

Japanese Internment Camps: How Hawaii Was Both Accepting and Unforgiving

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

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Abstract

The United States has a long and difficult history with immigrants, and it is something that is central to the legal and cultural development of the country. Hawaii, on the other hand, has a markedly different history in terms of immigration, and as a result, has a story that varies from that of the Mainland. Where the differences can be seen most prominently is the treatment of Japanese immigrants and citizens leading up to and throughout World War II. Through primary and secondary research into Japanese immigration to Hawaii and their foundation of a community, it is clear that their experience was different than that of those on the Mainland. These experiences then translated to a difference in treatment after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, which can be seen in the drastically different personal accounts of life during the war, as well as newspaper editorials published throughout the war. All together, these events point to the importance of Hawaii's and the Mainland's different histories in respect to racism and immigration, in which Hawaii was found to be more tolerant of differences and less severe in their call for confinement. As a result, it can be argued that while people of Japanese descent still faced some troubles in Hawaii during the War, due to their successful integration into society, they were able to avoid some of the hardships faced by those on the Mainland, where immigrants were constantly shunned, harassed, or banned entirely.

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Process Analysis

The process of creating and producing a thesis was something I always considered a daunting task, even before I actually got to college. I remember applying to schools back as a senior in high school and thinking about what the next four years would have in store. The culmination of the next few years, I knew, would be a thesis that I had to research and write. That thought had stayed in the back of my mind as I went through my first couple years of college, and I was always on the search for a topic that would be of interest to me. I knew that the only way to make the thesis less intimidating would be to write about something that I thought was valuable and not a burden to research and write for a whole semester. Finally, in the second semester of my sophomore year, I was tasked with writing a short paper for one of my history classes, and the topic I chose was Japanese internment camps in Hawaii during World War II. It was something I knew not a lot of people had knowledge about, but more importantly, it was something I was interested in learning more about. After writing that paper, I knew that was what I wanted to focus on for my thesis.

While it in a way took a couple years to figure out what I wanted to write about, picking my topic seems to have been the easiest part of the whole process. Once I had the topic, I needed to figure out what exactly I wanted to focus on within that, and that proved to be a challenge throughout the semester of research and writing. Originally, I had intended the thesis to be more of a compare and contrast between what happened to the Japanese in Hawaii versus those on the West Coast, with an emphasis on public perception on the Japanese population. After going through the process of finding sources and outlining, that definitely seemed to be the theme of my thesis. Actually writing it, however, showed me where my real interest in the subject lay. Though the contrast between Hawaii and the West Coast was important to telling the story of the

Japanese on the Islands, I was more interested in how the Japanese in Hawaii had created their community. Once I had the history of the community, I was able to fully discuss why their lives after the bombing of Pearl Harbor was so different from their counterparts on the Mainland.

Even though I would now consider the slight change in focus on my thesis to be beneficial and more worthy of my writing, it does not mean it did not cause significant stress. My outline that I had so carefully researched and written was basically useless. There were entire sections in there that I would no longer be writing about, as well as some things that had to be added. This was hard for me because not only did I feel a little lost in where I was going with my thesis, I also was not sure if it would still be a valid topic to discuss. This seemed to stall my will to do any writing as I was too concerned with what would be the end result. A bit counterproductive, for sure, but that appeared to be my attempt to deal with the changes I needed to make. Nevertheless, deadlines had to be met, and I needed to get something done. As I finally sat down to write, what I wanted to say came easier than I expected, and once again I found that I was excited to be writing about my topic. It was not the comparison to the West Coast that I had intended, but instead it was account of the way Japanese immigrants were able to create a community for themselves in Hawaii and how that community was able to get them through the had time that was World War II.

A key component of being able to achieve the changes that I needed while being motivated to continue writing is that I decided to complete my thesis in a traditional classroom experience, instead of simply doing it by myself with an advisor. I knew that I would need structure to complete my thesis, because as mentioned, when I find that I am faced with a challenge I tend to shut down. Since I was in a class that met regularly and had deadlines with expected goals, I was not able to do that, and as a result, had to work through the problems I had

with my thesis instead of avoiding them. The constant feedback I was also getting on my work helped to continue to push me, as well, and I know that it played a part in making me take a longer look at what I really wanted to discuss in my thesis.

The entire experience of writing my thesis was different than what I expected, but at the same time, it was still as stressful and time consuming as I had thought. To find a topic I was interested in took two years, and to find the courage to actually write about it took the prompting of several deadlines. What was different was the fact that I feel more confident about my writing than I had ever thought was possible. The thesis was always something I was dreading because I never thought it would be something I could do as successfully as I would like. Going through the writing process and allowing myself to change the focus when I thought it was not working gave me the ability to be passionate about what I was writing. In turn, this translated into a confidence in knowing that what I was saying was well thought-out and researched and that it had a place among all of the other theses and projects being produced. The end result will then be a thesis that covers what I think is important to be discussed and acknowledged in terms of the Japanese experience in Hawaii during World War II, and the complete piece will be a culmination of the hard work and anticipation I had in terms of finally completing something that had been weighing on me since senior year of high school.

Thesis

Japanese internment camps are not the shining beacons of freedom and democracy that most people like to think of when they picture the United States of America. There are many moments in America's history that seem to get glossed over, and the internment camps of World War II to fall into that category. Most likely because it was a time in the United States history where basic civil liberties were denied to thousands of American citizens. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the U.S. government was afraid of sabotage and subterfuge, and the residents of the West Coast feared their Japanese neighbors were somehow involved with the enemy. The Japanese residents of the West Coast were then, due to their fellow American's fear, forced to leave their homes and be placed into internment camps. That much is told when the internment camps are discussed. Should people take the time to look deeper into the stories and lives of those affected, they would learn that the story has more than just that one chapter. What happened to the Japanese residents living in Hawaii during the time of the war was so different from what had been happening on the Mainland that at times it completely contradicts the story. The Japanese living on the Islands still knew the fear of the war and trepidation of what would come next, but their lives remained relatively similar to that of their non-Japanese neighbors. There were no drastic measures taken to remove and secure the Japanese population from everyone else, and they faced no public backlash. How this could have happened, especially in the place where the attack that started it all took place, can be linked to the different approach Hawaii had taken to race relations and immigration. By establishing themselves early on the Hawaiian community, the Japanese population was able to escape most of the fear and subjugation of their counterparts on the Mainland, while continuing their previously formed relationships with the Hawaiian community.

