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Nidoto Nai Yoni "Let It Not Happen Again": The Effect of World War II and Mass Incarceration on Japanese American Women's Gender Roles

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NIDOTO NAI YONI “LET IT NOT HAPPEN AGAIN”:
THE EFFECT OF WORLD WAR II AND MASS INCARCERATION ON JAPANESE
AMERICAN WOMEN’S GENDER ROLES

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
Western Kentucky University
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In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Laura Bohuski

May 2019

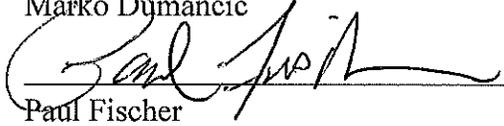
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I dedicate this thesis to those who helped me succeed in the researching and writing of this document. My parents Tom and Karen who supported me in so many ways throughout the years of this program. To all my friends and to Alley, Mike, and Jess who were instrumental in keeping me sane throughout these last trying years. And to Amanda.
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This thesis analyses the experiences, memories, and events of the World War II mass incarceration of Japanese Americans to determine what changes this traumatic event engendered in the gender roles of Issei and Nisei women. The events of incarceration separated families and broke down traditional societal norms leaving a deeply emotional and psychological scar upon the Japanese American community. Ironically, new opportunities arose for Issei and Nisei women as both a result of the effects of the mass incarceration upon the Japanese American community and because of governmental pressures such as labor shortages and the cost of housing over one hundred thousand prisoners. Issei women stepped into authority roles after the arrests of Japanese American community leaders and, in some cases, asserted their authority as mothers to stay in the United States against their husbands wishes. Nisei women were offered more opportunities in higher education and careers which allowed them to choose if they wanted to pursue an education or a career. These opportunities also allowed women more choices for marriage. While the decision of when to marry during the war years seems split between immediately before, during, and then in the years following the war, there is also a consistent pattern of women waiting to marry until after they had finished their education or worked for a few years. These patterns differ from both Issei and older Nisei women who often married early. World War II and mass incarceration is an extremely

painful event that left deep wounds upon the Japanese American community, however it also gave Issei and Nisei women opportunities to choose what roles to fill and when.

Introduction

In 1942, the U.S. government initiated the forced removal of over one-hundred thousand Japanese Americans from their homes. Japanese Americans were informed of their removal just a few days before evacuation and were allowed to bring “only what we could carry.”¹ Forced to sell their homes and businesses for whatever they could get, Japanese Americans even had to leave family pets and mementos behind. They were sent first to relocation centers, which were usually hastily converted race tracks or animal warehouses, and then after weeks or months sent to one of ten War Relocation Centers: Topaz, Poston, Gila River, Amache, Heart Mountain, Jerome, Manzanar, Minidoka, Rohwer, and Tule Lake.

The mass incarceration of thousands of Americans during World War II was a devastating act that the United States government enacted against its own citizens. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s issuance of Executive Order 9066 on February 19th, 1942, sanctioned the creation of militarized zones on the west coast which would lead to the incarceration of 120,000 Japanese Americans in concentration camps. Executive Order 9066 was followed by Public Proclamations and Exclusion Orders written by General John DeWitt, from March through August of 1942, which initiated the mass removal of both Japanese immigrants and anyone of Japanese descent who was more than 1/16 Japanese from the military zones.² The effect of this forced removal was

¹ Inada, Lawson F., ed. *Only What We Could Carry: The Japanese American Internment Experience*. Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 2000. This quote is both the title of this book edited by Lawson Fusao Inada, but also the phrase many Japanese Americans heard from soldiers when they were told how much to pack for camp. It is also now used frequently when Japanese Americans discuss the mass removal.

² “Civilian Exclusion Orders,” *Densho Encyclopedia*, Accessed February 5, 2019. http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Civilian_exclusion_orders/

deeply traumatic for Japanese Americans and has left scars both at the personal level and on the Japanese-American community as a whole.

The incarceration of the Japanese-American community on the West Coast of the United States did not occur just because of the bombing of Pearl Harbor; fear and racial tensions also played a part. Racism against first-generation Japanese immigrants, or Issei, and their American children, Nisei, was prevalent both within United States law and in American culture. The Naturalization Act of 1870 stated that all non-white immigrants would be refused United States citizenship. Furthermore, those of Japanese descent were often banned from joining white-run organizations such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) or, in some cities, forced to attend segregated schools.³ The banning of ethnic Japanese from mainstream white American society forced the Japanese to create their own communities, which in turn, led to deeper feelings of mistrust against the Japanese who were perceived as an unknown quantity. With the beginning of World War II and then the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941, the increase in tension between white society and Japanese society made the segregation and incarceration of Japanese Americans not only an acceptable action, but as scholar Alison Renteln claims, a highly popular action favored on the American West coast.⁴

During the first waves of Japanese immigration the population was overwhelmingly male, nearly 30-to-1 by 1900. This wave of immigration mostly

³ Valerie Matsumoto, *City Girls: the Nisei Social World in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 13.

⁴Alison Dundes Renteln, "A Psychohistorical Analysis of the Japanese American Internment," *Human Rights Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (1995): 624.

consisted of single young men hoping to make a fortune and then return to Japan.⁵ This was not an unusual makeup for immigrant populations, but a shift occurred in the early 1900s with the enactment of the so-called Gentlemen's Agreement. This agreement, never ratified into law, but informally enacted, stated that the Japanese government would discourage the migration of male laborers to the United States as long as the US refrained from placing undue restrictions on the Japanese immigrants already living in the US. Adult Japanese males still entered the United States after the Gentlemen's Agreement in 1907, but the immigration rate of men dropped enough so that by 1940 Japanese men only outnumbered women 123 to 100.⁶ Scholar Gary Okihiro states in his article that the female Japanese American immigrant population rose from 4 percent in 1900 to 35 percent by 1920, partially in reaction to the Gentlemen's Agreement.⁷ Almost overnight, Japanese immigrants were now mostly comprised of picture brides, wives, and children under the age of majority. With the influx of brides into the Japanese immigrant community families developed and wives and daughters took up important roles as wage earners and helpmates in the developing Japanese American community.

This thesis contends that the effects of World War II on the Japanese American community were devastating and long lasting, but that the breakdown of the tight cultural and social bonds inherent in the community also gave women the opportunity to make choices to put their education and careers before their desire to get married or have children. These women took advantage of opportunities that developed because of World

⁵ Rogers Daniels, "The Exile and Return of Seattle's Japanese," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 88, no. 4 (1997): 166; Valerie Matsumoto, "Japanese American Women during World War II," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 8, no. 1 (1984): 6.

⁶ Rogers, "Exile and Return," 166.

⁷ Gary Okihiro, "An American Story," in *Impounded: Dorothea Lange and the Censored Images of Japanese American Internment* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 48.

War II to find more respectable jobs, to increase their education, and to heighten their authority within their families. While women seized opportunities when they could, they did not aim to change women's gender roles but to help themselves, their families and their community in a time of crisis. Ironically, this deeply traumatic event also brought about those opportunities that allowed Nisei women to shift their gender roles.

While there are a few studies that focus on Japanese American women, most research on the effects of mass incarceration on Japanese Americans focuses on the effects on the community or on men, and the different experiences of women often get overlooked. Roger Daniels maintains that incarceration irreparably altered the socio-economic condition of the Japanese American community, but concentrates on the male segment of the population, most specifically Iwao Matsushita.⁸ Even in articles that discuss events in the camps explicitly, women are often not examined as a separate entity that might have alternate experiences. Rosalie H. Wax studies the specific tensions that occurred within the Tule Lake concentration camp from the perspective of the community. While the overarching view is appropriate for this study, it also does not acknowledge the women and men had contrasting experiences and neither Daniels or Wax discuss the different experiences that the Issei and Nisei had or any differences that occurred because of the prisoners' gender identity.

My research extends and complicates findings by historians Valerie Matsumoto and Evelyn Nakao Glenn what have both conducted in-depth research into gendered aspects of the Japanese American community. The foundation for this study uses both the

⁸ Rogers, "Exile and Return," 167.

information on the intricacies of the Japanese American community and Glenn and Matsumoto's arguments about Issei and Nisei women. Matsumoto contends that changes in Nisei gender roles, such as the shunning of arranged marriages, began before the war and developed, in part, because of the proliferation of youth groups. Before the war, Matsumoto claims, these youth groups functioned as spaces for young women to learn leadership skills, to figure out what it meant to be ethnically Japanese and born an American, as well as places to have fun with their peers. During and after the war the connections Nisei women made while attending these youth groups, both to their peers and to organizations such as the Young Women Christians Association (YWCA) or church groups, facilitated their removal from the concentration camps and helped with their re-assimilation into American society on the west coast after the war.⁹ Since Matsumoto's study concentrates on Nisei urban women, her study is limited in its ability to analyze the changes that occurred to Japanese American women in other settings.

Glenn has a similar limitation in her study. She argues that domestic service was one of the few areas in which Issei, Nisei, and war brides could consistently find wage work outside of their homes, but that earning money both gave them a limited type of power in the family while also doubling their workload in the home.¹⁰ Glenn's focus on domestic service reveals the hard-working ethic of Japanese Americans. Her analysis includes only those women who mainly worked as domestics. Those Nisei who either never worked as a domestic, or only worked as a domestic as a stepping stone to a different career (e.g. while they pursued higher education) are only briefly included in

⁹ Matsumoto, *City Girls*, 231.

¹⁰ Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 201-218.

Glenn's study. This thesis strives to uncover the ways in which women changed in response to the events of World War II beyond the scope of youth groups or domestic service. This study examines the experiences and overall changes of both Issei and Nisei women's roles as mothers, students, daughters, and wives in response to mass incarceration.

My research also extends the work of other scholars who have focused on the effect of World War II incarceration on women. Pamela Sugiman and Taylor Sakamoto debate the effect incarceration had on different generations of Japanese American women. Sugiman's research uncovers different generational subsections of the Japanese Canadian community.¹¹ "Memories of Internment" uses oral histories collected from Issei and Nisei survivors of incarceration camps to build an image of the trauma of the camps and discusses how memories change and affect people over time. Sugiman's article "A Million Hearts from Here," focuses more on how the incarceration affected the children and grandchildren of those who were incarcerated. Sugiman's article concentrates on Sansei and Yonsei Japanese Canadian women and how they can be more emotionally affected by the events that so changed their mothers' lives. Sugiman hypothesizes that the women who experienced incarceration are more likely to disassociate from the events than to be emotionally affected by them. Even though Sugiman's research is based upon the experiences of Canadian women instead of American, her research helps to highlight the long-term effects of incarceration for both those who experienced it, and for the

¹¹ Sugiman, Pamela. "A Million Hearts from Here': Japanese Canadian Mothers and Daughters and the Lessons of War," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 26, no. 4 (2007): 50-68.; Sugiman, Pamela. "Memories of Internment: Narrating Japanese Canadian Women's Life Stories." *The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers Canadiens De Sociologie* 29, no. 3 (2004): 359-88.

community more broadly. Sugiman's findings on the long-lasting traumatic effects parallel those found in this thesis.

The trend of different generations experiencing internment in contrasting ways remains consistent across communities. Taylor Sakamoto scrutinizes the lasting effects of incarceration on four generations of Japanese Americans. Sakamoto claims that the loss of Japanese culture that grows within each subsequent generation of Japanese Americans correlates to incarceration and the racism that Japanese immigrants and their children faced before and during World War II. According to Sakamoto, though the Sansei and Yonsei retain the drive to succeed that the Nisei have passed down, they do not preserve Japanese culture and are losing connection with the Japanese community. Sugiman and Sakamoto, though they discuss the effect of incarceration on women, do not explore how Japanese American women reacted to incarceration.

While Sugiman and Sakamoto focus on women and the long-term effects of incarceration, scholars John Howard and Leslie Ito examine how the concentration camps and the forced evacuation affected women during World War II. Howard takes a close look at what life was like at Rohwer and Jerome for women. Howard theorizes that changes brought about by camp life, such as equal pay for women and freedom from parental and community scrutiny, led to more independence for women. These actions included the development of non-heteronormative relationships, young women deciding not to marry, and the overall breakdown of the basic family structure.¹² These threats to traditional family structure, Howard claims, led some in the Japanese American

¹² John Howard, "The Politics of Dancing under Japanese-American Incarceration," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 52 (Autumn 2001): 137.

community and the government to heavily promote courtship and marriage among young Japanese American women to restore gender distinctions and stabilize the larger community.¹³ In comparison, Ito's article debates the effect of the mass incarceration on the advancement of women's education outside of the concentration camps and the structures of the Japanese community. Ito argues that these women were not just breaking molds because they were leaving their families and receiving education that had traditionally been reserved for Japanese males, but that they were also ambassadors for the Japanese Americans still locked behind camp walls.¹⁴

Though the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans has received more notice since the redress movement in the 1980s, this event is still under-researched and the reaction of women to the mass incarceration has received even less attention. While investigating how these women changed their roles in response to the events of mass incarceration this study revealed the complexities of assessing traumatic events, which, I found, created opportunities for women even as they created hardship. These types of studies also reveal how complex the responses to events like these are. When there is emotional, physical, and psychological upset, large community upheavals can also create valuable changes in the community in spite of prevalent racism and discrimination. While other studies focused on a specific community or on how multiple generations were impacted by incarceration, this study builds upon that research in order to examine how women from the Issei and Nisei generations were given the opportunity to change in response to the incarceration of the Japanese American community.

¹³ Howard, "Politics of Dancing," 139.

¹⁴ Leslie A. Ito, "Japanese American Women and the Student Relocation Movement, 1942-1945." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 21, no. 3 (2000): 6.

The primary sources researched during this thesis are a series of oral histories archived online at Densho.org. Of the thirty-six interviews studied there were twenty-four women and ten men included in these interviews. At the time of this study most Issei women had passed away and many did not record their experiences of incarceration. For this reason, the oral histories that make up the majority of the primary source material for this study are from Nisei survivors who recount both their own experiences and the experiences of their parents. This means that the information provided about Issei parents are influenced by the oral history narrators, the Nisei, and so all information is both second-hand and likely altered through a child's perspective. Though this sample size is relatively small, the consistent answers of the interviewees reveal similar trends in their lives regarding their choices in relation to their families and education. Additional primary and secondary materials support these emerging themes throughout this study.

Other primary resources examined include: letters written by Japanese American women during World War II and archival material from the concentration camps of Rohwer and Jerome housed in the special collection archives at the University of Arkansas Fayetteville. The Clara Breed Collection, digitized and published online by the Japanese American National Museum, contains letters sent from Japanese American incarcerates to Clara Breed, a children's librarian at the San Diego Public Library. Authors of these letters include both men and women, and their content covers a variety of topics such as: education, romance, and careers. Unlike the oral histories on Densho that occurred decades after incarceration, these letters show what life was like for the writers within and outside of the camps during World War II. When examining these letters, the intention of the authors must be considered and some of the information not

taken at face value. Young men and women may have written lightly about scary or disturbing situations to make friends feel better or because they were concerned about their mail being read. But as similar themes about education, marriage, and careers can be seen in these letters, then when they are examined in conjunction with the Densho oral histories and the primary material from the University of Arkansas, the support for these themes becomes stronger.

Both the letters in the Clara Breed collection and the oral histories archived at Densho rely on personal recollection or point of view, and, unfortunately, memories and perspectives can alter the reality of events. People often have mistaken memories or try to soften the pain of an event by altering what happened when they retell the story or write a letter. This means that information taken from these sources must be corroborated. By using data from WRA materials, secondary articles, and comparing the information from multiple primary resources, the themes observed within both the oral histories and the Clara Breed letters can be verified.

Throughout my examination of the oral histories it was apparent how much women's behaviors and attitudes altered based on whether they were Issei or Nisei and what expectations the Japanese American community had for each generation. As such, this thesis will first examine what women's lives were like for each generation before the mass incarceration. Chapter One discusses the lives of both Issei and Nisei women before Pearl Harbor and how their respective positions within the Japanese-American community created distinctly different behavior patterns among these two groups of women. Through an analysis of Japanese American women's behaviors and their expected gender roles before World War II, I showcase both the pre-war tensions and the

different life experiences that altered the Issei's and Nisei's responses to mass incarceration. Chapter Two continues the examination of generational differences but examines closely the alterations that started occurring in women's roles in reaction to Pearl Harbor and the initial months of involuntary evacuation. This chapter assesses how the upheaval of both the removal of Japanese American community leaders immediately after Pearl Harbor and Executive Order 9066 accelerated changes in the roles women inhabited in their communities even before the forced evacuation occurred, most especially for Issei mothers.

