. Phase A-1 entailed building a six-lane highway, known as the Geary Boulevard or Geary Expressway, that would replace Geary Street to take people from downtown San Francisco to the outer Richmond District. The highway cut right through the Fillmore neighborhood and separated the poorer, predominantly African American area from the much wealthier neighborhood of Pacific Heights, which was adjacent to it. The urban renewal projects in the Western Addition eventually

106 “Fillmore Timeline 1860-2001.”
107 The Fillmore.
109 The Fillmore.
encompassed hundreds of city blocks. By the late 1950s and throughout the early and mid-1960s, approximately 20,000 residents – primarily Black, but also some Japanese American and white – were forced out of the Western Addition as a result of redevelopment projects.\textsuperscript{110}

Urban renewal policies also struck a major blow to Little Tokyo-Bronzeville. Both during and after the war, Bronzeville was painted by media and the white authorities with the broad brush of Black criminality, portraying the neighborhood as a seedy ghetto teeming with unsavory behavior, delinquency, and filth.\textsuperscript{111} Soon after the war, the district, directly adjacent to City Hall, was targeted as the site to build the Parker Center, the new Los Angeles Police Department headquarters. As in San Francisco, residents were displaced for the project’s realization. The city planned to “acquire by purchase or eminent domain all parcels on the block bounded by Main, Los Angeles, First, and Temple Streets” in order to complete the Parker Center project.\textsuperscript{112} Redevelopment led to the demolition of nearly 25 percent of the Little Tokyo-Bronzeville neighborhood. It is estimated that 3,000 residents were evicted to make room for the construction project, and 90 percent of those displaced were Black.\textsuperscript{113}

Pilgrim House, which had relocated to 150 North Los Angeles Street in 1948, received notice in 1949, shortly after they had moved, that their new location was slated for demolition as part of the Parker Center project.\textsuperscript{114} The organization was told to vacate the building by December 31, 1949, but it was granted an extension to stay until September 1, 1950, which was the two-year anniversary of the original date it had moved into the building. Shortly after the organization was

\textsuperscript{110} “Fillmore Timeline 1860-2001.”
\textsuperscript{111} Jenks, “Bronzeville, Little Tokyo, and the Unstable Geography of Race in Post-World War II Los Angeles,” 222.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 231.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} Nakagawa, “Pilgrim House.”
pushed out of 150 North Los Angeles Street, the Pilgrim House board voted to discontinue the organization’s operations on October 16, 1950.\textsuperscript{115}

Eminent domain was a potent tool that the city governments in San Francisco and Los Angeles wielded to control and dictate the terms of settlement for citizens of color, replacing previous strategies like racially restrictive housing covenants, Jim Crow, and alien land laws. Eminent domain is the right of the state to expropriate private property forcibly, with compensation, for public use. According to Chester Hartman, an urban planner in San Francisco, eminent domain was a crucial tool to accomplish redevelopment projects: “How do you amass large enough parcels to clear a slum if, in fact, there are hundreds, possibly thousands of owners of the property? … A major element of urban renewal is the right of a local redevelopment agency to use the government’s eminent domain powers to gain control of an entire neighborhood, or part of a city.”\textsuperscript{116} According to Willie L. Brown, Jr., the mayor of San Francisco from 1996 to 2004, the redevelopment projects in the Western Addition were motivated by a desire to reshape the city: “I think they saw land, and an opportunity to get land, and the only way to clear the land was to use the tools of government to achieve that goal.”\textsuperscript{117}

The displacement caused by redevelopment projects in the Western Addition and Little Tokyo-Bronzeville was profoundly traumatic for the neighborhoods’ residents, especially since many of them still remembered undergoing migrations to, from, and back to the neighborhoods during World War II, either as a result of internment or from seeking wartime opportunities out West. For Japanese American residents, displacement as a result of redevelopment became known as the “second evacuation,” inextricably tying it to the pattern of the government uprooting Japanese

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{117} The Fillmore.
Americans and denying them full citizenship, as exemplified by internment.\textsuperscript{118} As Hillary Jenks notes, many of the facets of the situation in the 1950s and 1960s seemed to follow a similar pattern to that of the wartime removal: “[B]arely reestablished in the enclave and still in the shadow of internment, trying to demonstrate their reliable loyalty to state authority, Japanese Americans voiced minimal protest.”\textsuperscript{119} The state’s control over people’s property and mobility again demonstrated significant elasticity of tactics and continuity of goals.