This aforementioned relationship began in the late 1800's as the governments of both Hawaii and Japan worked to establish their relationship. Yukiko Kimura examines this relationship through the perspective of a sociologist as she details the emergence of Japanese influence in Hawaii. The relationship itself began in 1868 when the first sugar plantation workers were recruited from the Japanese cities of Yedo and Yokohama by a man named Eugene M. Van Reed.¹ This first migration consisted of 148 people in all, including six women and two teenagers.² These first laborers, however, were not accustomed to the hard work that accompanied employment at a plantation, and as a result there was a complaint sent back to the Japanese government. In response, the Japanese government sent over someone to look into the problem, and when he returned he brought back 40 immigrants.³ This interaction would then become the first of many times that the two governments would need to work with each in order to create a relationship that would benefit both countries while still working to protect the laborers. Those that decided to stay after the first diplomatic visit finished their contracts in 1871, and from that group 13 decided to return to Japan while 90 stayed behind to begin new lives in Hawaii.⁴ Once again a precedent was set in which those that originally only came to make money ended up staying on the islands, which initiated the rise of the Japanese population in Hawaii.

After the first labor contract was up, there was no longer an organized immigration plan between the two countries. It was not, however, for lack of trying on the Hawaiian government's part. The Japanese government were actually hesitant to provide more laborers for the sugar plantations, and it took multiple envoys from the Hawaiian government, including a visit from

¹ Yukiko Kimura, *Issei: Japanese Immigrants in Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1988), 3.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

King Kalakaua, to persuade them to reinstate their relationship.⁵ There were to be stipulations this time, and they were meant to provide more protections for the immigrants. Included in this was a contract approved by the Japanese government and signed by the immigrant before he or she had left Japan. With statements such as paid passage, medical care, living quarters, and firewood for cooking provided, it was no surprise that 945 Japanese citizens agreed to immigrate to Hawaii to work.⁶ Most of these workers were coming from overpopulated areas within Japan, so it could also have been understood as them moving towards better opportunities not provided to them due to competition.

This first group arrived in Hawaii on February 8, 1885, and the conditions were far from ideal. The living conditions were subpar, and the *luna* they found themselves working under were harsh and in some cases abusive.⁷ Not long after their arrival, one worker was actually beat to death, which resulted in a labor strike that was eventually put down. The workers themselves ended up being fined for “disturbing the peace,” while the luna continued on with their extreme behavior.⁸ The incident did not go unnoticed by the Japanese government, who sent over a Special Commissioner to investigate along with 983 new workers.⁹ After this investigation, it was decided that more needed to be done to protect those coming over, and five new points were established. With these, the Hawaiian government promised they would take guardianship of the immigrants, more interpreters would be used to avoid miscommunications, Japanese physicians were to be hired for treatment, workers would be protected from violent overseers, and all investigations were to be done by a Japanese official.¹⁰

⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The *luna* worked for the owners of the plantation, and they got their name from the Hawaiian word *Luna*, meaning leader or supervisor.

⁸ Kimura, *Issei*, 6.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Unfortunately, this did little to settle the treatment the Japanese workers were facing, and the continuation of unjust treatment led to issues among the immigrants including an increase in drinking and gambling. This type of behavior was the complete antithesis of what the Japanese government was expecting from those they sent over to work, and as a result they replaced the consul with a man by the name General Taro Ando.¹¹ Together with Reverend Kanichi Miyama, they were able to restore the plantation labors' "orderly life and self-respect" by founding the Japanese Mutual Aid Association and the Temperance Society.¹² These types of societies allowed for the Japanese immigrants to support themselves outside of the plantation and to remember the high standards with which they were to hold themselves. Workers also found ways to express their displeasure with conditions through the singing of *Hole-hole Bushi* songs, finding that they could sing about the experience while working and find a sense of solidarity with other workers.¹³ Lyrics would include phrases such as, "The luna found me lying in a field a field with a high fever and he beat me up [as a slacker]," which plays into the idea that people were so afraid of going to work that they would make themselves sick to avoid the fields.¹⁴ Commonly, the trick was to drink a lot of shoyu sauce, but not even that could always save them from the work, in some cases they would have had to work while sick.¹⁵ There was also the option of desertion, which could have been done for a number of reasons, including avoiding debts or higher wages, but there was a high price to pay in terms of flogging and imprisonment if caught.¹⁶

¹¹ Ibid., 7.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *Hole-hole Bushi* is a combination of Japanese and Hawaiian that means "Songs of Cane Leaves." The melody that was used for the lyrics came from the Yamaguchi and Hiroshima prefectures in Japan.

¹⁴ Kimura, *Issei*, 6.

¹⁵ Ibid. Shoyu sauce is the Japanese version of soy sauce.

¹⁶ Ibid., 8.