Chapters Three and Four then shift the focus to investigate more closely how World War II and the mass incarceration changed gender roles for Nisei women. Chapter Three focuses on how the forced evacuation of the Japanese American community allowed Nisei women to make choices regarding marriage and children. Chapter Four examines the increased access women gained to education and careers during World War II. This chapter also notes how women often chose to have a career or obtain higher education in the face of racism and sexism that worked to deter them. Finally, the conclusion pulls together the results of my research and demonstrates how the events surrounding the mass incarceration during World War II gave women access to choices that would ultimately lead to a change in their standing in the Japanese American community.

Before discussing the intricacies of Japanese-American gender roles and culture, and how they changed because of World War II, some of the terminology should be

examined.¹⁵ In both the academic world and in common parlance people usually use the terms “internment,” “internment camp,” and “voluntary removal” when discussing these events. The members of the Seattle Japanese-American community, however, prefer the use of the term “incarceration,” “concentration camp,” and “forced removal” when discussing the events of World War II. Because these terms paint a clearer picture of the events in question, and to respect the sentiments expressed by the Japanese-American community, I am using this terminology throughout the thesis.

Furthermore, the term internment is also complicated by its usage within the Japanese-American community in relation to specific events during World War II. Some narrators in the oral histories state that their fathers had been interned. For Japanese Americans this does not mean that their fathers were sent to one of the ten previously mentioned concentration camps, but that they had been arrested and were interned as enemy aliens in detention facilities such as the Crystal City Alien Enemy Detention Facility outside of Crystal City, Texas.

The thesis also explores a distinct generational divide within the Japanese American community. A majority of the sources I examined were from Nisei, or second generation Japanese Americans. The Issei are the first-generation Japanese immigrants, many of whom did not write, read, or speak much English. This distinction is important for two reasons. First, there is a difference in the way the Issei and Nisei women responded to incarceration, and second, the Japanese-American community itself uses

¹⁵ During the summer of 2018 I was invited to interview and observe some members of the Seattle Japanese American community, both in Seattle and during a pilgrimage to the Minidoka Incarceration Camp. While engaging with this community I was informed of the current preferred vocabulary to use when discussing the forced removal of the Japanese American community during World War II.

these terms to distinguish the generations. I will be using the terms Issei and Nisei to highlight the differences in generational reactions to incarceration or to distinguish between different groups within the Japanese American community. The differences in expectations and behaviors of the Issei and Nisei women is the foundation for this study and is covered in detail in Chapter One.

Chapter One: Life Before Camp

“Well, all the Issei women appear like they're submissive, but I tell you, they were iron-fisted,” laughed Sharon Aburano as she recalled what her mother was like during an interview in 2008. “But anyway,” she continued, “she was not a usual one. Of course, I think, as all families, they pressed education, she more than anyone.”¹ Aburano’s recollection suggests both how stereotypes of Issei women did not always match reality, and how Nisei children often characterized their own strong-willed mothers as an exception, thus further reinforcing the stereotype. This chapter examines the cultural norms that shaped Issei and Nisei women before World War II, and the texture of their prewar lives, to argue that even though Issei women reinforced the stereotype of the docile and submissive wife, their day to day actions did not match the personality they presented and it is this strong, hardworking personality that revealed itself as more authoritative and independent during the years of World War II. The prewar generational tensions that existed between the Issei and the Nisei, and their different life experiences, drastically altered each generation’s response to the events of Pearl Harbor and forced incarceration.

The feelings and views of the Nisei about their mothers runs a gamut of reactions, but one theme shows through in a number of cases. Their mother was unusual: strong or compassionate or clever, while other Issei women were, according to their own perceptions, not as well prepared as their own mothers. This perception of the normal

¹ Sharon Aburano, “Sharon Tanagi Aburano Interview I,” Interview by Tom Ikeda and Megan Asaka. *Courtesy of Densho*. March 25, 2008, Segment 5.

Issei woman as unprepared for major life events influenced the Nisei's opinion of Japanese woman and led them to desire a more American lifestyle.

Aburano considered her mother as rare among Issei women. For instance, when the interviewer observed to Aburano, "Well, it's interesting..., even though her husband had just been taken away, people were still coming to her for help," Aburano confirmed that they were. "Well, they want to know how to pay bills and how to do things," and further revealed that the people coming for help were people in similar situations, the "people in the neighborhood." Aburano also revealed during this interview with Ikeda that her mother had the ability to speak and read English, knew how to keep the family store running, how to pay the bills, who her husbands' contacts were, and because of her connection with the local church even had contacts of her own.² These were skills which Aburano believed to be unusual for her mother to know.

Further along in Aburano's interview she reveals how lost she considered most other Issei women before World War II, especially when their husbands were suddenly removed. "They didn't even know where the money was, they didn't know anything. ...The women came through, I guess, but evacuation was a good thing in that respect, (the women became decision-makers, and more independent)."³ This idea that Issei women only became decision-makers because of the war is both true, and indicative of the divide that existed between the community's perceptions of Issei women and the reality. Issei women were already decision-makers, but World War II forced them to make those decisions outside of their prescribed gender roles.

² Ibid., Segment 6.

³ Ibid., Seg. 24.

My findings on the difference between the capability of their own mothers and the Nisei's belief in the ineptitude of other Issei women is supported by Malve von Hassell's study of Issei mothers and Nisei daughters. Hassell's research was conducted on a group of Issei and Nisei living in the New York metropolitan area, though they had all lived on the West Coast before World War II.⁴ Hassell found during her research that Issei women used silence, and the indirect manner of speech that was a cornerstone of Japanese good manners, to allow their daughters freedom from their own burdens and from the pressures Issei women felt in their lives.⁵ Unfortunately this meant that Issei women didn't convey most of their experiences to their daughters, thereby projecting an image of themselves only as the polite, obedient, and silent Issei wife, instead of sharing the struggles they faced from their positions as immigrants or as wives and mothers. Hassell's article shows how pervasive the belief in the image of an obedient Japanese wife was, "Nisei daughters repeatedly told me that all *issei* women were pretty much alike and then would almost apologetically preface descriptions of their mothers with: "You know, in some respects, my mother was really an unusual *issei* woman," as if uncomfortable with the contradiction."⁶

The gap between the perception of and the reality of the Issei's life appears throughout the Nisei oral histories, which often highlight their mothers' strength and ingenuity. "I remember being in the other room with my two brothers and my mother. And there were these two big guys that came and were talking to my dad about this[,]" May K. Sasaki states in an interview as she recalls her mother's cleverness in the face of

⁴ Malve Von Hassell, "'Issei' Women: Silences and Fields of Power," *Feminist Studies* 19, no. 3 (1993): 550.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 563.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 551.

her father's imminent arrest. "And then my mother told me, she whispered in my ear, in Japanese, to run over there and grab hold of Papa and start crying... So I ran over there and I grabbed a hold of his pant legs and I started crying and hollering, and then my brothers were there holding onto Papa." Sasaki goes on to reveal that her Father had no idea why his kids were suddenly behaving in such a way as this was not a plan that he had discussed with his wife before the FBI arrived. "And my dad was startled. But then he saw the effect it had on the FBI agents... So finally they left and then after, I was to learn that my mother had purposely planned this, that she would have us kids run over there and make such a scene that they would think twice about [arresting him.]"⁷ This story portrays Sasaki's mother as a clever and determined woman, one who was willing to play upon the emotions of law enforcement to keep her family together.

Though May Sasaki has such a strong example of her mother as a determined and clever woman, it is not that image that remains when Sasaki thinks back to her mother. Immediately after relating this story Sasaki reveals her perception of her mother: "I think she... my mother had some reserves in her that she never showed us until it really was necessary, like standing firm about not going back to Japan and then at this point doing that. But she never really used that too often. I always thought of her as very passive and submissive."⁸ This description exemplifies the world most Issei mothers inhabited; they had strong personalities, but only rarely showed them. It is the idea of a passive women that remained with many Nisei years later.

⁷ May Sasaki, "May K. Sasaki Interview," Interview by Lori Hoshino and Alice Ito, *Courtesy of Densho*. October 28, 1997, Segment 10.

⁸ Ibid.

Nisei perceived their mothers in different ways, even though Issei women often had similar reactions to stressful events in their lives. Aburano saw her mother as an exception to the overall rule of the passive Issei wife, while Sasaki believed that her mother had brief reserves of strength but still embodied the ideal of an obedient Issei wife. Still other Nisei believed their mothers completely embodied the stereotype of the compliant Issei wife. Hiroshi Kashiwagi, a Nisei man who lived with his mother in Tule Lake all throughout incarceration, said in an interview, “My mother, her first idea was to keep the family together. So that if one of us decided we would register and leave the camp, then, of course the family would be broken up. And she needed us because my father wasn’t there, although she had some friends who helped her out.”⁹ Kashiwagi and his siblings perceived their mother as a woman who relied heavily on her husband and without him required the support of her family and friends to help her through the war, though it was her determination that kept the family together throughout the war.

Some Nisei accounts do support the image of the submissive wife. For instance, Chizuko Omori in the documentary *Rabbit in the Moon* relates that in her memories her mother was always demure, walking three steps behind her husband with her eyes downcast and always putting herself last. Omori goes on to say that she, “always thought that was... stupid, to be honest,” and would tease her mother about adhering to such traditional behaviors.¹⁰ Omori further reveals how her perception of her mother affected her perception of Japanese women.

I could never become a Japanese woman, I know that, I would be such a misfit. And the way I knew that women were going to be treated in Japan. Namely, I would

⁹ Hiroshi Kashiwagi, “Hiroshi Kashiwagi Interview,” Interview by Emiko and Chizuko Omori Collection, Courtesy of Emiko and Chizuko Omori on *Densho*. October 1, 1992, Segment 3.

¹⁰ *Rabbit in the Moon*, Directed by Emiko Omori (1999; Wabi-Sabi, 1999), 48:20.

have to be like someone like my mother, and I did not want to become someone, or be forced to become someone like my mother. That's the honest truth.¹¹

The image of the perfect Issei wife and mother defined life for Issei women before World War II and deeply impacted the experiences of their Nisei children.

Each of the previous images of the Issei mother are true. Cleverness and resolve, familial loyalty and obedience, these are all facets that Issei women used and presented to others in different ways depending on the personality and lifestyle of each woman. This complex set of behaviors and characteristics developed, in part, because of the history of the immigration of the Japanese community.

The dynamics of immigration shaped both Issei demographics and gender norms. The first 25 years of Japanese immigration in the late 19th century were disproportionately male, and these men had no familial ties within the United States. The lack of familial ties and structure led to a lack of cultural restrictions and so men routinely fell into gambling, drinking, and visiting prostitutes as their favored past times. Japanese leaders both in the US and in Japan were desperate to reform what they saw as a prevalence of these immoral exploits, which they feared would support the appearance of an uncivilized Japanese society, an image that a racially charged U.S. culture bolstered. It was only through the shift into family life, reformers believed, with the introduction of wives and children into Japanese American culture that the reformation of the Japanese community in the eyes of the American populace could commence.¹²

¹¹ Ibid., 47:56-48:17.

¹² Kei Tanaka, "Japanese Picture Marriage and the Image of Immigrant Women in Early Twentieth-Century California," *Japanese Journal of American Studies* 15 (2004): 115.

The improvement of the Japanese community was laid on the shoulders of Issei women. These women were expected to redeem the community through their roles as *ryosai kenbo* or “good wives and wise mothers.” *Ryosai kenbo* is a cultural gender ideology that developed during the early 20th century in Japan. This ideology was promoted by the Meiji State and in Japan applied to women of middle- or upper-class society who would be educated in how to raise children who would honor the imperial state and to bring harmony to the household through their actions.¹³ The idea of *ryosai kenbo* is similar to gender norms that developed early in United States history in that the definitions of an ideal wife and mother were linked to political aspirations. In the US a good mother raised independent-minded citizens, but in Japan a mother raised loyal imperial subjects who honored, “filial piety, loyalty to the emperor and nation, and female submission to the male.”¹⁴

Issei women faced a difficult task. They had to contend with high levels of racism against Asian Americans, compounded by the legacy of prostitution (which associated Japanese women with sex work), and finally economic factors that made it nigh on impossible for Issei women to completely emulate the ideology of *ryosai kenbo*. Scholars such as Yuji Ichioka and Kazuhiro Oharazeki have discussed how the first Issei women brought over to the United States were often brought as prostitutes.¹⁵ Mass immigration

¹³ Rebecca Corbett, “Guides for Modern Life,” In *Cultivating Femininity: Women and Tea Culture in Edo and Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2018), 123.

¹⁴ Tanaka, “Japanese Picture Marriage,” 119.

¹⁵ For a more in-depth look into Japanese American prostitutes and prostitution before 1920 see: Yuji Ichioka, “Amerika Nadeshiko: Japanese Immigrant Women in the United States, 1900-1924,” *Pacific Historical Review* 49, no. 2 (1980): 348-54. Yuji Ichioka, “Ameyuki-san: Japanese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Amerasia Journal* 4 no. 1 (1977): 1-21. Kazuhiro Oharazeki, “Listening to the Voices of “Other” Women in Japanese North America: Japanese Prostitutes and Barmaids in the American West, 1887-1920,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 32, no. 4 (2013): 5-40.

out of Japan began in the 1880s and consisted mainly of young male contract laborers who wanted to earn money and then return to Japan. The arrival of Japanese women in America before the 20th century consisted mainly of women who either planned to become prostitutes or were convinced to travel to the United States and then sold into prostitution.¹⁶ While the vast majority of these women were unlikely to have become prostitutes by choice, according to Oharazeki both the economic conditions in Japan and the ability for prostitutes to make higher wages in American did entice some women into traveling to the US to engage in prostitution.¹⁷

Immigration patterns shifted to include a higher number of women after the Gentlemen's Agreement was made in 1907, and the prostitutes remaining in America shifted from prostitution into marriage and more respectable areas of work. The White Slave Traffic Act of 1910 deported dozens of prostitutes, but those women who remained behind, both former prostitutes and newly arrived wives, were to help build the image of the ideal Japanese society.¹⁸

The Issei women whose wartime experiences the rest of this thesis examines faced a tough reality when they arrived in the United States, and many were disheartened by their circumstances. In Japan, marriage without first meeting your spouse was not uncommon, so the use of pictures as a placeholder during the marriage ceremony was not much of a stretch for Japanese customs and gave rise to the short-lived picture bride phenomena. Though no one can give an exact number as to how many women arrived in

¹⁶ Oharazeki, "Listening to the Voices," 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

America as picture brides, Gary Okihiro found that the female Japanese American immigrant population rose from 4 percent in 1900 to 35 percent by 1920.¹⁹

For many Issei brides, disillusionment began when the picture and the story told to Issei women about their new husbands did not even remotely match the reality they found upon arrival in the US.²⁰ Some women were so disheartened by the realities of their new circumstances that they refused to stay with their husbands and asked to be returned to Japan.²¹ The pressure on these arriving women was so pervasive that, according to Ichioka, the Japanese Association of America released a guide instructing new immigrant women on proper behavior, how to conduct themselves aboard ships, and how to manage a household.²² This guide was released in response to the high desertion rate of picture brides. Japanese brides deserted their new husbands because of their new husbands' gambling and drinking, the women's own disillusionment with their new lives, and the large education and age gaps that could exist between spouses. Even though men held some responsibility for the disillusionment of their new brides the guide placed the responsibility of conduct and proper comportment firmly on the shoulders of Japanese women.²³

Though Japanese women sometimes deserted the men they had been contracted to marry because of their disillusionment, many of those women married other Japanese immigrants and didn't leave the United States. In their new lives they learned to balance the demanding realities of immigrant life with the image of *ryosai kenbo* they were being

¹⁹ Okihiro, "An American Story," in *Impounded*, 48.

²⁰ Ichioka, "Amerika Nadeshiko," 347.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 353.

²³ *Ibid.*

instructed to display. The ideal of *ryosai kenbo* in Japan was usually limited to middle- to upper-class women, but in an effort to overcome both the racism and the bad image that Americans had of the Japanese community, Japanese leaders in America promoted the ideal of *ryosai kenbo* for all Japanese women. In Japan, a woman who adhered to these ideals would not work outside of the home, but care for the house, her husband, and devote the rest of her time to raising the children. This was not a reality that often existed for immigrant Japanese families.