Displacement also had a devastating impact on the neighborhoods’ Black communities, who were the primary targets of the state’s post-war redevelopment efforts. While San Francisco and Los Angeles’ Japantowns remained intact following redevelopment – albeit significantly smaller and more commercial than in their pre-war days – the African American communities in the Fillmore and Bronzeville barely survived redevelopment. Reggie Pettus, a barber shop proprietor in the Fillmore, lamented the displacement of the neighborhood’s Black residents, saying, “A long time ago, it used to be years and years back, we used to call it the Fillmore. Now we call it the ‘No More.’”\textsuperscript{120} Urban renewal devastated the economic and residential base of the African American community. Just as displacement reminded Japanese Americans of their forced relocation during the war, removal made African Americans reflect on how hard they had worked to establish communities on the West Coast as they moved away from their homes in the South to try to find better lives. Carol O’Gilvie’s aunt and uncle came to the Fillmore from northeast Texas in 1943, and they moved around the neighborhood until they eventually purchased a beautiful Victorian house on Ellis Street. The family gave up the house during the neighborhood’s redevelopment, but “[a]fter they moved out, there was a long period of time before the property was actually demolished.” O’Gilvie recalled, “Every morning until the property was actually leveled, my uncle would drive and

\textsuperscript{118} Jenks, “Bronzeville, Little Tokyo, and the Unstable Geography of Race in Post-World War II Los Angeles,” 231.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
park in front of the house and read the newspaper.”121 For African Americans who had worked tirelessly since the war to build communities and carve out spaces that supported their racial identity, being forced to leave was especially difficult. They had come to the West Coast because it was supposed to be the promised land for racial equality. Although it did not live up to this expectation, many African Americans – who had taken a major risk by leaving the South, where many of their families had lived for generations – had made up their minds that they would create new permanent settlements out West. Now, they were being forced to move again. Displacement extinguished the dream of a western utopia and bred despair among African Americans that they would never find a place in the country where they belonged or could settle comfortably. Redevelopment underscored the depth of African Americans’ unbelonging on both the local and national level and signaled that Blacks would be largely consigned to a transient or ghettoized existence in the U.S.

Redevelopment projects in San Francisco and Los Angeles ushered in the end of an era of community building between Japanese Americans and African Americans. Hillary Jenks notes, “In the end … Bronzeville ceased to exist less from disputes between African and Japanese Americans than as a result of racist spatial practices by a local state that continued to view property associated with either community as less valuable, and thus easier to manipulate than Anglo-occupied real estate.”122 While the bicultural communities in the Western Addition and Little Tokyo-Bronzeville certainly struggled at times to find balance and cooperate, ultimately it was the state’s intervention that led to the neighborhoods’ destruction, just as the state’s intervention had led to the creation of and influenced the material conditions in these neighborhoods in the first place.

The parallel trajectories of the communities in the Western Addition and Little Tokyo-Bronzeville – the spatial segregation, ghettoization, overcrowding, increased interactions between

Japanese Americans and African Americans, and the ultimate dismantling of these communities – can be attributed in part to the state’s actions and strategic inactions that shaped the racial composition of the neighborhoods. This is due to the flexible cycle of the state’s power to control and influence people of color’s citizenship and belonging: while the methods and tools used shifted widely over time, there were elements of continuity in the state’s goal of demarcating and limiting Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ citizenship and role in their local communities and the nation at large.

The destruction of the multiracial enclaves in the Western Addition and Little Tokyo-Bronzeville was part of a broader cycle of upheaval, disruption, and relocation of racialized people in the United States. As part of the state’s decentered and flexible structure, changing strategy is a constant in order to maintain the unstable equilibrium. Before, during, and after the war, Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ citizenship and belonging were in flux, but they also worked hard to make gains and put down roots in the communities in which they settled. Because of this countervailing force, the state had to negotiate and change tactics in different settings to try to enact their goals of limiting these groups’ citizenship. The state’s interventions in the post-war bicultural communities in San Francisco and Los Angeles exposes the precariousness of belonging and settlement for people of color. The state took steps to reorient Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ relationship to place on the local level. For racialized groups, citizenship does not guarantee the right to assume ownership of a space or settle permanently or freely. The evolutions of the Western Addition and Little Tokyo-Bronzeville illustrate the cycle of state crackdown and accommodation against which Japanese Americans and African Americans were constantly struggling to overcome.
Conclusion