Despite all the problems a Japanese laborer could face while working on a plantation, it should be noted that not all met the same harsh conditions. Some plantations owners were known to be considerate of their workers, even letting them stop for breaks throughout the day or firing luna who tried to abuse someone.¹⁷ The most prominent example of a positive relationship between immigrant and employer comes from those that worked in private homes. Still signed onto the same three year contract as plantation workers, Japanese private estate workers had established such strong relationships with their managers that they would leave their children with them while they went back to Japan. The Hawaiian residents were then entrusted to take care of the children by providing them with a home and education, and in most cases ended up basically adopting them into the family.¹⁸

Along with the immigrants who came to Hawaii in attempt to make money and return back to Japan are those that used the labor contracts as a means to simply get to the islands, and by extension, the United States. Mostly this was done in hopes of receiving an education, and Kimura notes three men who used the contract labor system to their advantage. The first person being Katsugoro Haida, who became interested in western medicine and decided that he wanted to pursue an education in the field. To do this, Haida signed a labor contract that placed him on a plantation where he used his previous education as a means to advocate for better working conditions.¹⁹ After his contract ended, he moved to the West Coast where he worked as a domestic servant before receiving a medical degree in 1898 from Cooper Medical College, now Stanford University.²⁰ A few years later he found himself back in Hawaii practicing medicine. Similar to Haida's story is that of Saiji Kimura, whose intelligence was noted at work and

¹⁷ Ibid., 9.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 10.

²⁰ Ibid.

resulted in the position of an inspector. After his contract ended, he was one of many that returned to Japan, but then found himself back in Hawaii not too long after, now as a businessman.²¹ Along with others, Saiji Kimura helped to establish the Japanese Merchants Association, which went on to become the Japanese Chamber of Commerce in 1908, and the Rice Refinery, which reduced the price of rice in Hawaii.²²

One man who truly exemplifies the story of a Japanese immigrant and who came simply for an education, but in the end stayed to build a life family, is Yasutaro Soga. Having begun his studies in Tokyo, Soga eventually made the move to America on February 18, 1896, with his only intention being an education.²³ Just as many others, however, Soga found that Hawaii could provide many more opportunities than what he originally thought. Joining another Japanese immigrant who was editor of a paper called the *Hawaii Shimpi*, Soga used his ability to speak both English and Japanese to help publish news about the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905.²⁴ In conjunction with the English-language paper *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, this ability to work together and publish news for both major populations of the island shows the type of relationship that was being built with the Japanese community. Not only was the community able to follow along with the news of their home country, but they were also able to do it in their own language. The fact that this could happen was a sign that the other populations of the islands were not trying to isolate and exclude the Japanese; rather, they were trying to include them in their own narrative. Soga's ability to reach the Japanese populace on the island through his work with newspapers solidified his place within the community, and unfortunately that also made him

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Yasutaro Soga, *Life Behind Barbed Wire: The World War II Internment Memoirs of a Hawai'i Issei*, trans. Kihei Hirai (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), xii.

²⁴ Kimura, *Issei*, 10. The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 was fought between Russia and Japan over the lands of Korea and Manchuria.

a target later on in the story of Japanese internment. He serves as a representative of what the community was striving for, and his is a story that will be referenced again when discussing what happened to the community after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Despite the obvious prospects offered to those that knew how to work around the contract restrictions, many in Japan still looked down on those that immigrated to Hawaii. It was seen as an option only for those that were poor, due to the fact that, as previously discussed, the first recruitments focused on areas that were overcrowded in hopes of attracting those that had difficulty finding work. Some would even travel back to Japan, clearly successful, in hopes of encouraging more people to immigrate, but they received a rather reproachful welcome instead. A man by the name Sasuke Yasumori was a laborer from the first recruitment, and since his contract ended, he had been able to open a successful business in Hawaii. Whenever he would return to his home region in Japan, Yasumori would attempt to make the pitch of emigration to Hawaii, but was constantly told that the people were “not that poor.”²⁵ This demonstrated the interesting dichotomy of views on Japanese immigration, not from the traditional point of view of American citizens, but from the citizens of the country from which the immigrants originated. The majority of Japanese that came over to work on the plantations saw the experience in a myriad of ways, all which were meant to better their lives. Those still back in Japan, however, looked down upon them, which should be noted for when the discussion turns to how the Japanese government will choose to interfere with emigration once again.

Before this interference is discussed, however, it is important to look at what led up to the Japanese government’s decision. The most notable indication of change to come would be the formation of Hawaii as a United States territory in 1898.²⁶ Now a territory, it would only have

²⁵ Kimura, *Issei*, 11.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

been a matter of time before the U.S. began to interfere with governing of the land, with the first notable change coming in the form of the 1900 Organic Act.²⁷ Passed by Congress, this Act stated that the Constitution and all federal laws of the United States would now apply to Hawaii, which in turn outlawed contract labor immigration.²⁸ Almost immediately this began a period of what was called “out-migration,” and it saw people leaving the plantations in massive numbers.²⁹ It was also a time at which many Japanese were simultaneously immigrating to and from Hawaii. The main destination of those emigrating was the West Coast, where Japanese immigrants were finding higher wages.³⁰ Though Hawaii still saw a population increase from those immigrating, the effects of such a rapid depletion of people was still felt. There were even attempts to slow, or stop altogether, the exodus by implementing a \$500 fine for those recruiting from the West Coast, strong urging from Consul General Miki Saito to stay in Hawaii, and the Japanese Merchants Association even going so far as to petition the Japanese Government to stop the emigration.³¹

While Hawaii was trying desperately to keep the Japanese workers, the West Coast was beginning to panic at the large influx of them. This sudden increase also worked to increase the anti-Japanese sentiment already present, and it culminated in San Francisco. Having found themselves with a large number of Japanese students, the San Francisco School Board in 1906 announced it would be opening a segregated school for the children.³² Facing some backlash, the School Board was investigated by the federal government who declared that the school was not justifiable. President Theodore Roosevelt told them to withdraw the ordinance, but to placate

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 14.