The economic condition of most Japanese immigrant families was constantly on the edge of collapse. The threat of financial instability, along with other factors, led Issei women into work, a situation that put Issei women in conflict with the ideal of *ryosai kenbo*. Where Issei women worked depended on the location and status of the family. Rural women often worked alongside their husbands in the fields of farms or labor camps. Urban women worked in laundry mats, grocery stores, or other small businesses that catered to the Japanese community. In some cases they were intrinsic to the running of a family business. Marshall M. Sumida, a Nisei born in 1921, recalled in an interview in 2011, how his father started a business selling sewing machines, “I think they had a Singer franchise, but the Japanese income was so low that they can't afford to buy new, new sewing machines, so my father started to sell used Singer sewing machines.” Sumida goes onto discuss how the difference between Japanese knowledge and American industry caused some problems. “Japanese didn't know how to use a sewing machine, so my mother became a seamstress and learned how to use the, sew with a Singer sewing machine a little.” Sumida then reveals just how crucial his mother became to their small family business, “It worked out that my father's business, she was a, became an important

part of it, that teaching the farmers' wives how to sew with a sewing machine.”²⁴ Even though Marshall Sumida’s mother worked alongside her husband, in fact became the backbone of the business, and since she worked for the family all her work was unpaid. Working for the family business was considered part of a woman’s duties as a wife.

Issei women also took on paid work outside the home, especially when their families were struggling to make ends meet. Evelyn Nakano Glenn found that Issei women earned supplemental income when it was needed to help bolster the money earned by their husbands, or to help with the accrual of a nest egg for returning to Japan, or because it was an easy way to earn an independent source of income.²⁵ Issei women entered into domestic work specifically because domestic work did not require skilled labor or command of the English language and domestic work was readily available to Japanese women. Japanese women often did not try to obtain other unskilled jobs because of widespread racism, domestic work had a flexible schedule, and women could work seasonally or half days if needed.²⁶

Thus, Issei women’s supposed domesticity and subservience, and their “Good Wife, Wise Mother” actions, are more complex than they might first appear. Women gained some power within the normally rigid family structure by working for the family business and earning wages, both Glenn and Hassell conclude.²⁷ Earning wages outside the home was not a traditionally favored role for Japanese women to take on, but as long

²⁴ Marshall Sumida, “Marshall M. Sumida Interview,” Interview by Martha Nakagawa, *Courtesy of Densho*, April 8, 2011, Segment 1.

²⁵ Evelyn Nakao Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 110-111, 115.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

²⁷ Hassell, “Issei Silence and Power,” 557; Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride*, 203.

as women adhered to the idea of working for the family or for their children, then engaging in wage work was not only supported but sometimes increased the respectability of the Japanese woman as they were putting the family above themselves.²⁸ Since Issei women were almost universally required to work, either in a family business or on a farm or in the domestic field, they all had some extra leverage within the structure of their families.

Women used what available power they had in different ways. Though limited, when used effectively an Issei woman could assert her will upon her husband as well as her children. May Sasaki's mother, who encouraged her children to cry about their father being taken away to discourage the FBI from arresting him, also stood up to her husband just a short time before that incident. In response to the rising tensions of the time, Sasaki's father wanted to return to Japan, but Sasaki's mother said no and put her foot down stating, "No, you could go back but I will keep the kids and I will stay here." And I guess he knew that she was serious at that point."²⁹ May Sasaki's father obviously gave into his wife's demands and the family stayed in America, even though up until that point Sasaki recalls that her father had always been the decision maker.³⁰

Yet whatever power women gained through either wage or household work, men still often controlled decisions regarding the family. Issei women's power was very situational and before the war husbands would often make decisions about the family without any discussion with their wives, including heartbreaking ones such as this story

²⁸ Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride*, 217.

²⁹ Sasaki, "May Sasaki Interview," Interview by Lori Hoshino and Alice Ito, Segment 9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

from Yone Bartholomew about being given away as a child. Bartholomew maintained a relationship with both her foster parents and her birth parents, so she recalls her family telling her that when she was

[T]oddling, barely toddling around -- there was another couple who did not have any children. And having seen me, they said, "Oh I wish we had one like that. We'd sure like a child, but I'm not able to have any children." And so my Dad says, "Fine I expect to have a big family. I have two in Japan and this one, and will have many more, but if you want her, you can have her." Without even consulting poor Mother. And Mother said, "I had nothing to say" -- because she felt sorry for the family, too -- "but I was so happy to have my firstborn here because I missed my two in Japan." But she gave me up in order to make the other family happy[.]³¹

Issei women worked, inside and outside of the home, for the betterment of their children and their family. They faced a community that told them they needed to limit their influence to their homes, but the economic reality of their situations demanded that they participate in earning wages for the family. Alice Kessler Harris found similar cultural expectations when she researched women and the shifting composition of the labor force after the American Revolution. Between the 1820s and 1840s women experienced a shift in the community's cultural expectations of them. Women went from being told that all their economic contributions were essential to sustaining the household to being told that their only place was raising patriotic sons within the household.³² During the 1820s and 30s women were encouraged to earn wages outside of the home, though they were to give up work when they married. By the 1840s though, a moral shift in the community pushed all but the most desperate women away from earning wages

³¹ Yone Bartholomew, "Yone Bartholomew Interview I," Interview by Tracy Lai, *Courtesy of Densho*, May 1, 1998, Segment 2.

³² Alice Kessler-Harris, "Industrial Wage Earners and the Domestic Ideology," in *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, 20th Anniversary Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 71.

outside the home.³³ For Issei women not even the community's desire for women to adhere to the ideal of *ryosai kenbo* could keep them from earning wages when balanced against the survival of their families, but the majority of women were able to project the image of the perfect wife and mother while also working.

The complex behaviors and gender norms that structured the lives of Issei women also limited their choices and independence before World War II. In contrast the Nisei had more options as they grew up as they attempted to balance Japanese cultural values with American customs. One of the most limiting aspects of an Issei woman's life in the United States was her inability to speak English. That Nisei could speak fluent English opened more options for them than their mothers. Both scholars and oral histories mention that Issei women had little time for anything beyond work and taking care of the family. Glenn points out that some Issei women had the opportunity to take English classes at the start of their lives in the US, but that as soon as children arrived they usually dropped the classes.³⁴ Their lack of English fluency meant that Issei women were ineligible for any form of skilled labor outside of the Japanese community.

By contrast, while Nisei women learned Japanese as their first language, they soon became fluent in English after starting school. Nisei spoke Japanese at home, and for the first-born Nisei there was often no English spoken at all until they entered elementary school. Then they only spoke Japanese to their parents or other Issei and switched to speaking English with their friends and peers. Younger Nisei were exposed to

³³ Ibid.; Kessler-Harris, "From Household Manufacturers to Wage Work," in *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, 20th Anniversary Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 22.

³⁴ Glenn, Issei, Nisei, War Bride, 48-49.

English earlier as their older siblings brought the English language home with them when they returned from school. Some Nisei went so far as to refuse to speak Japanese at home.

This transition to speaking English created a gulf between the Issei and Nisei. Only the oldest children were routinely encouraged or expected to keep up their Japanese language skills which at times lead to parents and children not being able to hold deep conversations with each other.³⁵ Being fluent in English allowed Nisei to more easily assimilate into mainstream American culture and to begin adopting ideas that countered the commonly held beliefs of the Japanese American community. Issei, especially women, had few connections outside of the Japanese American community because they could only speak the most basic English phrases. These language differences would be critical to how Issei and Nisei navigated, and were shaped by, wartime evacuation and incarceration.

Though Nisei women were beginning to assimilate with mainstream white American culture, within their community they were expected to fill the same roles as their mothers. In the decades before the war, those families that held more strongly to the gender norms that had been prevalent in Japan would place their sons above their daughters in terms of importance or respect and were more likely to send their sons on to higher education than their daughters. Hisaye Yamamoto recalled a story from her life before World War II that shows how little weight her voice was given by the men in her

³⁵ Marshall Sumida relates a moving example of this, “But I never really got to know my father because I didn't speak Japanese and we were learning, going to Japanese to learn how to speak a family conversation, but I never really got to talk to him about his life.”; Sumida, “Marshall Sumida Interview,” Interview by Martha Nakagawa, Segment 1.

community. When she heard that war had broken out between the United States and Japan, which she heard “on the radio early in the morning and I went to tell my father and his friend, our neighbor, Matsumoto-san. And they didn't believe me, you know, what does a girl know, you know.” Her relatives dismissed her concerns and thought she “must have misheard or something. And later on they became aware that it really did happen, you know.” Her father said to her later, ““Japan and the U.S. are at war.” And I said, “I already told you.”” Hisaye laughed as she recalled how much her opinion was respected, “So that's how much my word was taken in those days. And I was already, what, nineteen -- no, I was already twenty, I think. Yeah, I think so. 'Cause that happened in December and we were evacuated in May. Yeah, I was already twenty. And that's how much they took my word for things.”³⁶ A lack of voice within her own family was not the only unequal treatment that Yamamoto or any Issei and Nisei woman faced because of their gender.

Women also received less encouragement regarding education, even though Issei parents believed more education was the best way for their children to make better lives for themselves. In some families, education beyond high school was not supported for women. When Ruby Inouye, a Nisei who would become a doctor after World War II, asked her father about going to medical school his first response was, “Well, you're a girl, woman. And you know you're supposed to get married and have a family. That's what usually women do. And besides, you're, you're a woman, you don't know how you'll do.”³⁷ Even in a family where secondary education for women was encouraged, they

³⁶ Hisaye Yamamoto, “Hisaye Yamamoto Interview,” Interview by Emiko and Chizuko Omori, Courtesy of Emiko and Chizuko Omori on *Densho*, March 21, 1994, Segment 4.

³⁷ Ruby Inouye, “Ruby Inouye Interview,” Interview by Alice Ito and Dee Goto, *Courtesy of Densho*, April 3 & 4, 2003, Segment 14.

believed that marriage and children were Inouye's ultimate goal and that she probably wouldn't succeed as a doctor because she was a woman. Whereas Inouye's father did come around and approve of her entering medical school, Inouye's circumstances were rare, and she realized that her father's stance on education for girls was different.

However, my best friend, her family was more Japanese, I guess. When she was eighteen they, their families agreed to have her marry another older guy... I thought it was weird -- not weird, but, I sure didn't wanna be like that. I didn't want my parents to do that. But apparently her parents were more Japanese and wanted their eldest daughter married off.³⁸

While Inouye was allowed to go to college and think about a career, her friends were told to get married, in a manner reminiscent of their parents' marriages. This emphasis on education as a route to a better life, coupled with the devaluing of girls' education, probably contributed to Nisei women's driven pursuit of education after their internment experience, as we will see in Chapter Three, which explores their reactions to incarceration.

Before World War II it was difficult for a woman, even one with a degree, to get a steady job. Though Issei wanted better for their children, with the ever-growing racism against Japanese immigrants and the Japanese American community, and the growing tensions surrounding the war, Nisei were being forced to find jobs below their educational level to keep their families afloat. In a situation reminiscent of their mother's lives, older Nisei who were married and having children before World War II were working in similar positions, for similar pay, to their mothers. Mostly they took on domestic work, if they worked outside the home, though as the Japanese American community grew they could sometimes find work from other Japanese Americans in the

³⁸ Ibid., Segment 9.

community. Mitsu Fukui, a Nisei from Seattle, ran a dry-cleaning business with her husband before the outbreak of World War II. While she worked hard alongside her husband, she was also able to hire a neighbor to help her support her family. “Well, my husband did all the pressing and I did all the alterations and, oh, did the hand ironing. And then I had a girl that did the seamstress, you know, repairing. She used to come in 10 o'clock in the morning and leave about 3:00. So when she came home her children would be home from school.”³⁹ Women, when taking on jobs outside of the home had to consider the schedules of their families, because they were often the sole care providers for their children.

Even without the language barriers and limited education that Issei women faced, Nisei still struggled to find jobs outside of domestic work before World War II. Though they were fluent in English and had received a college degree, Nisei were restricted in where they could work. Nobu Suzuki relates how racial discrimination in America affected Nisei women’s ability to get jobs in the US before the war.

Well, there were only a few jobs available here and mostly it was secretarial to the Japanese firms here. American firms didn't hire Japanese girls at that time. There weren't any salespersons or anything else in stores, in the white stores, and there was no Japanese, no place for college graduates to find jobs unless it was with an importing firm and there wasn't too many of them. And so there were no jobs available teaching or anything else.⁴⁰

Even if women could to go to college before the war they were severely restricted in how they could use their education.

³⁹ Mitsu Fukui, “Mitsu Fukui Interview,” Interview by Alice Ito, *Courtesy of Densho*. December 18 & 19, 2002, Segment 13.

⁴⁰ Nobu Suzuki, “Nobu Suzuki Interview I,” Interview by Dee Goto, *Courtesy of Densho*, June 3, 1998, Segment 14.

Indeed, Nisei women struggled in finding a balance between becoming more Americanized and holding onto their Japanese traditions. Valerie Matsumoto emphasizes how important clubs and youth groups were to Nisei girls in helping with this struggle. Clubs and youth groups sprang up within the Japanese American community by the dozens in the decades before the war. Nisei girls, like other ethnic minorities at the time, were routinely barred from joining the clubs and organizations that already existed for white Americans because of their race, and so developed their own. These clubs, affiliated with organizations such as the YWCA and Church groups, grew rapidly during the 1920s and 1930s as they fulfilled the unique needs of Nisei women. Clubs allowed Nisei women to assimilate mainstream white American cultural ideals such as mixed-sex dances or going hiking, with more Japanese cultural traditions such as flower arranging or Japanese etiquette, all without causing extreme conflict between the Issei and Nisei generations.⁴¹ Nisei girls' clubs allowed women a space in which they could interact with young men their age and explore new interests away from the watchful eye of parents that kept young Nisei girls behaving appropriately. It was within these spaces that they could begin to define themselves and their place within both Japanese and American culture.

Many Nisei women also found leadership roles within these clubs that otherwise would not have been available. "If we hadn't had these ethnic organizations to join," Yoshiko Uchida wrote, "I think few Nisei would have had the opportunity to hold positions of leadership or responsibility. At one time I was president of the campus

⁴¹ Valerie Matsumoto, *City Girls: the Nisei Social World in Los Angeles, 1920-1950*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 37.

Japanese Women's Student Club, a post I know I would not have held in a non-Japanese campus organization."⁴² The Nisei ran the clubs themselves, becoming presidents and vice-presidents of clubs that routinely held events that required planning, cooperation, and organization. Women learned leadership skills within these groups that they could not receive elsewhere, and these groups allowed women freedom from parental restrictions.

What, then, were Issei and Nisei women's lives and expectations like on the eve of World War II incarceration? Though both were raised within communities that touted the ideal of the "good wife and wise mother," Nisei women were also shaped by American culture, while their mothers remained ensconced within Japanese American communities. Issei women were often more than just a "Good Wife and a Wise Mother." They labored with their husbands in shops and fields, took care of both the home and family, and where they could apply their own form of power. But their isolation from other communities left Issei women without many pathways to enact change within Japanese American society, if they ever considered a need for change. Nisei, with better access to American cultural norms through school and the community engagement opportunities offered through their social clubs, had begun to shift away from the gender roles imposed on them by their community. Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga, in two separate interviews, aptly describes the dynamics of the typical Japanese American family before World War II. She states, "My mother was not, was so busy taking care of us that when she came over here from the old country, she actually never had time to learn the language. She was working from dawn to dusk, taking care of the house, of course, and

⁴² Ibid., 30.

sometimes going out to earn extra money to keep our family going.”⁴³ Later, in an interview conducted in 2009, Herzig-Yoshinaga further expanded on the role her mother played in their family. When asked about her mother’s relationship with Herzig-Yoshinaga’s father, she replied. “Sort of what I figured was typical of Issei parents, that Papa was the boss, Mama did all the work, and he had the last word.”⁴⁴ It would not be until their circumstances were changed by the mass incarceration of the Japanese American community that Issei women would be required to reassess what qualified as a Good Wife and Wise Mother, while Nisei women took advantage of wartime opportunities to pursue previously inaccessible opportunities that Issei gender norms, Japanese American cultural restrictions, and U.S. racism had denied them.

⁴³ Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga, “Aiko Herzig Interview,” Interview by Chizuko and Emiko Omori, Courtesy of Emiko and Chizuko Omori on *Densho*. March 20, 1994, Segment 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Segment 4.

Chapter Two: Incarceration and the Realities of War

Alice Ito (AI): Well, I wanted to ask you, were your folks, your mother and father still in Minidoka while you were in Detroit?

Mitsu Fukui (MF): Well, they stayed 'til the very last, until it closed and then they went home because they had their own home.

AI: And what about your sister, Toshiko, she had gone out from camp, didn't she?

MF: Yeah, she left early, very early with her friend Ko Suzuki. And they went to Minneapolis and she got a job at (YMCA) as a secretary and she was doing very well and then she met Kay, Kay Ishii and they got married and he was still in the army.¹

Mitsu Fukui's description of her family during World War II shows the differences in their lives that developed between the Issei and the Nisei, and how families often had to physically split up. Many Nisei left the camps at some point during the war, leaving when they found jobs or going to school when they could. The clear majority of the Issei lost most of what they had gained—housing, savings, personal belongings—and many of them spent the war years in the concentration camps. The physical separation that occurred because of mass incarceration was echoed by the emotional and cultural breakdown that occurred within the Japanese American community during this time.