World War II was a test of the tenets of American democracy and freedom. The experiences of Japanese Americans and African Americans during the war illuminate how deeply embedded racism undergirds the U.S. state’s determination of the national identity, belonging, and entitlements of its citizens. The nation’s contribution to and support for the fight against fascism and racial tyranny abroad threw into sharp relief the racial inequality and conditional citizenship some Americans endured on the homefront. In 1963, James Baldwin’s “The Fire Next Time,” a powerful and condemning meditation on race in the United States, appeared in the *New Yorker*. In the piece, Baldwin offered his assessment of the war’s lasting significance: “The treatment accorded the Negro during the Second World War marks, for me, a turning point in the Negro’s relation to America. To put it briefly, and somewhat too simply, a certain hope died, a certain respect for white Americans faded.”\(^1\) Although Baldwin was writing specifically about African Americans, the sentiment he expressed broadly applies to other racialized groups, including Japanese Americans. Many people of color interpreted the state’s actions during the war as a sign that it was committed to maintaining a racial hierarchy, even as the United States assumed its position as “Leader of the Free World.” The war was a test and, as Baldwin concluded, America failed.

The circumstances of World War II led to, or required, a shift in how the state maintained a racial hierarchy that privileged white Americans. Before the war, “change in the racial order was epochal in scope,” since racial “minorities had very little access to the political system.”\(^2\) After the war, “racially based social movements” became more prevalent and influential; in response, the state underwent a major reformation process to re-stabilize the racist social order in the age of liberal democracy.\(^2\) This period and event in U.S. history marked the transition from a nation in which

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white power was explicitly codified and underwritten by large structures and institutions to a nation in which white supremacy was implemented and embedded in a more piecemeal and adaptable manner. The United States’ leadership role as an Allied Power cemented its global reputation as a defender of freedom coming out of the war. The world’s new superpower promoted national policies that, in theory, were democratic and racially neutral, but in practice maintained racial inequality. Having addressed the challenges of race during the war, the state’s ability to address challenges to white supremacy after the war was more sophisticated and insidious.

The state used a wide variety of tactics to dictate and restrict Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ property ownership, physical mobility, and economic participation as a means to constrict these communities’ citizenship. The state’s attempts to limit Japanese Americans’ and African Americans’ belonging to the nation served as a catalyst for these racialized groups to reflect on their relationships with one another and develop an incipient cross-racial solidarity. The magnitude of the state’s actions during the war revealed in no uncertain terms its role in and commitment to upholding and perpetuating a white supremacist racial hierarchy. This recognition spurred Japanese Americans and African Americans to connect with one another in ways that transcended racial boundaries. In the post-war era, the cross-racial relationships and identification people had cultivated were put into practice in the Western Addition and Little Tokyo-Bronzeville. The wartime and post-war transformations of these neighborhoods were a product of the state’s various interventions, which pushed people together and pulled them apart at different moments in time. After developing a holistic racial consciousness during the war, residents of these bicultural neighborhoods were more aware of how important it was to push back against the state’s tactics by remaining united.

During and immediately after the war, Japanese Americans and African Americans found myriad ways to resist the state’s shifting policies and tactics of maintaining the racial order. Some
members of these communities attempted to define themselves as part of the American national community by manipulating and expanding the state’s rhetoric of global democracy to include citizens of color on the homefront. During the war, Japanese Americans and African Americans shared theories, knowledge, and strategies with one another to gain a better sense of how the state’s policies influenced different racialized groups’ lived experiences. This transfer of ideas helped cultivate cross-racial identification with and affinity for one another that lasted into the post-war era. Immediately after the war, Japanese Americans and African Americans sharing ethnic enclaves in San Francisco and Los Angeles created unique cultures and communities informed by the lessons learned during the war. Denied government support and social services, residents of bicultural neighborhoods created alternative communal institutions to serve their communities’ needs, emphasizing inclusivity and joint belonging.

The experiences of Japanese Americans and African Americans reveal World War II to be a laboratory in which the state learned how to maintain the supremacy of whiteness in a putative democracy. In turn, the pushback from racialized groups required a refinement in the methods of perpetuating racial oppression. The greater significance lies in how the state learned and set precedents that had future value for continuing the same cycle of reifying white power, which impacted the futures of citizens of color. The shifts that occurred during the war institutionalized newer, more subtle policies and ideologies that have proven harder to overturn.

The actions of Japanese Americans and African Americans during and after the war offer lessons going forward. United in their experiences of limited citizenship and varying states of national belonging, these two groups pushed back against the state by focusing on collaboration, cooperation, respect, and sharing, in contrast to the state’s emphasis on division and hierarchy. The responses to the state presented an expansive view of what national and local belonging could mean when delinked from exclusivity and racism. These little-known narratives reveal the state’s vast
power to adapt, redefine, and impose notions of citizenship and belonging upon racialized groups. At the same time, the history that Japanese Americans and African Americans share highlights their resilience and resourcefulness to combat racism and promote an alternative vision of belonging based on interracial solidarity, empathy, and common ground.
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