³² Ibid.

those worried about the immigrants, issued an executive order in 1907 that ended Japanese immigration to the United States through Hawaii, Mexico, and Canada.³³ Not long after in 1908, both Japan and the United States came to what is called the Gentlemen's Agreement, in which an informal agreement was made that stated that Japan would restrict emigration and issue passports only to those that have close family members already in America and picture brides.³⁴ This lasted until 1924, when California representatives and senators advocated for and then enforced the Japanese Exclusion Act.³⁵ This meant there would no longer be direct immigration to either a territory or state, and in direct opposition to California, it was opposed by those in Hawaii. Most notably, the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce cabled President Calvin Coolidge to urge him to veto the bill.³⁶

This wholesale exclusion was slowly building its way up, and it found a major breakthrough in terms of the Gentlemen's Agreement. The Japanese government was complicit in the first exclusion of its people, and so it made it easier for the U.S. government to make the bold move to ban Japanese immigration unilaterally. Why the Japanese government would have ever agreed to limit its emigration when those that left for Hawaii were doing relatively well could be traced back to the belief Japanese citizens had of those that choose to leave. As discussed, many in Japan felt that those who left were only poor and unable to provide for themselves at home. For Japan, then, it was merely a convenient way to control overpopulation, and though inconvenient, limiting emigration would not make a detrimental impact on their industries. It also important to note that it took a lot of urging from the Hawaiian government to

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 15. The term "picture brides" refers to women who found husbands in America after he picked her from a picture. The man was usually presented with pictures of women supplied by a matchmaker who went based off family recommendations.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

get the Japanese government to agree to a contract labor system in the first place, so it is not completely unfathomable that Japan would be in favor of suddenly ending the flow of immigrants.

After looking at the circumstances that surrounded immigration of Japanese citizens to Hawaii and its diverse complications and responses, it is obvious that the governments and populations held no one singular opinion about the immigrants. As with most issues, there are always differing opinions, and the increasing Japanese population of Hawaii is no exception. While Kimura was able to provide an examination of the past by relating personal stories and historical detail, an account from that time would go farther in examining the complex thoughts that went into the public's opinion of the Japanese population in Hawaii. The former president of Oahu College in Honolulu, A.F. Griffiths, provided just that by writing an essay titled *The Japanese Race Question in Hawaii* in 1916. Addressing directly how Hawaii has managed to keep "peace" amongst their multiple races, Griffiths was able to—probably unknowingly—demonstrate how those in Hawaii simultaneously looked down upon and praised the Japanese while still thinking themselves better than place likes California.

Griffiths starts right off comparing Hawaii to California, specifically San Francisco and the aforementioned school issue, and he notes that it was amusing they could not handle the small influx of Japanese immigrants. He then claimed that it should not be a problem for them, writing that their population is 2,377,549 and they only received 41,628 Japanese immigrants.³⁷ Hawaii, in comparison, had 80,000 Japanese immigrants and only 15,000 white people, and as Griffiths claims, is doing just fine in handling the differences.³⁸ After having directly called out California for being unable to adjust to their small number of Japanese people, Griffiths says he

³⁷ A.F. Griffiths, "The Japanese Race Question in Hawaii," *Journal of Race Development* 6, no. 4 (1916): 424.

³⁸ Ibid.

wanted to address why Hawaii is able to get along with all the various ethnicities. The first answer he would give has to do with the missionary spirit of the people, claiming that ever since missionaries first came to the islands people have taken up the proper Christian attitude.³⁹ That attitude has been passed down due to the example set by those in charge, who then go on to influence everyone around them. Along with that, Griffiths posits that allowing the Japanese to practice their faith also decreases tension, but notes that not everything is as peaceful as it seems. He was quick to say that all it would take is a few people with a “California point of view” to disrupt the delicate balance.⁴⁰

Continuing on with his assessment of why Hawaii is so successful, Griffith places a large part of it on the interaction of children with others their age. Children of all races and ethnicities are allowed to attend school together, noting that “the mingling of children is one of the surest ways of overcoming distinctions of caste and race feeling.”⁴¹ This comment could also be seen as another criticism of California, where they were too afraid to let their children attend school together and are therefore perpetuating racial tensions by teaching that people who are different should be excluded and segregated. Moving on from schools, Griffiths notes how their labor has made Hawaii prosperous, even creating and sustaining their own successful businesses on the islands. He is not afraid to admit that it used to be a problem, writing that white business owners used to complain about Japanese success. That was apparently not a problem anymore, because according to Griffiths, all the people with problems simply left for the West Coast.⁴²

Despite his spirited attempt at explaining how the Japanese population was trying to fit in with the overall population of Hawaii, Griffiths then listed questions he had about the Japanese

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 425.

⁴¹ Ibid., 427.

⁴² Ibid., 428.

people. Noted right away was the fact that more Japanese people were buying land, and this was becoming a problem for white people in the sense that they did not want Japanese neighbors. This led to some people buying the land next to them in order to avoid a Japanese person possibly purchasing it.⁴³ There was also a worry that Japanese people were becoming too educated, and that soon they would be competing with white people in areas that had previously been uncontested.⁴⁴ One problem listed by Griffiths truly highlights the double standard with which Japanese people were judged. In terms of voting, people had begun to be concerned with Japanese people who were eligible to vote but had chosen not to, seeing this a declaration of loyalty to Japan.⁴⁵ Standing in complete juxtaposition to that belief was the fear that all Japanese able to register will, so when they vote “they will hold the balance of power.”⁴⁶ Not only was it impossible for the Japanese person to please the U.S. citizen in terms of voting, but it also displayed a clearly racist view that everybody of the same ethnic background thinks the same.

It is exactly that type of thinking that the person of Japanese descent was facing as they navigated life in Hawaii in the early 1900’s. Those who lived in Hawaii liked to see themselves as racially tolerable people, and in a sense they were, as seen by their ability to integrate schools and allow differences of religions. Especially when compared to California, which was unable to successfully integrate Japanese people into their society and eventually resorted to simply blocking immigration, the islands seemed to be the ideal place. But while Hawaii protested the new immigration laws, and though they were accepting of the Japanese presence in Hawaii, the white population in particular had yet to acquiesce to the shift of the Japanese as the majority population. This was clearly seen in their fear of the voting majority, which makes it unfair to the

⁴³ Ibid., 431.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 434.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 436.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Japanese person who is either questioned about their loyalty or feared for the power they hold by participating in their rights. So while it should be noted that the Japanese population in Hawaii was tolerated to a level of praise, that does not mean that they were accepted or understood.