Issei and Nisei women changed their behavior to match the disruptions in their community structure. Issei women were required to step forward to keep their families together in the months after Pearl Harbor, though their power was circumscribed by entry into assembly centers and the expectations of their families. While some Nisei women adhered to the already established cultural norms still other women found ways to take advantage of wartime opportunities to circumnavigate the restrictions of pre-war family

¹ Mitsu Fukui, "Mitsu Fukui Interview," Interview by Alice Ito, *Courtesy of Densho*. December 18 & 19, 2002, Segment 31.

life. Through their roles as wife and mother, and out of a desire for better education, Nisei women found opportunities to gain more power and independence within the Japanese American community.

Changes in the roles of Issei and Nisei women began to alter, not with the mass removal of Japanese Americans to the assembly centers or concentration camps, but with the sudden removal of Issei community leaders after Pearl Harbor. In the days immediately following Pearl Harbor the FBI seized Japanese men from their families and interned many of them. These men were community leaders: men involved in the *kenjinkai*—the local Japanese business associations, Japanese language teachers, Buddhist priests and other men whose opinions held sway within the community. The US government had lists of men slated for arrest even before the bombing at Pearl Harbor, but the violent attack on American shores gave the government the permission it needed to lock up these men.² Some of these men were released quickly after being questioned, returning to their families before the forced removal of Japanese Americans began, but others were kept in prisoner of war internment camps for months or years, and some until the end of the war. Twelve hundred Issei men were arrested immediately after the Pearl Harbor attack and five thousand were eventually taken into custody by the DOJ, leaving families without their normal authority figures.³ Over the course of World War II only

² Gary Okihiro, “An American Story,” in *Impounded: Dorothea Lange and the Censored Images of Japanese American Internment*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 50.

³ “About the Incarceration.” *Densho Encyclopedia*. Accessed February 5, 2019.
<https://encyclopedia.densho.org/history/>

thirteen hundred men were released into War Relocation Authority camps, leaving thirty-seven hundred families without their fathers for years.⁴

Without the decision-making authority of Issei men, Issei women were required to step into the position of family figurehead. For some, this task was relatively easy. As we saw from Sharon Aburano's mother in Chapter One, some women had experience with tasks that were routinely gendered for men, such as paying the bills.⁵ For other women completing tasks that were traditionally accomplished by men was extremely hard. Ayako Nishi Fujimoto, Kyoko Nishi Tanaka, and Nancy Nishi, three sisters who were interviewed together in 2008, described their mother's situation right before the war, "AF: There were four girls, my mother had four young girls, you know, and no sons. NN: And she also had to manage the nursery." Their mother, whose first name is not given, had a hard time keeping up with four girls and the nursery, especially after Executive Order 9066 was released, "it was quite hard for her. And then the Executive Order 9066 came about, and so it was a matter of packing, yes. So it was quite traumatic for my mom, I think. KT: Well, especially for my mom, because she had all girls...." The sisters further recalled that they were not expected to help their mother in securing the family business or their home when they were forced to leave, but that she had to rely on a neighbor's son. "AF: Oh, I'm sure it was [a confusing time] for my mother, yeah. Because she had the neighbor's sons, who spoke, who was bilingual, help her."⁶ Ayako Nishi Fujimoto, Kyoko Nishi Tanaka, and Nancy Nishi go on to describe in their

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Sharon Aburano, "Sharon Tanagi Aburano Interview I," Interview by Tom Ikeda and Megan Asaka, *Courtesy of Densho*, March 25, 2008, Segment 6.

⁶ Fujimoto, Ayako Nishi, Tanaka, Kyoko Nishi, and Nishi, Nancy. "Ayako Nishi Fujimoto - Kyoko Nishi Tanaka - Nancy Nishi Interview." Interview by Richard Potashin. *Courtesy of Densho*. July 19, 2008. Segment 10.

interview how hard it was for their mother to handle the preparations to leave their home and go into the concentration camps. Because there was no male presence in the house, no older brother or uncle who knew how to make decisions for the family, then their mother was thrust into the role of decision maker. A role that was, in the eyes of her three young girls, very distressing for her to fulfill.

Issei women were required to make decisions for the family during the mass evacuation, but their authority over their family ultimately seems as limited as their power was before Pearl Harbor. Glenn describes how women working alongside their husbands in the fields and businesses or going out to earn wages as a domestic worker earned Issei women a say in their homes, a limited form of power.⁷ In a similar manner, the authority that Issei women had during the forced evacuation had its own set of limitations. If an Issei woman had older male children or older brothers, or sometimes even just male family friends, these men would aid the Issei woman in making decisions regarding the family. If Issei women had no male figure to help them through the mass evacuation, then often what power they had over their family diminished once they were situated in camp.

When the forced removal of the Japanese American community began in March of 1942, Issei women who had taken control of the family had to decide if they needed to sell their family business or if there was a reliable family friend who could take care of their property. At this time, Japanese immigrants could not own their own land due to alien land laws and many leased property or bought land under their children's names.

⁷ Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 203.

When the evacuation came if they could find neighbors or friends who were willing to watch over their possessions then Japanese Americans boarded up their homes and stored what they could. If they faced high levels of racism in their area and could not find American citizens willing to help them, then they were forced to sell their land or possessions at ridiculously low prices.

Issei and Nisei women whose families owned their own businesses instead of farms, were often obligated to sell their business before being forced to evacuate because they often couldn't find anyone willing to lease the shop from them while they were gone. Kay Matsuoka, a Nisei who owned and operated her own dress shop in Lomita, related during her interview how Pearl Harbor changed her relationship with her customers. "I had it all finished and I called her and told her that it's all ready, and, "Would you please come after it?" This was a couple of weeks after Pearl Harbor started, and she says, "I wouldn't be caught in a Jap's shop." And that's the first time that I heard that word used negatively. And I just felt crushed[.]”⁸ Matsuoka's shop included at the time of Pearl Harbor, five sewing machines, sewing equipment (i.e. pinking shears), and she even taught other women how to sew in her shop. Pearl Harbor and incarceration stripped Matsuoka of her shop and of her shop's value. She relates what happened when she wanted to sell her supplies, "And when I tried to sell all my equipment, they said, "You're not gonna be able to take it with you." And so, they offered like 5 cents, 15 cents for pinking shears. And my showcase window, I mean... it was just left there.”⁹

⁸ Kay Matsuoka, "Kay Matsuoka Interview," Interview by Alice Ito, *Courtesy of Densho*, December 29 & 30, 1999, Segment 11.

⁹ Ibid.

Issei and Nisei men also faced situations in which they were forced to sell off property for a fraction of the cost. Frank Emi tells a similar story of how his family was forced to sell their full-service market for a fraction of the money they had invested, “In fact, one fellow came and offered us \$500 for the whole thing and we almost threw him out of the store. Well, as it happened, the best offer we could get up to then was \$1,500. We had about close to \$25,000 invested at that time, which was big money then. And we had to unload it for \$1,500, so all our three- or four-years’ toil there and efforts were, went down the drain.”¹⁰

The type of offers that Kay Matsuoka and Frank Emi’s family received were not unusual, with many American citizens taking advantage of the Japanese Americans desperation to obtain property cheaply. Various American citizens offered to look after houses and property owned by Japanese Americans, to keep the property whole and intact until the families returned to the property. Some of these people legitimately wanted to help the Japanese Americans, but others sold the property left in their care after the Japanese Americans were in camps. Some Issei returned from concentration camps expecting a home or at least stored family items to return to but found nothing.

With their husbands arrested and interned, Issei women were required to make decisions for the family during the mass evacuation, which took place from March through August of 1942, but their authority over their families ultimately seems as limited as their power was before Pearl Harbor.¹¹ Glenn describes how women working

¹⁰ Frank Emi, “Frank Emi Interview,” Interview by Emiko and Chizuko Omori, Courtesy of Emiko and Chizuko Omori on *Densho*. March 20, 1994, Segment 1.

¹¹ “Assembly Centers.” *Densho Encyclopedia*, Accessed January 28, 2019. http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Assembly_centers/

alongside their husbands in the fields and businesses or going out to earn wages as a domestic worker earned Issei women a say in their homes, a limited form of power.¹² The authority that Issei women had during the forced evacuation had its own set of limitations. If an Issei woman had older male children or older brothers, or sometimes even just male family friends, these men would aid the Issei woman in making decisions regarding the family. If Issei women had no male figure to help them through the mass evacuation, then often what power they had over their family quickly diminished once they were situated in the assembly centers or concentration camps.

Life in camp was drastically different for Japanese Americans than their lives before Pearl Harbor. Besides the limitations placed on their freedom and the violation of the Nisei's constitutional rights as US citizens, the structure of camp life drastically altered the structure of the Japanese American community. Barracks were hastily constructed out of tarpaper and other low-end materials. Built in an A-frame military style, each building was 20 feet wide by 100 feet long separated into four to six apartments. Each apartment held a family, no matter how large, and sometimes two families were required to share a single apartment. There were usually 12 to 14 barracks to a block, with each block housing between 250 to 300 people. Each block also contained a mess hall, communal bathroom facilities, a laundry, and a recreation building.¹³ The cramped living spaces and the communal bathing facilities created issues with privacy that traumatized the reserved members of the Japanese American community, causing large amounts of stress just from the camps living conditions.

¹² Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride*, 203.

¹³ "Block" *Densho Encyclopedia*. Accessed January 28, 2019. <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Block/>

The changes in living conditions immediately altered the structure of everyday life for Japanese American women. Household work had been an integral part of the women's daily routine and that responsibility was now non-existent. Issei, and older Nisei women were accustomed to cleaning and taking care of an entire household and now they cared for a room that was at most twenty by twenty-five feet square. While these rooms were often dirty as the floors and walls leaked and allowed in dust and sand, they were not hard nor time consuming to clean. Meal preparation was also removed from the woman's lists of responsibilities as feeding thousands of people at once was more easily accomplished through the use of block mess halls where the inmates received three meals a day. Two of the main tasks that Issei women engaged in daily to take care of their families, cleaning and meal preparation, were suddenly stripped from them when they were forced into camp.

The loss of responsibilities and normal Japanese American cultural structures within the camps promoted the breakdown of familial and cultural ties. Eating in the mess hall allowed young adults, men, and women with young children to all eat in groups separate from their families, usually congregating with their own peers instead. Young adults and children were able to more freely roam within the confines of the camps without their parent's supervision, encouraging their independence. This loosening of family structure has also been noted by other scholars. Matsumoto discusses these effects in her article on Japanese American women, while photographic evidence of this physical separation can be found in the photography of Dorothea Lange.¹⁴

¹⁴ Valerie Matsumoto, "Japanese American Women during World War II." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 8, no. 1 (1984): 8; Gordon, Linda and Okihiro, Gary Y., eds, *Dorothea Lange and the Censored Images of Japanese American Internment* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 171.

For Nisei women the physical separation of families inside the concentration camps was both a blow to family unity and a window of opportunity. Before the war Nisei women were more closely monitored and restricted in their activities by their parents than Nisei men, a restriction that other second generation American women also faced.¹⁵ In an interview with Paul Tomita I asked about his everyday interactions within his family.¹⁶ He admitted that as the only boy he was spoiled by his parents and related that the restrictions placed on him, compared to his sisters, were very different. He was given preferential treatment and not punished for similar offenses as his sisters. Tomita related that his mother “sat in front of the door inside with a watch, and my two sisters, if they were one minute late they were grounded for two weeks from dating.”¹⁷ They were not allowed to stay out past curfew and they were discouraged from going to any school if it wasn’t near home. Interestingly, these restrictions were enforced by both of his parents, his mother enforcing to the strictures as much as his father did.

Restrictions on where Nisei women could go, who they could see, events they could participate in were less stringently enforced when families were in concentration camps than before World War II, but some families still kept their daughters close to home. Mabel Kitano, in a hearing to request leave from Rohwer, expresses her desire to leave the camps but her parents were against it. “I would like to go out, but my folks

¹⁵ Second generation Mexican American women had their interactions with community outsiders and with women closely monitored through the use of a chaperone; Vicki L. Ruiz, “The Flapper and the Chaperone: Mexican American Teenagers in the Southwest,” in *Women’s America: Refocusing the Past*, Eight edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 430.

¹⁶ Paul Tomita, (Paul Tomita Minidoka Pilgrimage Interview Transcript,) Interviewed by Laura Bohuski, Minidoka Pilgrimage, Twin Falls, Idaho. July 6, 2018.

¹⁷ Ibid.

won't let me. They would let my brother, but they will not let me."¹⁸ This family's restriction was also interesting because Mabel Kitano was apparently older than her brother as Kitano states when asked where her brother is, "He is still here, because he just got out of school."¹⁹ It was usually the prerogative of the older Nisei to support the family during World War II, an older daughter was relied upon if a son wasn't available to help. Nisei women who were old enough to be in the work force and didn't want to or weren't able to go to college, often left camps to find domestic work or got married and left with their husbands. The fact that Mabel Natsuyo Kitano was being kept with her family in camp shows that even though conditions within the camps were pulling families apart and would allow women make new choices as will be discussed in Chapters Three and Four, families also tried to maintain the close ties and tightknit structure that had existed before the war.

One of the most agreed upon effects of the concentration camps on Japanese American families was the disintegration of family ties and ultimately the separation of the family.²⁰ Once in camp, the use of mess halls, the army draft, student relocation, and leave clearances worked against the tight knit Japanese American community. In the face of literal and emotional separation, some women found different ways to retain authority, like Hiroshi Kashiwagi's mother from Chapter One who was so focused on the family staying together. Though her children may have considered her as vulnerable, she did

¹⁸ Hearing of Mabel Natsuyo Kitano, October 13, 1943. Leflar, Robert A. 1901- Papers; Loc. 73-88; War Relocation Authority Papers, 1942-1946; MS L52; Series 5. Hearings; Box 6; Folder 4. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Matsumoto, "Japanese American Women," 8.

accomplish her goal, she kept her family together during the war.²¹ A feat that not many other mothers could claim.

The removal of the Japanese American community to the concentration camps stripped Issei women from their place of honor as homemakers and Issei men of their careers and place in the family as breadwinners. Once within the confines of the concentration camps, the government further encouraged the Issei's removal from positions of authority by encouraging the Nisei to take over leadership positions within the camps.²² The sudden free time that the Issei found themselves with in the camps reflected both the Issei's economic losses (e.g. their jobs, businesses, and homes) and their loss of authority within the Japanese American community.

The forced loss of responsibility and respect was more noticeable in Issei men as they were actively discouraged from being a part of the Japanese American community's self-governance in the camps. A Community Council constitution document from Rohwer illustrates the desire to limit the influence of the Issei. This document, drawn up by Japanese American incarcerates to establish a form of self-governance, shows how originally Issei men were not allowed to run for office. It states, "A Councilman must be a citizen of the United States of America who is 21 years of age or over."²³ Sometime after the creation to the Community Council constitution the phrase "a citizen of the United States of America who is" was scratched out, but at its creation this document was

²¹ Hiroshi Kashiwagi, "Hiroshi Kashiwagi Interview," Interview by Emiko and Chizuko Omori, Courtesy of Emiko and Chizuko Omori on *Densho*, October 1, 1992, Segment 3.

²² *Rabbit in the Moon*. Directed by Emiko Omori. 1999; Wabi-Sabi, 1999, 20:30.

²³ War Relocation Authority, Constitution for the Community Government of Rohwer Relocation Center. Griswold, Nat R. Papers; MS G88 257; U.S. War Relocation Authority; Rohwer Relocation Center Records, 1938-1945; Series 7. Miscellaneous; Box 6; Folder 1. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

intended to stop Issei men from running for positions of authority within the concentration camps. Instead, Nisei men were encouraged to take up the leadership roles within the camps as well as to be a go between for the Japanese American community and the WRA over their older, and ostensibly more respected, Issei relatives.

While Issei or Nisei women were extremely unlikely to hold leadership positions within the Japanese American community before World War II, in a similar pattern of shifting power Nisei women were more likely to acquire higher paying and more respected jobs within the camps than their mothers. Many Issei women had worked as domestic servants in white households or as helpmates in their husband's businesses, and the job skills that Issei women had acquired limited them to similar positions in camp. John Howard claims that in camp women took the less professional positions, being servers and dish washers instead of cooks, and so were paid less than their male counterparts.²⁴ While this is likely true, there were a number of Nisei women who took jobs within administration buildings as assistants to camp lawyers or as secretaries and translators throughout camp, jobs which would have received pay equal to that of the professional jobs that men took.

In Jerome, for example, multiple Nisei women were hired to be secretaries and legal assistants within Robert Leflar's legal office.²⁵ Because of the high levels of racism the Japanese Americans faced these are jobs opportunities that would have been difficult for Japanese American women to obtain outside of the concentration camps before World

²⁴ John Howard, "The Politics of Dancing under Japanese-American Incarceration," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 52 (Autumn 2001): 133.