A quote that encapsulates this idea comes from William C. Smith, a sociologist that studied the relationship between Asians and white people on the Pacific Coast, who was writing about the minority groups in Hawaii during the war in 1942. Smith mentioned that those who visited from the Mainland, particularly from areas that were heavily segregated, were always quick to note the supposed peace amongst all the peoples. What they were not witnessing was the blatant and outright rejection of interracial mingling typical of most areas on the Mainland, and as a result felt that everything in Hawaii was “beautifully idyllic.”⁴⁷ As Smith noted, however, “when [discrimination] does not appear on the surface in the familiar forms” people would like to believe that “in Hawaii there is neither prejudice nor discrimination.”⁴⁸ Hawaii, though certainly not at the level of the Mainland, still possessed problems. The plantations were not always the best place for a Japanese immigrant to find a secure and safe job, and many people still felt threatened by the thought of the immigrants expressing themselves as either American citizens or Japanese nationals.

This underlying fear became realized after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. After the direct attack by the Japanese military, Hawaii was swiftly put under martial law, which removed the right of civilian authority. Ken Takemoto, who happened to be a *Nisei* and sophomore in college at the University of Hawaii, recalled the times as troubling.⁴⁹ Though he

⁴⁷ William C. Smith, “Minority Groups in Hawaii,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 223, (1942): 40.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Paul Howard Takemoto, *Nisei Memories: My Parents Talk About the War Years* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 26. The word *Nisei* refers to a second generation Japanese American citizen.

noted that the government could not remove the entire Japanese population because it would take away one third of the entire island's population and workforce, Takemoto understood that there was still fear to be found in the unknown reactions of the public. These fears did not go unfounded, either, as his own father was taken in for questioning in the days following the bombing. Even though he was released shortly after, his family had not been informed where he was going or how long he would be gone. Despite this distrust from the government, Takemoto and his fellow Japanese American friends felt the need to prove themselves, and following a recommendation, petitioned the U.S. army to be allowed to "do something positive."⁵⁰ The group of men were admitted and formed a group called the Varsity Victory Volunteers, also referred to as the "Triple V."⁵¹ As Takemoto goes on to tell his story, he makes it clear that he does not remember any discrimination from the white troops with which Triple V would interact. With the initial fear of the bombing fading, it was becoming clear that there was a distinct difference between the Japanese who attacked and the Japanese who had been born and raised in an American Territory.

For those that were not born on the Hawaiian Islands, however, the experience immediately after the bombing is different. Ken Takemoto shared a bit of what it was like for an *Issei* while telling his own story, but one of the most illuminating accounts of what it was like comes from Yasutaro Soga.⁵² Having already told the story of how Soga found his way to Hawaii and set up a life, his story picks up again as Japan attacks the harbor. The morning began quietly, and when his friend called to tell him the news of the attack, Soga was in disbelief. Originally wanting to believe that it was simply a training exercise, it took seeing the fighting

⁵⁰ Ibid., 27.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² The word *Issei* refers to a first generation Japanese immigrant.

himself from a veranda for it become real. From that point on, Soga was concerned only with getting news of the attack, and as he listened on the radio, he heard that the enemy planes bore the emblem of a Rising Sun. It was at that time Soga “had a premonition that something was going to happen” to him, and so he dressed in a way that he could leave at any time.⁵³

Soga was not wrong to feel this type of anticipation after the attack. Tensions had been rising between Japan and the United States for the past year, and it just so happened that they peaked with the bombing in Hawaii. The U.S. government had already been keeping track of the Japanese immigrants they deemed suspicious, and as a prominent figure within the community as someone who produced news in Japanese, Soga was on the list. Those that were considered immediate threats to the safety of the Islands were brought in, and Soga himself was arrested by three military policemen on the night of December 7, 1941.⁵⁴ Multiple other men were arrested at the same time as him, and all were taken to the Immigration Office. Once there, the men were searched and relieved of most items except for their wristwatches, pens, and handkerchiefs. Soga noted that the moment he was shoved into his room for the night, he was met with “rank and sultry air.”⁵⁵ Soon he discovered that the room was to be shared by every Japanese man that had been picked up that day, many of whom he actually knew and interacted with regularly. One man, he noted, was Dr. Tokue Takahashi, who was not only a doctor on the island but also the elder brother of Vice Admiral Ibo Takahashi of the Japanese navy.

What is made clear from Soga’s story of his arrest is the attitude the government was taking towards what they perceived to be a threat in terms of the Japanese population. Though it was based on ethnicity, the arrests were systematic and preplanned to bring in those that

⁵³ Soga, *Life Behind Barbed Wire*, 24.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

possessed the most immediate danger. Issei (such as Ken Takemoto's father) and Soga were immigrants from Japan, and therefore it could be reasonably hypothesized that they might still possess connections to people living there. After being further interviewed, people still considered a threat remained detained, while others such as Takemoto's father were allowed to go free. From a civilian perspective, however, the story seems to be different. A man by the name of Dr. Blake Clark was a professor at University of Hawaii and on the Islands at the time of the bombing, and as he recalls, there was not a doubt among most civilians that the Japanese living in Hawaii could be trusted. He noted that multiple people have asked what Hawaii plans to do with Japanese Americans, and while it has been seen what the government intended to do, the public's idea was slightly different.

Advocating for the fair treatment of the Japanese, Clark speaks of civilian sentiment on the Islands by fighting back against the idea that there were spies amongst the Japanese, and that as a precaution, all of them would need to be moved to a secure location. His efforts to argue against this centers around the fact it was not even necessary for there to be spies in order to find Pearl Harbor and plan the attack. The harbor, he says, had been within public view for years, and it could have been easy for Japanese consuls, not immigrants or citizens, to pass along information. Clark also pointed out that it can be found on any map, and the fact that battleships are quite large would make them easy to spot and target.⁵⁶ Along with promoting these ideas of Japanese American loyalty, Clark then questioned what the United States would even gain from interning them. Based on what he has observed throughout his time living in Hawaii, Clark believed that those that have come to the territory believe in democracy and want to fight for it, and they will continue to raise families that believe the same. As he ends his piece, Clark notes

⁵⁶ Thomas Blake Clark, "The Japanese in Hawaii," *New Republic* 107, (Sep. 1942): 308.

that to turn against them and to believe they had anything to do with the attack would “abandon them to fascist propaganda and rob them of the incentive to resist fascist ideas.”⁵⁷ Having been published in *The New Republic*, Clark was speaking out to American public about ideals he gained through his time in Hawaii. Having witnessed first-hand the relationships and community between the Japanese and other populations, Clark had a solid base with which to state the claim for tolerance and acceptance. The government was quick to move against the community leaders and first generation immigrants, but that does not mean that the general public of Hawaii also felt the same.

Back on the Mainland, Japanese Americans had begun to face scrutiny, especially those who had been living on the West Coast. In contrast to Ken Takemoto’s story, Alice Imamoto told how the experience of the Mainland was vastly different to that of the Hawaiian Islands. Eventually going on to meet and marry Takemoto, Imamoto told her story along with him as their son recorded their experiences in an oral history. As their story is told side by side, there are some similarities, but for the most part, Imamoto’s story is full of a type of fear and uncertainty that was not as wide spread on the Islands. Though she mentioned how she felt safe at school due to the support of her principle, Ralph Burnight, there was still an ominous sense that something was going to happen.⁵⁸ Eventually something did happen in the form of Executive Order 9066, which called for the removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast. Having been issued February 19, 1942, it did not directly affect Imamoto’s family until March 13.⁵⁹

On that day, March 13, 1942, the FBI came to take both Imamoto’s mother and father, while also taking what they had believed to be evidence against their loyalty to the United States.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 310.

⁵⁸ Takemoto, *Nisei Memories*, 37.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 38-9.

Her father had been a principle at a local Japanese school in Norwalk, California, so that evidence included books in Japanese that he had used to teach. With her parents arrested, Imamoto and her sisters were forced to take care of themselves as they tried to navigate their lives amongst the rising tensions. For Japanese residents only, they could not go farther than five miles in any direction from six in the morning to eight at night. The rest of the time they were prohibited from even leaving their houses.⁶⁰ Eventually, Imamoto and her sisters were removed from their home, being notified only through signs posted throughout the neighborhood. Stating that “all Japanese persons...will be evacuated,” the posters were there to let the girls know that they had to sell all their belongings or give them away to friends who would watch over them while they were moved to a “reception center.”⁶¹ The night before they were moved to the center, Imamoto recalled that they were constantly receiving threatening calls that were telling them to leave.

The types of fear and uncertainty experienced by the Imamoto family were indicative of what the Japanese population within the nation at large was feeling. In the days following the attack on Pearl Harbor and declaration of war against Japan, tensions escalated to the point of violence. *The Los Angeles Times* actually reported on December 9, 1941—two days after the bombing—that a Japanese man was beaten on a New York street by a group of men, one of them even supposedly saying, “Why don’t you go where you belong?” (See Figure 1).⁶² With panic spreading among the American citizens, both Japanese and non-Japanese, printing articles such as this could have only further frayed the relationship. Imamoto’s story speaks of fear on her end in terms of how people would react to her, and this article proves that she was within her rights

⁶⁰ Ibid., 43.

⁶¹ Ibid., 75-6.

⁶² “Japanese Attacked on New York Street,” *The Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 1941, 20.

to believe someone might hurt her. The article also shows the fear that drove the rest of the American population. The West Coast was supposedly the area that had been facing the largest threat, yet across the country in New York were men taking out their anxieties about the rapidly imploding political situation on a Japanese American.

Japanese Attacked on New York Street

Beaten Nipponese Escapes in Hallway

NEW YORK, Dec. 8. (AP)—The first case of violence against a Japanese since that nation declared war against the United States was reported at 2:30 a.m. today by Teddy Hara, 42, who told police he had been assaulted by three unidentified men.

The Japanese, severely beaten, said he was set upon in front of his West Side lodging house and escaped by hiding in a hallway and later taking a taxicab to Polyclinic Hospital, where he was reported in serious condition with a possible skull fracture and lacerations and contusions of the left eye, face and head.

"Why don't you go where you belong?" he quoted one of his assailants as saying before attacking him.

Figure 1. This article comes from the December 9, 1941 issue of *The Los Angeles Times*, page 20.

Back on the Islands, there was obvious mistrust of Issei as seen in the stories previously discussed. In terms of violence or complete removal and arrest of whole families, Hawaii was able to avoid what the Mainland was facing. One would not know this, however, from the type of information being spread throughout California. Directly after the bombing, Hawaii was placed under martial law, and communication between the Islands and Mainland was severely limited. This led to misinformation being spread about the conditions of the people there, as well as contributing the villainous image being attributed to the Japanese.

One of the first pieces of information to be misconstrued was the idea that the Japanese population of the Islands would be moved to a secure area on a separate island (See Figure 2).⁶³ The information is pieced together with other, more factual points about martial law on in Hawaii, but blatantly states a lie. At no point were the residents of Hawaii told that part of the martial law being imposed would include the complete resettlement of the Japanese population. In fact, an article printed the very next day in a Honolulu newspaper states the regulations being imposed on Japanese citizens under the new martial law. Called the “Freeze Rules,” it states that any Japanese not exclusively a citizen of the United States would have faced regulations regarding transactions of property (See Figure 3).⁶⁴ The article then goes on to state that “Japanese nationals...may continue to engage in their normal commercial and agricultural activities.”⁶⁵ Without knowing what was happening in Hawaii, and without having access to newspaper articles like the one printed in the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* newspaper, having *The San Francisco Examiner* print that Japanese in Hawaii were being rounded up and removed to one area would have given the people the idea of removal months before it would go into effect. This

⁶³ “Observer Tells of Honolulu Raid,” *The San Francisco Examiner*, December 8, 1941, 13.