²⁵ Jerome Relocation Center Final Report, Legal Division; MC 695. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, 1.

War II. These women worked closely with the Jerome legal team and were instrumental to the running of the legal office. They not only directly handled evacuee property matters but, when these positions were filled by older Nisei, these women often spoke fluent Japanese which allowed them to translate for the Issei and help them with a variety of legal cases.²⁶

Hiring Nisei women as secretaries, legal aides, and translators within camp had several implications. The Nisei were more trusted by the government than their non-citizen parents and as a result they were offered more opportunities than the Issei. These opportunities were frequently ones that led to the Nisei leaving the concentration camps through programs such as the Student Relocation Program, the army draft, or the Women's Army Corps.²⁷ Nisei women were entrusted to leave camp, to work for the war effort, and to be ambassadors for the Japanese American communities.²⁸ In contrast, Issei women were not given these same opportunities.

Both during incarceration and immediately after World War II, Nisei women concentrated on finding work and rebuilding their lives. The Nisei, both women and men, strove to create better lives for themselves and for their families; they went onto college and applied for more diverse jobs. Their parents though, even if they returned to work after the war, did not approach life with the same type of drive that had dominated their

²⁶ Ibid., 2, 15.

²⁷ The drafting of Japanese American men from the concentration camps to join the war effort in World War II is a tumultuous topic that the Japanese American community is still divided on. Some men welcomed the opportunity to fight for America during World War II, while others resisted the draft as long as Japanese Americans were still incarcerated. For more information on the draft and draft resisters see: Cherstin Lyon. *Prisons and Patriots: Japanese American Wartime Citizenship, Civil Disobedience, and Historical Memory*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011.

²⁸ Leslie A. Ito, "Japanese American Women and the Student Relocation Movement, 1942-1945," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 21, no. 3 (2000): 3.

lives before the war. This difference in determination showed itself in a variety of different ways.

Being incarcerated stripped Issei women of any economic security they were able to help their family achieve before the war. At the time of their forced incarceration the average Issei woman was somewhere between 40 and 60, while Issei men were in their late 50s to early 70s, nearing what current mainstream American culture would consider retirement age. According to Tetsuya Fujimoto, a researcher who studied the initial economic and class structure of Japanese American society, before World War II and the mass incarceration, Japanese Americans were both extremely hard working and devoted their time to economic family improvement.²⁹ The emotional and mental turmoil caused by the treatment of Japanese immigrants during World War II greatly reduced their desire to continue strive for the economic enrichment of their family as both Issei men and women would be forced to start over from scratch when they were released from incarceration.

In the years immediately after World War II Issei women often reverted to the same positions they held within the family before Pearl Harbor. They joined their husbands where they settled after the war and, when the families were lucky, this meant returning to claim land or houses that had been held for them. Not all families had an easy time reclaiming their property. Kay Nakao describes how the woman who was renting her parents' house initially refused to move out upon their return, "They came home, she's still in the house. So they lived in the basement... She wouldn't move out..."

²⁹ Tetsuya Fujimoto, "Social Class and Crime: The Case of the Japanese-Americans," *Issues in Criminology* 10, no. 1 (Spring, 1975): 87.

Reasonable rent, 25\$ a month. So one day my Dad – Mom – Started cooking fish and everything in teriyaki sauce. And you know how the aroma goes up? After so many times she took off without a word.”³⁰ That the Nakao family was able to retrieve their property with relatively little fuss from their renter was an achievement, and many Issei were left with much less when they returned from camp. Sometimes their houses had been sold to new owners while they were incarcerated or the possessions they had stored had either been sold by the people who had agreed to look after the Issei’s items or had been stolen from storage facilities.

The actions of the Issei after the war cannot be generalized as the situations that each family faced was unique, but some patterns seemed to develop in how they went about living their lives after the war. Not all Issei decided to return to the West Coast after the end of World War II, but when they did return one of the main indicators of whether either men or women would work again was the state of their property. In the case of Issei who lived in communities that embraced their return, such as on Bainbridge Island, many Issei returned to their homes after the war and were able to repurchase or reclaim their land without much trouble. Farmers, like Kay Nakao’s or Nancy Iwami’s parents, were likely to return to farming after the war if they could reclaim their former property, with the years in concentration camps equated to a few years vacation.³¹ Kay Matsuoka’s in-laws, who were able to crop share their land while the family was incarcerated at Gila River, had an even better experience upon their return than Kay Nakao’s parents. “[T]hey came home midsummer, before the crop was gathered. And so

³⁰ Kay Nakao, (Kay Nakao Bainbridge Island Interview Transcript,) Interviewed by Laura Bohuski, Bainbridge Island Historical Museum, Bainbridge Island, Washington, May 3, 2018, 7.

³¹ Ibid.; Nancy Iwami, “Nancy Iwami Interview,” Interview by Megan Asaka, Watsonville - Santa Cruz JACL Collection on *Densho*, July 29, 2008, Segment 18.

they more or less had it all fixed. And so the house and everything was pretty much the way it was before we left. So they got that year's crop full."³² Matsuoka goes on to describe how her Issei in-laws were even more fortunate than her, as she could not reclaim the dress shop she had been forced to sell before the war.³³ Those Issei with businesses were often hardest hit as they were forced to sell businesses and equipment, instead of renting out their lands as some farmers were able to do.

It was not just those Issei and Nisei who were incarcerated during the war whose lives were impacted. All Japanese Americans were forced to leave the military zones on the West coast after Pearl Harbor and were only allowed to return at the end of World War II. Instead of being forcefully incarcerated, some families decided to leave before John DeWitt's civilian exclusion orders were released in March and traveled together, working, during the years of the war. Lily C. Hioki's family left San Jose with a caravan of other families who traveled in the Midwest working a variety of different jobs. After the war some of these families returned to the West Coast, while others made their homes in the Midwestern states. In her interview in 2010, Lily Hioki relates the experiences her family had upon their return, as compared to one of the families that had decided to come back to San Jose after the war ended. "The Kanemotos, the house they lived in, the landlord still had the house vacant and the farm vacant, so they went back to the house they were in. And we had nowhere to go, so we stayed at the Buddhist church[.]"³⁴ The Kanemotos and Lily's family, the Takimotos, had two completely different experiences upon returning. As with other families whose businesses or farms were intact, the

³² Matsuoka, "Kay Matsuoka Interview," Interview by Alice Ito, Segment 40.

³³ *Ibid.*, Segment 11.

³⁴ Lily C. Hioki, "Lily C. Hioki Interview," Interview by Tom Ikeda and Steve Fugita, Courtesy of the Japanese American Museum of San Jose on *Densho*, December 1, 2010, Segment 20.

Kanemoto family immediately returned to farming. Hioki's parents, unlike the Kanemoto family, had nothing to return to, but their drive to work seemed relatively unaffected, in contrast to Issei who were incarcerated.³⁵ The Takimoto family did not spend three years in a concentration camp, with their ability to make money limited to the WRA appointed wage stipend provided to the inmates. They worked throughout the war years and though they still lost their homes and businesses when they were forced to leave the West coast, upon their return to California, Oregon, and Washington those families like the Takimotos continued to work. A similar mindset can be seen in those families who were released on work furloughs from the camps.

While it appears that Issei women returned their authority to their husbands after World War II, they were also more likely to continue working after the war even if their husbands did not. For Issei men the will to return to work after the war was affected by their ability to retain a sense of purpose during their incarceration. Those men who either stayed outside of the concentration camps and worked during the war years, or those who were able to receive work furloughs, appear to be more likely to return to a way of living that resembled their life before the war. For Issei women though, working had always been about supporting the family, and this continued to hold true after the war. If their family was able to reclaim a business, either a farm or a laundry mat or a flower nursery, then Issei women returned to working within the family business. Matsue Watanabe, a Nisei from Bainbridge Island, left the camps with her family to live in Chicago. The entire family, her parents, brother and sisters all slowly moved to Chicago—her parents last in 1945—but they all got jobs and lived together in Chicago during the last months of

³⁵ Ibid.

World War II. When Watanabe's parents returned to Bainbridge Island after the war ended they were able to reclaim their home and get back to their life of farming, even though they could have stayed with their children in Chicago.³⁶

If there was no farm or business to reclaim and the family still needed money, Issei women took up work in domestic service again.³⁷ Even decades later after the family was financially stable, Glenn found during her study that Issei women often continued with domestic work long after they had any financial reason to. Issei women liked to keep busy and, in some cases, had become friends with their employers. These women kept working in part to continue seeing the friends they had made.³⁸ For some Issei women the desire to work seems relatively unaffected by their time in incarceration, but for other women their return to regular society did not mean a return to work.

Issei parents who had older Nisei children sometimes stopped working upon their return from incarceration. This decision directly impacted the course of the lives of those Nisei who now had to consider the needs of their parents, as well as their own goals. Nancy Iwami's parents farmed before the family was incarcerated at Poston, but when asked by an interviewer if her parents returned to farming after World War II, Iwami responded with a decisive "no."³⁹ Nancy Iwami had a brother on whose farm Iwami's parents helped after the war, but her parents did not take over the farm themselves or attempt to reclaim their positions of authority within the family. Lily C. Hioki's father-in-

³⁶ Watanabe, "Matsue Watanabe Interview," Interview by Debra Grindeland, Courtesy of the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Community on *Densho*, October 7, 2006, Segment 15.

³⁷ May K. Sasaki, "May Sasaki Interview," Interview by Lori Hoshino and Alice Ito, *Courtesy of Densho*, October 28, 1997, Segment 27; Sharon Aburano, "Sharon Tanagi Aburano Interview I," Interview by Tom Ikeda and Megan Asaka, *Courtesy of Densho*, March 25, 2008, Segment 23; Watanabe, "Matsue Watanabe Interview," Interview by Debra Grindeland, Segment 14; Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride*, 116.

³⁸ Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride*, 121-22.

³⁹ Iwami, "Nancy Iwami Interview," Interview by Megan Asaka, Segment 22.

law was able to reopen his laundry mat business a few years after the end of World War II, but when that laundry mat closed Hioki's father-in-law retired instead of trying to find other work.⁴⁰ Sharon Aburano's father had a similar reaction, "He came back very dispirited. In fact, when I finished and got my R.N. and came back [to Seattle], he quit working the day I walked in. He never worked after that, and he lived 'til he was ninety-seven."⁴¹

In the examples above Issei women are not discussed as making separate choices from their husbands, and in most situations Issei wives appeared to follow the choices of their husbands after the war. Iwami states in her interview that "they" decided to retire, instead of trying to farm again, and there is no way to tell from the interview how much influence her mother had on that decision.⁴² In Hioki's interview the laundry mat was her father-in-law's business but she describes her mother-in-law as a kind hard working lady who sadly died shortly after the laundry mat went out of business.⁴³ Only in Aburano's interview is there a marked difference in the reactions of her parents, her father stopped working but, "my mother was doing housework, which I really felt sorry for her, 'cause that was even harder for her."⁴⁴ Aburano appears to lament the fact that her mother, who also lived into her nineties, continued to work in a profession that was hard for her to do, while her father stopped working as soon as Aburano returned to Seattle. There is unfortunately no indication why Aburano's mother continued to work after Sharon

⁴⁰ Hioki, "Lily C. Hioki Interview," Interview by Tom Ikeda and Steve Fugita, Segment 24.

⁴¹ Aburano, "Sharon Aburano Interview 1," Interview by Tom Ikeda and Megan Asaka, Segment 29.

⁴² Iwami, "Nancy Iwami Interview," Interview by Megan Asaka, Segment 22.

⁴³ Hioki, "Lily C. Hioki Interview," Interview by Tom Ikeda and Steve Fugita, Segment 24.

⁴⁴ Aburano, "Sharon Aburano Interview 1," Interview by Tom Ikeda and Megan Asaka, Segment 29.

returned to Seattle, but with her husband no longer working the family might have needed the income.

After their return from incarceration the Nisei had to face the changes the war had wrought in their parents and the impact of those changes. While some Issei retained their desire to make a better life for themselves and their family after the war, many lost that drive when upon their return from the concentration camps they had nothing left to begin the rebuilding process. When families came back together after the war both Nisei men and women were now often required to take care of their parents. The social structure of the Japanese American community was such that often the oldest son would care for the parents once they had retired from work, but it sometimes fell to a daughter to care for their parents, such as with Sharon Aburano's situation with her parents. After the war the Nisei faced new issues, finding ways to use their education and have a career on top of taking care their husbands, children, and possibly their parents.

World War II and the mass incarceration of the Japanese Americans accelerated changes in the gender roles and norms of women that were flourishing within the Nisei generation. It also deeply impacted the roles and culture of the Issei generation. World War II displaced Issei men from positions of authority within the community and within the home. These positions were sometimes taken up by Issei wives or by the Nisei, dramatically shifting the makeup of the Japanese American community. Issei women were forced to lead their families, though how effectively they did so and for how long varied from woman to woman, while some Issei men were so disheartened by the loss of their livelihoods that they never reclaimed the authority they had before the war. The impact of the war was not just limited to changes in women's gender roles, the changes

were also divided by generation, family status, and loss—or retention—of property during the World War II.

Nisei and Issei women lived similar lives before the war but it was the changes that were forced on the Japanese American community during World War II that revealed the differences in the Issei's and Nisei's gender roles. The loss of the Issei's possessions, the shift in community authority that occurred during these years, and the lack of motivation that overtook those Issei that stayed within the camps all contributed to how Issei lost their vibrancy and desire for economic growth after the war. For Nisei women new opportunities in education, new careers, and the ability to choose who and when they would marry allowed the Nisei to grow into new aspects of the lives, to combine American ideals with the Japanese traditions of close family and community ties. The next two chapters will show how differently the gender roles of the Nisei changed in comparison to their Issei mothers during and after World War II.

Chapter Three: Becoming Wife and Mother

Why I didn't have children. I used to think it was not having a stable relationship, or money, but since my childbearing years are over another possibility came to light. Like me, my child would be an American trapped in the body of an unwanted alien race. Could I conceal from my child how I wished he or she was more white, so as not to suffer the rejection I had, just because of my face.¹

Emiko Omori's introductory narration for the documentary *Rabbit in the Moon* illustrates just how deep of an impact the events of World War II could have on Japanese Americans' self-identity. The origins of the changes to Nisei women's gender roles that manifested themselves during incarceration was, at least partially, grounded in the Nisei's desire to leave behind the more traditional Japanese ideas and try to become more Americanized. Ruby Inouye saw this desire in many of her peers. "[T]he whole neighborhood was Japanese, and our friends were Japanese... but I think we were more anxious to become Americanized. We were more anxious for the other Caucasian kids to think of us as gradually becoming more Americanized... [A]most as though we wish we were Caucasians."²

The effects of the racism prevalent on the west coast before World War II and the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans deeply impacted how the Nisei viewed themselves and their culture. The distress at the realization that they were perceived as different sometimes went incredibly deep causing them to reject their Japanese heritage. At ten years old May Sasaki made the decision to stop using her Japanese name after leaving camp. During her interview she laughed as she recounted, "I was always Kimi-chan, Kimi-chan, and that was okay. But I began to sense that it was because I was

¹ *Rabbit in the Moon*, Directed by Emiko Omori (1999; Wabi-Sabi, 1999), 00:53-1:40.

² Ruby Inouye, "Ruby Inouye Interview," Interview by Alice Ito and Dee Goto, *Courtesy of Densho*, April 3 & 4, 2003, Segment 9.

Japanese that I was in this camp because I looked around and we're all Japanese. And I think that's when I came to this decision that whenever I get out of here, I'm not gonna be Japanese anymore." Sakaki's decision to not be Japanese manifested in her resolve to not respond to her Japanese name after camp. Though she didn't tell anyone her decision she resolved that she wouldn't respond to the name Kimi-chan and decided, ""That's the way I'm going to do it. I'm not going to be Kimiko anymore. I'm going to be May because that is my name also." And when I... I never used my name Kimiko after."³ Sasaki's determination to stop using her Japanese name and Omori's decision to not have children are intense responses that illuminate the hurt Japanese American women experienced because of the war. The effects of World War II incarceration were deeply traumatic and can still be seen in the community today.

However, the events that tore families apart also gave Nisei women enough freedom from the cultural and familial ties that had bound them to choose whether they wanted to inhabit the roles of wife and mother at all. If they chose to take on these roles, and most Nisei women did, they exercised more agency than they had previously over who they married, when they married, and decisions about their children. It is ironic that the deeply traumatic events of mass incarceration that led to the cultural and physical separation of the Issei and Nisei would also engendered opportunities for women to earn their own money and live away from the supervision of their family and communities, thereby fostering a greater sense of independence in these women.