⁶⁴ “New ‘Freeze’ Rules For Japanese Here,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, December 9, 1941, 1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

could have easily escalated tensions as people called for the removal of Japanese, believing it already being done in Hawaii. With Hawaii then under martial law, there was no way to truly clarify what was going on, therefore allowing the misinformation to spread and promote dangerous ideas about what to do with the Japanese population.

Governor Poindexter lost no time in proclaiming a state of emergency throughout the Territory.

It was expected that the carefully laid plans for "M" Day, calling for full mobilization of Army, Navy, Marine and civilian defense forces would be placed in immediate operation.

Under the "M" Day plan, it is no secret that the heavy Japanese population would be concentrated in a single area. The Island of Molokai, lying athwart Oahu, has been designated the concentration point.

Figure 2. This article comes from the December 8, 1941 issue of *The San Francisco Examiner*, page 13.

New 'Freeze' Rules For Japanese Here

Governor Poindexter today announced new "freeze control" regulations affecting all Japanese in the Territory regardless of length of residence except United States citizens who are not also subjects of Japan. As a result of Public circular No. 8, all transactions involving property in which Japan or any national thereof has an interest are prohibited, unless specifically authorized by General License No. H-1 or No. H-2 which were issued today.

Under General License No. H-1 Japanese nationals within the Territory may continue to engage in their normal commercial and agricultural activities provided that the report requirements of such general license are complied with.

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Figure 3. This article comes from the December 9, 1941 issue of the *Honolulu-Star Bulletin*, page 1.

Information was also being disseminated in the news that made people question the loyalty of Japanese living in America. Dr. Blake Clark, while advocating for the Japanese population living in Hawaii, also made sure to point out how information could have gotten back to the Mainland that would have made it hard for the Japanese population to be accepted. Citing the rumors that had begun to circulate after the bombing, Clark noted that many people on the Mainland felt the Japanese population in Hawaii had helped the attack to take place. One of the more popular rumors was that the Japanese Americans blocked a major highway and prevented medical and military personal from getting to the harbor. In Hawaii, hundreds of locals vouched for them and said that the road was free of all blockage, but due to the press on the Mainland, the story only seemed to gain momentum there.

In order to find out the veracity of the story told by the press, Clark went directly to the man who had told the tale. A navy captain who had happened to be at Pearl Harbor during the attack was asked if he had witnessed any confusion during that day. He noted that, while he was driving, he almost hit “a carload of Orientals...driving wildly.”⁶⁶ After saying that, everything else mentioned fell by the wayside as the press spread the story of sabotage by Japanese living Hawaii. In fact, the captain went on to tell Clark that he was not even sure if they were Japanese at all, much less attempting to sabotage anything on the Islands. He concluded his discussion by claiming “he was sorry he had even mentioned the incident to the reporters.”⁶⁷ Clark then mentioned he spoke with the chief agent of the FBI in Hawaii and was reassured that there was no chance that the Japanese living in Hawaii were the cause of any damage during or after the

⁶⁶ Clark, “Japanese in Hawaii,” 309.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

bombing, further confirming the idea that what was being spread and believed on the Mainland was completely baseless and damaging in terms of reputation.

When examined in conjunction with the previous newspaper articles discussed, it is clear there is a pattern emerging in terms of reactions to the Japanese populations. From the articles that were from the Mainland, more specifically California, the Japanese population was not being looked upon favorably. Newspapers choose to focus on the violence and supposed removal of the population within the Hawaiian Islands thus making them outcasts. Little was being done to understand them and talk with them about what had happened, and instead the Japanese received disapproval from the rest of the country as they tried to distance themselves from the perceived enemy. Reporters then writing articles about attacks in the street does little to create any sympathy but does a lot to make people wonder if they also should have reason to fear passing a Japanese person in the street. Newspapers also brought about the casual discussion of the removal of the Japanese population in Hawaii, whether false or not, gives people the freedom to be okay with the idea of the same thing happening along the West Coast. At a time when it was crucial for the American population to come together and try to understand what was happening to the country, the citizens choose to let prejudices and false information dictate their decisions.

Those prejudices were fueled by the articles and then further inflamed by the rumors that were coming out of Hawaii. Based on what Clark was describing, it was widely feared and believed that the Japanese population in Hawaii had helped the attack to happen and would continue to do work for the Japanese military. While patently absurd to the thousands of citizens living in Hawaii who witnessed the attack and the panic that followed for themselves, those on the Mainland were relying on the press for what to believe. As stories were manipulated and then

spewed out at the general public, their fear of the unknown populace among only increased. No longer were the Japanese Americans seen as a small, mostly unwanted presence, but now they had taken on the persona of an evil villain that was out to get Americans no matter the cost. Blocking roads and directing Japanese aircraft to the harbor itself was just the beginning for those Americans that put faith in the stories and rumors they were hearing.

After a person understands what the populations of both Hawaii and the Mainland were hearing after the bombing, it can put into perspective the reactions people had to the arrests and internment of the Japanese. Personal accounts from Hawaii revealed that only men on prominence within the Japanese community were taken in for questioning, and even after that not all of them were held in detainment. For those that were placed into camps, there is still a discussion to be had about the legality and morality of it all, but the United States was not alone in their idea of rounding up and arresting those they deemed a threat. The *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* reported on December 8th and 9th that Japanese nationals were being taken in throughout the Philippines, Mexico, Singapore, and Australia, which was similar in fashion to the United States' process. It should also be noted that Germans and Italians were also being arrested by the U.S. government, and while certainly not the extent the Japanese were, it could be debated the motivations of the United States to be a little more security focused than blatantly prejudiced.

What occurred throughout the West Coast was almost the opposite in terms of understanding what had actually happened and how to handle the growing unrest by the general public in regards to their skepticism of the Japanese population. The general populace in Hawaii had the benefit of being directly at the source of all the stories, and so they were able to move forward in their relationship with the Japanese. People on the West Coast already had their preconceived notions in relation to the Japanese, and those families such as the Imamtotos were

forced to bear the brunt of their ignorance as the population was given no reason to trust the Japanese living as citizens. Threatening phone calls, sudden arrests, and relocations generally encapsulated their experiences as people along the West Coast called for the Japanese to be removed and “put...where they can’t harm any one.”⁶⁸ Fueled by the false stories and the belief that removal and internment was already happening in Hawaii, non-Japanese residents of the West Coast were not hesitant to make known their beliefs on what should be done with Japanese residents.

Once in the camps, it did not matter so much where they were. Camps on both the West Coast and the Islands were said to have unfavorable conditions as people were cramped together and given minimal supplies. People subsisted in these camps from the time of their arrest, which was either directly following the bombing or early 1942, and it was not until December 1944 that the executive order was rescinded. By that point, most internees had been in the camps for two years, and the rest of the American population had been separated from them as they formed their own opinions about the camps and the people that they held. Reintegration into society was then hampered as the former internees had to deal with what the people in Hawaii deemed their stigma. Since only a select portion of the Japanese population in Hawaii had been arrested and considered enough of a threat to be interred, it was believed that they must have actually been guilty of something.⁶⁹ Reactions such as this only compounded their intense feelings of betrayal that some of the former internees carried. Sam Nishumura was one of those arrested in Hawaii and further interred, and he noted to his granddaughter that he had been angry at the government for what they had done. When he came back to Hawaii, that anger then expanded as he realized

⁶⁸ “Japanese,” *San Francisco Examiner*, Feb. 21, 1942, 10.

⁶⁹ Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii. “The Untold Story: Internment of Japanese Americans in Hawai’i.” YouTube video, 29:47. Posted [Jul 2014].

his friends would only visit him at night so others would not see them going to his house.⁷⁰ Not only had the government taken two years of his freedom, but they had also inadvertently restricted his freedom after release as they made it hard for him to continue his life as it was before the war.

As with most aspects within the discussion of Japanese Internment Camps, there are differing opinions about what to feel and believe, and reintegration was no different. While some such as Nishumura felt anger that continued on throughout his life, others such as Harry Urata believed they would need to do something positive. An Issei from Hawaii, Urata had been taken in during the war, and after release, immediately decided that he had to do something for America.⁷¹ Urata decided the best thing to do was teach Japanese to the U.S. Military Intelligence Service before returning to Hawaii where he became a music teacher for 53 years. This reaction by Urata seemed to encapsulate the feelings of the general Japanese populace after the war. The majority of them simply wanted to blend in with society and move forward with their lives rather than dwell on what had just happened. That feeling of simply getting back to how things were before was only amplified in 1952 when Issei were finally allowed to become legal citizens of the United State and naturalize. It was not until the 1970's that those affected by the Japanese Internment Camps began to fight for a formal acknowledgement and apology from the United States government regarding what happened during World War II.⁷²

The story of Japanese internment in Hawaii had begun long before the first bomb was dropped on Pearl Harbor or before there were even growing tensions between the United States and Japan. It could be fairly stated that it was in 1868, with the first formal interaction between

⁷⁰ Ibid., 20:25.

⁷¹ Ibid., 19:41.

⁷² Ibid., 21:37.

Hawaii as an independent entity and Japan occurred. Workers were needed for sugar plantations on the islands, and the businessmen who owned them traveled to find them. Since that first interaction in 1868, the flow of immigrants to work on the plantations only grew, and as they worked to create better conditions for themselves and take advantage of the opportunities presented to them in the form of education and job opportunity, a community began to grow. This community had begun as simple plantation workers, but it ended up containing members of the business class as more men found that they could pursue an education and then become contributing members of the Hawaiian community at large. One of these men was Saiji Kimura, whose story showed how a man could have come over as a contract worker, but who then moved on to help form crucial parts of the Hawaiian economy, such as the Rice Refinery, which reduced the price of rice in Hawaii.

As the Japanese immigrants established a community amongst themselves and the wider Hawaiian population, more immigrants began to see it as an opportunity for themselves. Immigration continued to increase up until the ban in 1924, but by that point the Japanese population had already secured themselves a definitive place within the Island community. Their families continued to grow and interact with the other non-Japanese residents, cementing their relationships and pushing the Japanese population to the majority populace in Hawaii. This fact was important when it came to the government's decision of whether to inter the entire population of Japanese residents in Hawaii, or not. As seen, only a small fraction—about 2,000 out over 130,000—ended up being arrested and taken to camps for the duration of the war.

While from just looking at the basic facts, it could be argued that it was simple logistics that saved the Japanese population in Hawaii from facing the same fate as their counterparts on the West Coast. In order to get the point where it was logistically impossible, however, it must be

recognized that immigration to Hawaii was less regulated and more encouraged than on the Mainland. Japanese immigrants were seen as valuable workers and eventually integral members of the community, while on the Mainland, any foreign person was seen as different and therefore should be feared. The Japanese population was never able to fully assimilate and find their place within the West Coast community as the Hawaiian Japanese did, and it resulted in a diminished population that were as outsiders. People then had no qualms about calling for the Japanese removal on the West Coast, but in Hawaii, the residents had become so accustomed to their Japanese neighbors that they felt no fear or need to see them sent away.

The complicated story of Japanese internment is a discussion often centered on the events that took place on the West Coast. While obviously integral to the telling of the treatment of Japanese residents during World War II, the West Coast was not the only area affected by the attacks inflicted by the Japanese military. Though small in number, the internees from Hawaii have a place in the larger story of the internment camps. By their inclusion, years of suffering and exclusion that the Japanese Americans faced during the war can only be reinforced, but the Japanese from Hawaii would also bring to light the story of life on Islands for those left behind. Those left on the Islands were representatives of the hard work and dedication their family put in to create a community on Hawaii, and they tell the story of how one group of people was able to overcome questions of loyalty and ability to come back stronger and more determined to succeed than before.

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