³ May K. Sasaki, "May K. Sasaki Interview," Interview by Lori Hoshino and Alice Ito, *Courtesy of Densho*, October 28, 1997, Segment 23.

My research supports the extensive literature on mass incarceration during World War II, in which scholars emphasize the dissolution of Japanese American family ties during camp.⁴ While it is true that familial bonds weakened because of the conditions within the concentration camps, women themselves reacted to the realities of incarceration by making choices concerning their lives and their place within their families. Nisei women made choices about what roles within Japanese American families they wanted to assume and, if they were one of the older Nisei who were already married and were beginning to have children, they broadened their authority within their families to retain control over decisions about the lives of their children. Consistently these choices strove to keep the ties within their families strong, even in the face of the physical and emotional separation caused by the mass evacuation.

Many Nisei women married before, during, and after World War II and in researching how mass incarceration affected marriage trends among Nisei women there was not one major trend followed by most Nisei women. Some women chose to get married immediately after Pearl Harbor while some women chose to wait until after incarceration, and still others were introduced to the idea of casual dating, an activity that was a new experience for some Nisei. Others got married while in camp or outside of camp during the war years, either to men they had known before or to men they would have otherwise never met if they hadn't been incarcerated. Lastly, a small percentage of women decided not to get married at all, even years after the incarceration had ended.

⁴ Valerie Matsumoto, "Japanese American Women during World War II," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 8, no. 1 (1984): 8; John Howard, "Politics of Dancing under Japanese-American Incarceration," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 52 (Autumn 2001): 134; Linda Gordon, "Dorothea Lange Photographs the Japanese American Internment," in *Dorothea Lange and the Censored Images of Japanese American Internment* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 32.

Though these choices all appear to be different responses to incarceration, the one major theme that runs through all these variations is that Japanese American women were choosing when and whom they wanted to marry. A choice that before the war had still required consultation with their parents, at the very least.

Before World War II marriage within the Japanese American community did not always follow the wishes of the bride, and in some cases parents or matchmakers determined whom Nisei women married. The concept of an arranged marriage had started to be replaced by the idea of romantic love within the Nisei generation, but before Pearl Harbor many Nisei were still following the marital traditions of the Japanese American community even as they hoped for romantic love. Though they were being allowed more freedom in choosing their partners Nisei were still expected to get married using a *nakoudo*, a go-between or matchmaker, to arrange the marriage, and to consult with their families on the suitability of their partner.⁵ Nakoudos were used during the picture bride phenomena and as a standard part of traditional arranged marriages to introduce couples and look into the background of the bride and groom to make sure they were compatible. Nisei women were supposed to involve their families in their marriages and follow many of the same traditions as their parents, such as the use of a go-between, even if they were no longer required to introduce the couple. It was also helpful if the families already knew each other and had a good relationship so that the families could approve of the match.

⁵ Kay Matsuoka, "Kay Matsuoka Interview," Interview by Alice Ito, *Courtesy of Densho*, December 29 & 30, 1999, Segment 18, Segment 27.

Pearl Harbor, the threat of evacuation, and then the chaos of mass incarceration pushed many Nisei women to make choices that would propel them into to new roles. “I mentioned to you a little while ago, that I was engaged to a young Nisei who lived on the other side of town,” Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga reveals as she recalled how wartime events accelerated the couple’s marriage. “We found out that the persons living in the area where he lived would be going to a particular assembly center, whereas my family would be going somewhere else. And so foolishly, and desperately in love, we eloped, so I could go with his family.”⁶ Herzig-Yoshinaga had not been planning to marry her fiancé so soon, but with the threat of incarceration and their physical separation she chose to go against her family’s wishes and marry without their permission.

Herzig-Yoshinaga’s story is not unusual. Many Nisei who were in relationships before Pearl Harbor married quickly before evacuation. Ruby Inouye, a college-age Nisei at the time of evacuation recalled, “See, there, there was a flurry of marriages around that spring before the May 11th evacuation because a lot of the girls and boys who were going around together, they suddenly got worried that they might get separated and be sent to different camps.”⁷

Yet such marriages sometimes precipitated the family ruptures scholars have associated with the impacts of evacuation and incarceration. In some cases, including Herzig-Yoshinaga’s, these choices were considered so rash that they caused breaks within the family structure. She recounts how “distressed” her family was, and their

⁶ Akio Herzig-Yoshinaga, “Aiko Herzig Interview,” Interview by Emiko and Chizuko Omori, Courtesy of Emiko and Chizuko Omori on *Densho*, March 20, 1994, Segment 7.

⁷ Inouye, “Ruby Inouye Interview,” Interview by Alice Ito and Dee Goto, Segment 17.

impression that she was a “spoiled brat and just did whatever” she wanted to. Her family’s response was painful:

My father pretty much disowned me for a while. He wouldn't contact me. I only wrote a couple of letters and I'd say my life in camp was pretty miserable because I knew I did such a dishonorable thing and it haunted me all the time I lived in camp, that I had disgraced my family by my behavior.⁸

Herzig-Yoshinaga’s story illustrates how marrying without some form of permission could lead to shunning from the family. Romantic love was a new concept to Japanese immigrants but its popularity among the women of the Nisei community was spreading rapidly. Nisei women were looking more often for a romantic attachment rather than following the traditions that their parents had undergone of arranged marriages.⁹ The use of nakoudo, or go betweens, was still encouraged before the war and, as seen early in Ruby Inouye’s account of her high school friend’s early marriage, the more “Japanesey” families still arranged marriages for their daughters.¹⁰ Even if the marriage was not arranged by a nakoudo the practice of using a go between to facilitate a happy beginning to a marriage, as well as receiving permission to marry, was expected of a young Nisei couple.¹¹

When Herzig-Yoshinaga eloped with her fiancé she stepped out of her expected role as obedient daughter instead of following the traditions of the Japanese American community.¹² Marrying early without permission was deemed a defiance of parents’ wishes. In some cases, marriage before incarceration was encouraged but only if the

⁸ Herzig-Yoshinaga, “Aiko Herzig Interview,” Interview by Emiko and Chizuko Omori, Segment 7.

⁹ Valerie J. Matsumoto, *City Girls: the Nisei Social World in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 76-77.

¹⁰ Inouye, “Ruby Inouye Interview,” Interview by Alice Ito and Dee Goto, Segment 9.

¹¹ Evelyn Nakao Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 57.

¹² Herzig-Yoshinaga, “Aiko Herzig Interview,” Interview by Emiko and Chizuko Omori, Segment 7.

marriage was sanctioned by the family. Kay Matsuoka, a Nisei woman whose family was intimately involved in her marriage and engagement, married early at the encouragement of her nakoudo.¹³ Kay Matsuoka and her fiancé Jack were in consultation with their families and marriage counselors after Pearl Harbor and their quick marriage was supported. Herzig-Yoshinaga did not state in her interviews whether nakoudo were involved in her marriage, and the continuation of the practice of go between's seems to have varied from family to family, but even without nakoudo the consent of the couple's parents was expected behavior from a young Nisei woman before World War II.

My study has found that if Nisei women choose to make changes to their ascribed gender roles for the purpose of supporting the family then, much like Issei women engaging in wage work outside of the home before the war, their changes were more readily accepted by the community. Historian John Howard though discusses how both the Japanese American community and the government resisted changes in women's gender norms when their actions strayed too far outside what was considered normal, such as female homosexual leanings.¹⁴ Female homosexuality is an extreme example of shifting gender roles but, according to Howard's research, the community responded to these extreme deviations by starting to pressure both women and men of marriageable age to marry once a suitable heterosexual partner was found.¹⁵ Fortunately for many Nisei women, the loosening of family restrictions while in camp, and during World War II in general, still gave the majority of women opportunities, and space, to make their own decisions about their futures.

¹³ Matsuoka, "Kay Matsuoka Interview," Interview by Alice Ito, Segment 28.

¹⁴ Howard, "Politics of Dancing", 137-138.

¹⁵ Ibid.

It is perhaps one of the understudied ironies of the trauma that Japanese Americans endured during World War II that Nisei women suddenly had opportunities that gave them freedom from parental control. There were many employment opportunities both within and outside of the camps during the war years. Outside of the camps women were outside of family structures, making their own decisions, and supporting themselves. Within the camps, several job categories paid women the same rate as men, though there were still instances of gender discrimination in employment within the camps.¹⁶ Nisei women were now making their own money that they controlled and outside of camps they had an autonomy they likely hadn't experienced before because of the observation they had been under within their community. This physical and economic freedom gave Nisei women the opportunity to choose what they wanted to do with their lives, but this freedom was also connected to the trauma and civil rights violations that occurred against their family and community.

Throughout my study the accounts have shown that after 1943 Nisei women began to apply for, and receive permission to, leave the camps. These women were often young, either alone or married, and sometimes had children with them. They didn't leave the camps because it removed them from the oversight of their parents or their community, but with the idea of helping their parents and their community who had a harder time leaving the camps than their children did. These observations concur with Matsumoto's research on Japanese American women during World War II which found that those who were leaving the camps were in their 20s or 30s, mostly single or married

¹⁶ Ibid., 133.

couples sometimes with small children, or fathers with a large family who were planning to call on their family later.¹⁷

During World War II Nisei women who left the camps were now supporting themselves outside of the sphere of their families influence, and this new situation led to some women choosing to remain outside that influence. Haru Miyazaki, a Nisei released from the Jerome concentration camp to work in Denver, wrote in a letter to Virginia Tidball a teacher from Jerome that, “It looks as if I’m on my own and if I think about it I doubt if I’ll ever live with my folks from now on except on visits.”¹⁸ This statement from Miyazaki follows after the opening of the letter where Miyazaki proudly proclaims that she just received her first pay envelope from her first job.¹⁹ The autonomy that Miyazaki experienced by being able to support herself allowed Nisei women to see what life outside the Japanese American community would be.

Haru Miyazaki’s observation about no longer living with her parents demonstrates that ideal of independence that spread throughout Nisei women during World War II. Many women did choose to take on the roles of wife and mother, but within the environment created by the mass incarceration women were more apt to choose when, who, and why they were marrying. Fusa Tsumagari, a Nisei incarcerated in the Poston concentration camp, wrote in a letter to Clara Breed, a children’s librarian at the San Diego Public Library about considering marriage. “I was, needless to say, more than surprised and all agog!” she wrote. “He is a fellow I went around with in S.A. (I mean

¹⁷ Matsumoto, “Japanese American Women,” 11.

¹⁸ Haru Miyazaki to Virginia Tidball, June 10, 1944. Virginia Tidball Papers; MS T438 274; LOC 824; Series 1. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, Correspondences; Folder 1; Item 6, 3-4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

Santa Anita!) We went together--off and on over there--but it wasn't very serious at the time.”²⁰ Fusa Tsumagari was intrigued by the idea of marriage to this young man named Jim but, “what has me rather puzzled and has set me thinking is that he has no other future than farming. I am wondering if I could fit into that pattern of living and like it. I have never done much housework and I've never done any farming of any kind.”²¹ Tsumagari appears to be considering other goals in life beyond getting married, which she relates to house work, and because of her suitor’s profession, farming. In other letters to Clara Breed, Tsumagari discusses other career prospects she is interested in such as secretarial work, business school, or taking the civil service exam.²² Tsumagari’s letters show that she now has the time and the opportunity to decide whether she wants to marry Jim, or if she wants to marry at all. “Some day my heart and soul will get together and tell me what to do. Until then I'm not giving him any answer.”²³

Being in camp allowed both urban and rural Nisei to engage in dating activities that further supported the ideal of romantic love that threaded its way through the Nisei generation. Similarly to Fusa Tsumagari, other Nisei women not only decided to not think about marriage during incarceration, but like Tsumagari though they dated, it wasn’t with the intention of getting married. Nishi Fujimoto, Kyoko Tanaka, and Nancy Nishi, in their joint interview, admitted to dating while they were in camp, but none of them could recall specific boys they had dated or one-on-one events. “I think our social life had a lot to do with the clubs that we belonged to... I mean, there isn't anywhere,

²⁰ “Letter to Clara Breed from Fusa Tsumagari, Poston, Arizona, August 23, 1943,” Fusa Tsumagari to Clara Breed, July 21, 1943, in Clara Breed Collection, Japanese American National Museum, 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²² “Letter to Clara Breed from Fusa Tsumagari, Poston, Arizona, July 21, 1943,” Fusa Tsumagari to Clara Breed, July 21, 1943, in Clara Breed Collection, Japanese American National Museum, 1.

²³ “Letter to Clara Breed from Fusa Tsumagari, August 23, 1943,” 3.

even if you dated, where would you go?” Tanka asked, laughing.²⁴ While Nisei women dated in camp, they did not take the attachments seriously and some ultimately decided that they didn’t want to marry while in camp. Delaying marriage, and being able to date casually, was an activity that urban Nisei women had been engaging in through their youth groups before the war, but an activity that had been more restricted in rural communities.

The youth organizations that spread with the camps, and the lessening of parental restrictions, increased Nisei’s ability to engage in dating without being expected to marry, a tendency Valerie Matsumoto found in her study of Nisei youth groups in Los Angeles before the war and that I have found mirrored in the camps. Sharon Aburano related in an interview that before World War II, “the boys and the girls stayed far apart. If you even held hands that was considered really an awful thing to see in public.”²⁵ The restrictions on Nisei for touching and interacting with the opposite sex without having to worry about marriage were reduced through the activities held by youth groups such as mixed sex dances.²⁶ Youth groups organized by the YWCA and some church organizations also flourished within the concentration camps and facilitated women’s ability to choose who they wanted to marry or if they wanted to delay marriage. Matsumoto also recognized an increase in Nisei dating in the camps as women began choosing husbands they loved and, in some cases, married quickly to men leaving for war.²⁷

²⁴ Ayako Nishi Fujimoto, Kyoko Nishi Tanaka, and Nancy Nishi, “Ayako Nishi Fujimoto - Kyoko Nishi Tanaka - Nancy Nishi Interview,” Interview by Richard Potashin. *Courtesy of Densho*, July 19, 2008, Segment 17.

²⁵ Sharon Aburano, “Sharon Tanagi Aburano Interview I,” Interview by Tom Ikeda and Megan Asaka, *Courtesy of Densho*, March 25, 2008, Segment 21.

²⁶ Matsumoto, *City Girls*, 37-39.

²⁷ Matsumoto, “Japanese American Women,” 9-10.

Nisei women also exercised their increased ability to make their own marriage decisions by *choosing* to marry, but sometimes the reasons for marriage were more complicated than just choosing a partner for romantic love instead of through an arranged marriage. Kay Nakao, a Nisei from Bainbridge Island who was 22 at the time of incarceration, related in an interview that her fiancé Sam Nakao asked her to get married after he returned from a ranching job and she initially resisted. Kay, in her interview in 2018, stated that she didn't know why she was so insistent about it, but that she wanted to get married in June and so she wanted to wait. Kay even went so far as to reveal, "I don't know why I kept saying that, because what's the difference, you're in camp. You can't have a big wedding or anything."²⁸ It seems as if Kay wanted control of when she married, or maybe just wanted to wait until after incarceration so that she could have a nice ceremony when they married, but then Sam revealed to her, "He was working out at the ranch, being a bachelor you had to cook for yourself, and wash clothes. So he says, 'I need somebody to cook for me and wash my clothes.'" By today's standards these reasons for marriage seem odd, but in the early 1940s Japanese American culture a wife was supposed to take care of the household and of her husband. If she accepted his offer, then Kay would be able to leave the concentration camps and help out a man that she had decided to marry because she loved him. Kay does admit that her perceptions of marriage may have changed over time, "and in those days I was more quiet, I didn't express my feelings like I do now. So, I gently said, okay." She goes on to relate that with her current personality she would have refused that particular offer. "You know what I would have

²⁸ Kay Naoka, (Kay Nakao Bainbridge Island Interview Transcript,) Interviewed by Laura Bohuski, Bainbridge Island Historical Museum, Bainbridge Island, Washington. May 3, 2018, 7.

said now? “Hell no!” Oh god, but, it worked out okay.”²⁹ Kay wanted to decide when she was going to get married, but while she could choose to marry Sam the forced environment caused by mass incarceration and the perceived roles of married women at the time led Kay to agree to an early marriage.

Kay Nakao married her husband because he needed her help and because she wanted to marry him, but marrying Sam also allowed Kay to more easily leave Minidoka. While getting leave clearance from any of the concentration camps wasn’t impossible, having a place to work or a family member to join was required when applying for leave clearance. While affection and personality played a major role in women deciding if they would get married while in camp, the ability to move with their spouse, or to leave the camps at all, also played a role in women’s decisions about marriage.

Though the personal experiences of the women in this study don’t reflect the following trend, according to Matsumoto, Glenn, and a Nisei oral history, marriage while incarcerated wasn’t infrequent.³⁰ Of the twenty-four women’s accounts of wartime examined for this study, only Kay Nakao married while she was incarcerated. The other women who went into concentration camps either married before evacuation or waited until after the war was over to marry. The one woman in this study who did get married during the years of the war was never incarcerated.³¹ Those Nisei women who were not in relationships before the beginning of World War II, and were of marriageable age

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Matsumoto, *City Girls*, 161-162; Evelyn Nakao Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 220.

³¹ Mii Tai, “Mii Tai Interview,” Interview by Megan Asaka, *Courtesy of Densho*, March 14, 2006, Segments 13-14.

during incarceration, appear to more consistently choose to wait for marriage until after the war was over.

New marriages, such as Kay Nakao's, did happen during incarceration, though. Evidence of marriages among incarcerated Nisei appears in the *Rohwer Outpost*, the newspaper put out by incarcerated people at Rohwer, Arkansas, and by paraphernalia such as wedding invitations saved from the concentration camps. The second issue of the *Rohwer Outpost* from October 26, 1942 includes a short article announcing the third marriage to take place within Rohwer and congratulating the new couple.³² Nobu Suzuki, a Nisei incarcerated in Minidoka, further supported the idea that some women also choose to marry while in the camps as she recalled in her second interview, "A lot of people did get married in camp, or they went to Twin Falls and got married, or they waited until they relocated. And then a lot of them went to Spokane and got married."³³ Matsumoto also showed earlier in her work that romantic relationships rose sharply during incarceration, and if a woman was in a relationship with a man who was drafted the couple was likely to get married before he left for war.³⁴

Thus, while scholarship rightly emphasizes the trauma and decreased freedom and opportunities that Issei and Nisei enduring during World War II, evidence also suggests that Nisei women made many choices regarding married life during the war years. The choice that shows how much the Nisei were changing their definitions of their own

³² "Third Marriage," in *Rohwer Outpost*, October 26, 1942. Griswold, Nat R. Papers; MS G88 257; U.S. War Relocation Authority; Rohwer Relocation Center Records, 1938-1945; Series 6. Periodicals, newspapers, and Other Publications, 1942-45; Box 5; Folder 1. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

³³ Nobu Suzuki, "Nobu Suzuki Interview II," Interview of Dee Goto, *Courtesy of Densho*, June 11, 1998, Segment 17.

³⁴ Matsumoto, "Japanese American Women," 9-10.

gender roles was their decision to delay marriage even after World War II or, in rare cases, to not get married at all. Ruby Inouye, a Nisei born in 1920, had a more liberal upbringing than her peers. Inouye recalled that during her high school graduation her best friend was married at eighteen, but she was lucky, “So he [father] told us early on that we, we are to go to college and yet all around us, our next door neighbor, the eldest boy didn't go to college. A lot of the older, I mean, the boys in the families, some were allowed to go to college, but women, no. Girls were not supposed to go to college. So I figured that my father was pretty liberal.”³⁵ For Ruby Inouye the decision to not get married immediately was directly related to her stronger desire to go to college and get a job. Inouye spent the years of World War II going to medical school and finding a job and it was only when Ruby Inouye was thirty that she decided to marry, to a Chinese immigrant doctor who “talked [her] into it.”³⁶ Thirty was late in life for a Nisei to get married so by the time she decided to get married, her parents had stopped mentioning marriage to her at all. “[T]hey did tell me that, before I started going into pre-medical training, that my role as a female was to get married. But after I was in practice they never said anything like that. Oh, I guess that, it just was determined that I was a career woman.”³⁷ Ruby Inouye’s family had determined that her decision to pursue an education and a job in a male dominated field meant that she would never get married. Nisei women didn’t often choose their careers over having a family, but unlike their Issei mothers, Nisei women could choose to have a career alongside having a husband and children.

³⁵ Inouye, “Ruby Inouye Interview I” Interview by Alice Ito and Dee Goto, Segment 9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Segment 39.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Ruby Inouye did eventually get married and raised three children with her husband, but other women choose to never get married at all. A pair of sisters, Ayako and Masaki Murakami who were incarcerated in Minidoka and decided never to marry after the war, cited positive reasons for their decision. Their desire was to travel, to see the world, and to help in their father's shop after the war ended.³⁸ In an interview they did together when asked about marriage both women responded that no one had come to sweep them off their feet or that they wanted to travel, "[a]nd if you get the wrong kind of husband, you can't go no place. 'Cause some of the ladies said, "I can't even cut my hair, 'cause my husband doesn't want me to." I said, "Oh my God." Our marriage would be dissolved right away."³⁹ For the Murakami sisters getting married was more of a restriction than they wanted on their lives. They believed that marriage to the wrong kind of husband would restrict where they could go and what they could do, and some Nisei men did adhere to the same type of family strictures that existed in their parents' relationships.⁴⁰ For women like Inouye and the Murakami sisters, marrying would have placed restrictions on them that they didn't care for and so marriage was an institution they decided not to readily embrace.

For Ruby Inouye and the Murakami sisters the mass incarceration gave them the opportunity to choose not to marry or to delay marriage, but for other women the trauma of incarceration was so great that it altered their relationships to marriage and children. Emiko Omori, the narrator at the beginning of this chapter, and the director of the documentary *Rabbit in the Moon* never had a stable relationship or children, laying part

³⁸ Ayako and Masako Murakami, "Ayako and Masako Murakami Interview," Interview by Alice Ito and Dee Goto, *Courtesy of Densho*, December 14, 1997, Segment 28.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride*, 222-23.

of the cause for these decisions on the emotional turmoil cause by mass incarceration and the racism that she faced in her youth, as seen earlier. While historians such as Pamela Sugiman and Donna K. Nagata have studied the reactions of different generations to mass incarceration, further research into the emotional trauma of incarceration and its direct impact on Nisei marriages and their children is warranted.⁴¹

When Nisei women did decide to get married, almost inevitably children followed not too long after. In choosing to marry, many Nisei women also agreed to have children. In Japanese American society in the 1940s, as in many other cultures, having children was an expected outcome of marriage. The difference for Nisei women both during and after World War II was their determination to have a say in the decisions that impacted their children's lives.

My research has found that during and after the war women were choosing to better the lives of their children through their roles as mothers. Nisei women were embracing the role of the Wise Mother over the role of the Good Wife, but instead of raising loyal and patriotic children, they were using their authorities as mothers to create a better life for their children, with or without their husbands.⁴² Where an Issei or Nisei woman might allow a father or a brother to dictate where they went to school or what job they accepted, but when it came to family decisions that impacted the lives of their children Nisei women were more likely to exert their authority. Susie Ayako Imai, in an

⁴¹ For the generational impacts of incarceration see: Pamela Sugiman, "Japanese Canadian Mothers and Daughters" in *Journal of American Ethnic History* 26, no. 4 (2007): 50-68 and "Memories of Internment," in *The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers Canadiens De Sociologie* 29, no. 3 (2004): 359-88; Donna K. Nagata, *Legacy of Injustice Exploring the Cross-generational Impact of the Japanese American Internment* (Springer Verlag, 2014).

⁴² Kei Tanaka, "Japanese Picture Marriage and the Image of Immigrant Women in Early Twentieth-Century California," *Japanese Journal of American Studies* 15 (2004): 119.

interview for a leave clearance hearing from Rohwer, was asked if she would have gone with her husband to Japan if he had been granted expatriation, her response: “I wouldn’t have gone. I told him I wouldn’t go back to Japan.”⁴³ Susie Imai would have defied the will of her husband and stayed in America, and while it initially appears that Imai is splitting up the family, at the time of this hearing Imai had a baby and four siblings all in the United States. Imai wanted to stay with her child and siblings more than she wanted to return to Japan with her husband. Chiyo Madokoro, an Issei, had a similar response at the idea of leaving her children behind. “About a month ago I received a notice from one of the Departments saying that the Japanese government was calling for me. After consideration, as I have children here, and my husband is not here, I decided to decline.”⁴⁴ Madokoro’s husband was in Japan at the start of the war and could not return, so even with her husband in Japan and the Japanese government calling for her repatriation, she decided to defy her husband’s authority and stay with her children.⁴⁵ The impact of World War II, combined with the desire to stay with their children, forced many Japanese American women to modify their roles as wives and mothers to take over more authoritative roles within their families.

The shift to put the well-being of their children over obeying their husbands was an easier shift for Nisei women to make because the care and raising of the children was allocated as a woman’s job. Like their Issei mother’s, Nisei women were to care for the

⁴³ Hearing of Susie Ayako Imai, March 3, 1944. Leflar, Robert A. 1901- Papers; Loc. 73-88; War Relocation Authority Papers, 1942-1946; MS L52; Series 5. Hearings; Box 6; Folder 5. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, 3.

⁴⁴ Hearing of Chiyo Madokoro, 9K-9-[M]. August 4, 1943. Leflar, Robert A. 1901- Papers; Loc. 73-88; War Relocation Authority Papers, 1942-1946; MS L52; Series 5. Hearings; Box 6; Folder 1. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. 1.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

household and the children, even if they were pursuing a career. After the war and as Japanese Americans tried to return to a normal existence, men again left the care of house and children to their wives. Since children were already seen as part of women's responsibilities, it was a natural area for women to begin expanding their authority within.

Nisei, to make a better life for themselves and their children, even started making decisions for the family without the direct input of their husbands. Before World War II wives may have discussed what was best for the children with their husbands, but husbands made the final decisions. For Nisei women this was not a situation they wanted to continue, and in more than one family Nisei mother's made decisions on their own if it was necessary for the family. Lily C. Hioki married her husband Eige in 1948 and some years later, Eige's father reopened the old family laundry business. Eige and Lily were both working in the family laundry when Lily decided to quit, which caused some tension in the family. "Dissention. Because I quit. I had to leave because we had six children and we had no insurance and I wasn't getting paid[.]"⁴⁶ Lily Hioki knew that she needed to earn money to help her family survive and so she went and got a job as a nurse's aide at a local hospital which paid her a fair wage and gave her insurance for her family.⁴⁷ While she never states that her husband objected to her taking another job, this also appears to be a decision that Lily made on her own to ensure the survival of her family.

Nobu Suzuki wielded similar authority within her family, exemplified by how she pushed her family to relocate from Minidoka after they had been there for less than a

⁴⁶ Lily C. Hioki, "Lily C. Hioki Interview," Interview by Tom Ikeda and Steve Fugita, Courtesy of the Japanese American Museum of San Jose on *Densho*, December 1, 2010, Segment 23.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

year. Suzuki had small children at the time of incarceration, and about a year into their forced evacuation Nobu and her husband decided to move to Spokane as she wanted a better school situation, and a more normal life, for her kids. They made this decision together because Nobu's husband Paul was an Issei doctor and he was only licensed to work in Washington which restricted where they could move. While the Suzuki's decided together on where to move, it was Nobu who ultimately demanded that they leave camp for the sake of the children, even though Japanese doctors were needed in the camps.⁴⁸

This chapter has thus extended scholarly understanding of the gendered impact World War II era incarceration had. Before the mass incarceration of the Japanese American community the cultural norms of their society limited the roles that Nisei women could undertake within the community and what authority they could wield within those roles. The shock of incarceration and the war changed the Japanese American community to the point that women were both forced and allowed to make different choices. In some cases, the trauma they faced disrupted women's willingness to marry. But, in other instances, women exercised greater freedom of choice. They were allowed to decide if they wanted to marry, to decide when and who they wanted to marry, to decide whether they wanted to have children, and to decide what their roles would look like within a new Japanese American family dynamic.

Nisei women made many different decisions regarding whether they would marry throughout the years of World War II, but one of the consistent ways in which women began to expand their gender roles within the established boundaries of the Japanese

⁴⁸ Nobu Suzuki, "Nobu Suzuki Interview II," Interview by Dee Goto, *Courtesy of Densho*, June 11, 1998, Segment 4.

American community was through their authorities as mothers. The mass incarceration of Japanese Americans physically split families apart. Daughters eloped and left their families early to stay with new husbands, fathers were removed and sent to FBI prison camps, and families were divided over education, jobs, and loyalty to Japan. Even with the family splitting at the seams, Nisei women, much like their Issei mothers, strove to retain familial bonds and protect their children.

Chapter Four: Women, Careers, and Education

Ruby Inouye's account of her decision to become a doctor demonstrates how intricately gender roles and ideology were intertwined with Japanese American women's decisions to pursue education or a career outside of the household. Inouye recalls that she started out her college career in the Home Economics track but that she quickly grew disenchanted with that line of education and decided she wanted to change to pre-med. "I told my father what I -- think I wanted to change to pre-med. Well, he doesn't say anything right away. He's very quiet and he's thinking about it." Inouye's father does not give her an enthusiastic response and he initially is resistant, wondering why she wants to be a doctor. "I said, "Well, to begin with, I'm very healthy," and I knew that good health is very important. I'm healthy, I did well in school, and I said, "I don't like my Home Ec. class, classes," and I, and then I said I wanted to do something that would help the community." Inouye's response, her desire to help the community, is a trait prevalent in the Japanese American community, but it's not immediately embraced by her father, rather he was concerned with the gender roles she was expected to fill. "[H]is immediate response was, "Well, you're a girl, woman. And you know you're supposed to get married and have a family. That's what usually women do. And besides, you're, you're a woman, you don't know how you'll do." But I must have put up some kind of argument because I said, "Well, I don't have to get married right away, or have a family. I'd like to try.""¹ Eventually her father relented—Inouye hypothesized that a conversation with her mother had changed his mind.

¹ Ruby Inouye, "Ruby Inouye Interview," Interview by Alice Ito and Dee Goto, *Courtesy of Densho*. April 3 & 4, 2003, Segment 14.

We have seen how the circumstances of World War II and the forced evacuation of the Japanese Americans increased women's decision-making power about when and how they wanted to become wives and mothers. This chapter analyzes how these impacts also allowed them to make choices about whether they wanted a career, either in addition to or instead of a family, or if they wanted to engage in higher education. The Japanese American community believed that education was the way to better careers and a better life for their children. Before the war men were given preferential access to higher education but, as Matsumoto's study also shows, during and after the war Nisei women entered higher education and the work force in higher numbers.²

Ruby Inouye was not an anomaly, though most Japanese American women did not prioritize their education and career above getting married or having children. The more common trend among Nisei women was that they chose to pursue a few years advanced education or to work for a few years outside the home, before choosing to take up the job of wife and mother. They then often returned to work after their children went off to school. This choice, to work for a time or receive a degree before marrying or having children, was made easier by the circumstances surrounding World War II. Before the events of the war Japanese American women were more restricted by the wishes of their families, in particular the decisions of their fathers, who often made choices for the family members.

Before World War II advanced education and work outside the home was not considered important or appropriate for most Japanese American women, even though

² Valerie J. Matsumoto, *City Girls: the Nisei Social World in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 178-179 and 203.

women routinely engaged in work, both work for the family business or domestic wage work. Men though, if their family could afford it, were encouraged to get a degree and to engage in wage work as they were supposed to be the families' sole provider. Men were supposed to fulfill the role of breadwinner, while women were expected to emulate the ideal of good wife, wise mother that influenced Meiji era Japanese cultural beliefs.³

Ruby Inouye's story shows that some ideas about Japanese American women and education had begun to change by the start of World War II, though Inouye herself believed her father to be fairly liberal, citing his insistence that his daughters go to college. "But fortunately my father said, "Well, girls or not, you're going to college." So that was nice."⁴ Akiko Kurose had a similar experience to Ruby Inouye, "And education was very important to them [parents], so they encouraged us to go and pursue, you know, higher learning."⁵ Japanese American families encouraged their children to receive an education, but as discussed in Chapter One while men were encouraged to obtain higher education, women usually weren't sent on to college.

Two main factors account for the shift: The camps and the war loosened the cultural ties that had kept women following their cultural gender norms, and clubs also played an important role. Valerie Matsumoto argues that many of the changes that occurred to Japanese American women's gender roles during World War II were already happening before the war because of the prevalence of youth groups created by Nisei

³ Rebecca Corbett, "Guides for Modern Life," in *Cultivating Femininity: Women and Tea Culture in Edo and Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), 123-124; Evelyn Nakao Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 114.

⁴ Akiko Kurose, "Akiko Kurose Interview I," Interview by Matt Emery, *Courtesy of Densho*, July 17, 1997, Segment 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Segment 2.

Japanese American women.⁶ Nisei clubs and youth groups didn't stop effecting change within the Nisei community with the mass incarceration, but some groups reformed under new names in the concentration camps while entirely new groups formed in other areas because of their incarceration. Originally started in the Santa Anita Assembly Center, the Crusaders was a girl's group that wrote letters to soldiers during World War II.⁷ This group was developed by girls in Santa Anita and the girls in the club were entirely responsible for the efforts of their group, buying postcards, collecting names of soldiers, and mailing off letters as needed. At one point the Crusaders group expanded to include the Junior Crusaders and the Junior Junior Crusaders, high school and elementary aged youth groups, and the number of soldiers they were writing to had topped three thousand.⁸

The Crusaders, and other youth groups, were more than just a girl's group who wrote letters to soldiers during World War II. It was a group that created Nisei women who, through the organization and running of a girl's group, learned leadership skills and gained a sense of independence from their activities that would affect their choices going forward. Japanese American women were stepping out of the roles they were assigned by Japanese American cultural norms. The roles and responsibilities they took on while participating in these clubs opened up opportunities for the Nisei that they would not have normally had.

⁶ Valerie Matsumoto, "Japanese American Women during World War II," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 8, no. 1 (1984): 13.

⁷ Brian Niiya, "Crusaders," *Densho Encyclopedia*, Accessed January 27, 2019.
<http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Crusaders/>

⁸ Ibid.

Most of the new opportunities that Nisei women could experience was outside of the concentration camps, which involved applying for leave clearance. Leave clearance from the concentration camps took more than just completing a pile of paperwork. It required a connection outside of the camps who would vouch for, or sponsor, any Japanese American leaving a camp. Before they applied for leave clearance from a camp a Japanese American had to secure both a place to live and at least know of an open job position. They had to provide documentation that proved these conditions were already in place before they were allowed to leave the camps, and if the situation changed they were required to return. Kay Nakao gave birth to her son in Minidoka because of the parameters of their ranching job. Kay and her husband Sam had returned to the camp for the winter because the ranch Sam had a job at had no work for them during the winter months and so Kay had her son within a concentration camp.⁹ Having consistent work and a place to live outside the camps was essential to keeping their leave clearance.

The bonds created through the girls' clubs facilitated other options for Japanese American Nisei who wanted to leave the camps. Initially the way in which Nisei left the camps was through family connections. One person would acquire a job in a city and resettle there. A short time later that person would either find another open position or they would get a different, hopefully better job, and then call for a relative to come fill the empty position. Matsue Watanabe explains how it worked for her family, and how they helped her get out of Minidoka to finish school outside of camp, "And so [my brother and sister] had sponsors. And when... the first part of your family goes out, then

⁹ Kay Nakao, (Kay Nakao Bainbridge Island Interview Transcript,) Interviewed by Laura Bohuski, Bainbridge Island Historical Museum, Bainbridge Island, Washington, May 3, 2018.

it makes it little easier for the next part. So they can help get sponsors for you. And so by the time it was my turn and they decided that I should come out, well, I just took Sue's place in her home. And I went to school and worked as a schoolgirl.”¹⁰ It would be difficult for a Nisei to find a sponsor if they had no connections outside of camp, but if they joined a club or organization either before the war or while in camp, then sometimes organizations such as the YWCA would offer their assistance in resettlement.¹¹

In other families, job positions didn't work out quite as nicely as they did for Matsue Watanabe, but the first family members out often helped those still in camp. Fusa Tsumagari, in one of her letters to Clara Breed, states that she is leaving Poston to go live with her sister in Minnesota.¹² It does not appear from the letters that her sister acquired the job for her, but Fusa Tsumagari is leaving camp to go live with her sister and brother-in-law, which makes it likely that Tsumagari's sister at least told her about an open position. In Tsumagari's situation, being out of Poston and working in Minneapolis then allowed her to go to business school and she had plans to take the civil service exam after she completed her education.¹³ For Nisei women leaving camp provided opportunities to complete or even engage in higher education, whereas before the war their ability to engage in higher education was not up to them.

The harsh injustices of incarceration permanently changed life for Japanese Americans, but for Nisei women the Japanese American determination to rebuild their

¹⁰ Watanabe, "Matsue Watanabe Interview," Interview by Debra Grindeland, Courtesy of the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Community on *Densho*, October 7, 2006, Segment 12.

¹¹ Matsumoto, *City Girls*, 159.

¹² "Letter to Clara Breed from Fusa Tsumagari, Minneapolis, Minnesota, June 2, 1944," Fusa Tsumagari to Clara Breed, July 21, 1943, in Clara Breed Collection. Japanese American National Museum, 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*

lives lowered the resistance against women getting an education. The war opened more opportunities for them to use that education. Near the end of mass incarceration, late 1943 through 1944, Japanese American incarcerates were frequently relocating from the camps for farming, education, and new jobs outside of the Western Defense zone. Before 1943 though, receiving leave clearance was a strenuous process and only particular groups were allowed to leave. Relocation began in 1942 when the need for farm labor to harvest crops and for linguists in military intelligence convinced the government to begin allowing Japanese Americans to relocate away from the West coast.¹⁴ Quickly following the initial leave clearances a non-governmental group, the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council (NJASRC) was established to help college bound Nisei find placement in colleges willing to welcome them during the war.¹⁵ In the first wave of 400 students to relocate for education, one third were women.¹⁶

Nobu Suzuki was deeply involved in the beginning of the student relocation movement in Minidoka. Suzuki was one of a few Japanese American women to receive a college education before the war. She stated that there were four Japanese American women in her class, but that there were twenty-five Japanese American women with in her in the Pacific School of Religion at Berkeley where she received her master's degree.¹⁷ As stated earlier in this chapter by Suzuki, it was near impossible for a Japanese American women to get a job even if they did get a degree, so Suzuki did not get a job in

¹⁴ Rodger Daniels, "Exile and Return of Seattle's Japanese." *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 88, no. 4 (1997): 170.

¹⁵ Valerie Matsumoto, "Japanese American Women during World War II." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 8, no. 1 (1984): 10.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Suzuki, "Nobu Suzuki Interview I," Interview by Dee Goto, *Courtesy of Densho*, June 3, 1998, Segment 14-15.

religious education but managed to pick up odd jobs in social work, eventually working for the WRA right before the mass evacuation.¹⁸ When Nobu and her husband Paul, a doctor, were moved into Minidoka, Nobu used her experience with both the WRA and her connections to the YWCA to work on helping that first wave of students wanting to relocate to college. “[U]sually the schools started in the middle of September to the first of October and, if possible, we could get the students who had acceptances from the eastern colleges, let's hurry and get them all through.” Nobu remembered that when she got to the relocation office the man in charge had no idea what to do to get the applications approved. Nobu quickly offered to work there and then set about getting those students who had acceptances to college out of the camps and off to school.¹⁹

The War Relocation Authority, the Young Women’s Christian Association, and the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council, all helped Nisei’s find ways in which to leave the camps during incarceration and the help of these organizations gave Nisei women choices that they hadn’t had before. For high school aged Nisei who wanted to, this meant leaving the camps to go to college, and women who might otherwise have been unable to go to college before were now actively encouraged by many of these groups to do so. One major limitation for Nisei women to attend college before war was how much money their families had to send children onto secondary education. This limitation, combined with the idea that women didn’t need higher education, left many women without a way to attain a college degree before World War II. The assistance of these national organizations helped Nisei women find placement in homes near their

¹⁸ Ibid., Segment 23.

¹⁹ Ibid., Segment 29.

colleges, often with jobs as ‘school girls’ to pay for their room and board while they went to college.

Taking a job as school girl was common among Nisei women who left the concentration camps to attend college during World War II, but their experiences within the households of the families they lived with were varied. These girls usually entered a white American household and engaged in domestic work during the time they had off from school. In return they were paid a small wage as well as given a place to stay. Japanese American women filling positions as school girls was a part of mainstream American society before World War II but throughout the war the number of positions available increased. During mass incarceration Nisei women took school girl jobs not only to have access to higher education, but also as a way to leave the desolation of the camps.²⁰

For some Nisei, working as a school girl and going to school worked out quite well, as it did for Matsue Watanabe, “[My friends] were working like for three dollars a week, and they would have to baby-sit quite a, quite late at night and then do their studies after that. And, and talking to other people that I know currently, they, they said they did the same things... But I was very fortunate because I had a family that didn't make me baby-sit, and she paid me ten dollars a week. So I was a rich lady.”²¹ Some of Matsue Watanabe friends worked more than her, making a very low wage for the jobs they did around their sponsors’ homes, but they were still allowed to go to school. Akiko Kurose had a difficult time with her first family when she went to Salt Lake to enroll in the

²⁰ Matsumoto, *City Girls*, 166.

²¹ Matsue Watanabe, "Matsue Watanabe Interview," Interview by Debra Grindeland, Courtesy of the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Community on *Densho*. October 7, 2006, Segment 12.

University of Utah. "I was placed in a home, but those people had no intention of letting me go to school, they wanted a nursemaid and a housekeeper."²² The family Kurose was working for so limited her time that she was forced to switch to business school and when her brother tried to visit her, the family attempted to keep him from visiting. These actions caused Kurose's brother to take her to the WRA office in Salt Lake and get her placed with a new family after her original placement threatened to "send her back to camp" if Akiko didn't stay with them.²³

Taking a job as a school girl and going to school was a continuation of prewar employment patterns, but for Nisei women these patterns gave them access to higher education that they might not have had before the war. The ability for women to choose to go to college helped to accelerate the changes in Nisei's ideas about what roles they wanted to inhabit. Was education more important to them than getting married or having children? Nisei women were now allowed to ask questions like these and getting an education before having children was a path they could choose if they desired. Nisei women were beginning to look for jobs as teachers, secretaries, clerks, civil servants, and nurses, and the wartime labor shortages helped create opportunities for Nisei women to fill these positions.²⁴ There was, of course, still racial and gender discrimination against Nisei women that limited their access to these types of employment, but because of the war more jobs were available to women in general.

Education was not the only way that women could leave the concentration camps as work and relocation provided another way to obtain leave clearance. During 1943

²² Kurose, "Akiko Kurose Interview I," Interview by Matt Emery, Segment 22.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Matsumoto, *City Girls*, 172.

more and more inmates were granted indefinite leave clearances for work as well as for education.²⁵ To women who did not want to go to college or decided that heading directly into the workforce was a better idea, domestic work was always a plentiful option for non-white Americans. Often, those women who did not pursue secondary education were unlikely to find jobs available to them outside of the domestic field and domestic work was easier for a Japanese American woman to obtain because of the racism that was still prevalent in some American communities. Matsumoto found in her study that about half of the jobs offered to Japanese Americans during the war were in domestic service.²⁶ Nisei women who left the camps to start working instead of going to school were also found to use domestic jobs as a way out of camp before they found work in an industrial, clerical, or managerial profession.²⁷

Nisei women with business skills, such as typing or shorthand, or another degree were able to search for jobs outside of domestic service once they left camp, but they often still faced racial discrimination. Fumi Kaseguma left Minidoka as part of the National Youth Administration program which gave work-study training to those who could not afford education otherwise. She, and a group of other girls from Minidoka, went to business school to learn typing and shorthand but when the money for the program ran out Kaseguma was offered a secretary's job in Salt Lake City.²⁸ Kaseguma stayed in Salt Lake for an unspecified amount of time before deciding to move to Chicago where some of her friends lived. While in Salt Lake Kaseguma stated that she

²⁵ Daniels, "Exile and Return," 170.

²⁶ Matsumoto, *City Girls*, 166.

²⁷ Matsumoto, *City Girls*, 166, 173.

²⁸ Kaseguma, "Fumi Kaseguma Interview," Interview by Tom Ikeda, *Courtesy of Densho*. November 6, 2007, Segment 15.

wasn't discriminated against and that the "Caucasians... were all very friendly", but the same couldn't be said when she moved to Chicago.²⁹ "So I went to Chicago, but I really felt discrimination when I started looking for a job. I looked at an ad, and when I went to apply, the minute they saw me, they would say, "I'm sorry, the job is filled," or something like that, and I knew it wasn't." Kaseguma didn't let this discrimination stop her though. She took, and passed, the civil service exam which then led to a job working for a lawyer at the National Labor Board in Chicago.³⁰ Nisei women could find work outside of the domestic field if they had learned the required skills, but it wasn't easy.

Even when they did find work that was outside of the domestic field, some women didn't care for the work they could find. Haru Miyazaki discusses her first job in a letter she wrote to Virginia Tidball, "My job is to care for the fruits and vegetable department at Zimm's food market... After the first few days there isn't much more to learn, it's just a mechanical process—would never do for a lifetime job, not that sort of thing. I'm glad that I have this opportunity to learn a little and have experience to my credit though."³¹ Miyazaki goes on to express her desire to become a cadet nurse and possibly join the army; at the time of writing the letter she was waiting to see had been accepted into a training program.³² While Miyazaki chose to look for a job first, she was also planning to get an education that would lead to job she liked and could make into a career.

²⁹ Ibid., Segment 16.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Haru Miyazaki to Virginia Tidball, June 10, 1944. Virginia Tidball Papers; MS T438 274; LOC 824; U.S. War Relocation Authority; Jerome Relocation Center Records, 1942-1944, 1959; Series 1. Correspondences; Folder 1; Item 6. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, 2-3.

³² Ibid., 3.

Other Nisei women were of the opinion that taking on domestic work was not the best idea for Japanese American women, even if those jobs were easy to get. Fusa Tsumagari, a Nisei just out of high school at the start of the war and Nobu Suzuki, a Nisei mother in her early thirties at the start of World War II, share similar thoughts about women leaving the camps to get jobs in domestic work. Fusa Tsumagari explains to Clara Breed that, "It's really tough on people my age who have just gotten out of high school without any specific training. We want to go out and work, but we haven't had enough training or experience and feel rather unsure of ourselves."³³ She then relates that she wants to leave the camp like her friends however, "Lots of girls take domestic work just to get outside, then they plan to move into some other line of work. I, myself, don't like domestic work and have been told that it isn't the best line of work to go into, even as a starter."³⁴ Tsumagari has actively been warned away from domestic work, even if it was some of the easiest work for a Japanese American woman to obtain during World War II. Nobu Suzuki worked with the YWCA during the war to find job placements for women who wanted to leave the camps, but she was also one of the Nisei that warned younger women away from domestic work.

NS: Yes. Well, a good many people at that time were looking for housekeepers or girls to help around the house. Those were a lot more available than office work.

DG: But you suggested that you didn't want to fill those jobs.

NS: No. [Laughs]

DG: Why?

NS: Well, it seemed to me that there were other places where girls could avail their talent, work on their talents a little more.

DG: And that was kind of demeaning.

³³ "Letter to Clara Breed from Fusa Tsumagari, Poston, Arizona, May 3, 1943," Fusa Tsumagari to Clara Breed, July 21, 1943, In Clara Breed Collection, Japanese American National Museum, 2-3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

NS: Well, that there were other places where they could use their energies to more helpful means than doing just housework.³⁵

Suzuki, who worked actively to promote both education and work for those Japanese Americans that chose to pursue those goals, didn't believe that domestic work helped either Japanese American women or the community.

During the war even Nisei women who were already married and had children would choose work over their family if the situation warranted. Kiyō Sakahara and her husband Toru had both obtained higher education during the war, though Kiyō had dropped out of college when she got pregnant. After her husband finished law school Kiyō and Toru were staying with Toru's parents and Kiyō was looking after their young son David when she was offered a job for a sugar company in Salt Lake City. Kiyō decided to leave her children in the care of Toru and his parents and take up the job in the company's quality control lab. By working for this company Kiyō was able to pay off Toru's school loans and get the family out of debt. For a while Kiyō was the breadwinner that helped her family reach financial stability during the war years.³⁶

The war years created different opportunities for different families. In some cases, women engaged in wage work to support their families financially while for other women their involvement in a variety of organizations, both inside and outside of the Japanese American community, increased. During and after World War II Nisei women became involved in organizations that they would not have had the chance to join before the war. Nobu Suzuki was active in multiple organizations after World War II such as the PTA,

³⁵ Suzuki, "Nobu Suzuki Interview I," Interview by Dee Goto, Segment 37.

³⁶ Kiyō Sakahara and Toru Sakahara, "Kiyō and Toru Sakahara Interview II," Interview by Dee Goto, *Courtesy of Densho*. February 27, 1998, Segment 14.

the YWCA, the League of Women Voters, and the American Association of University Women. She was so active in these organizations, both during and after the war that she had to leave her children in the care of her mother. Lucky for Suzuki, her mother was supportive of her activities outside of the community and was willing to look after Nobu's children.³⁷

Education and work were two powerful motivators that encouraged Japanese American women to leave the concentration camps, but not everyone chose to—or could—leave the camps. Those Japanese Americans who stayed within the concentration camps during World War II also sought new opportunities regarding their education or work. Incongruously it was in the camps that Japanese American women would be able to undertake jobs that were more fulfilling than domestic work and receive wages equal to men. Glenn's work supports this finding as she relates a story about how animated an older Nisei woman became when she related how she was able to use her education in typing and shorthand to get a job as a secretary in the camps. A job she found much more enriching than the domestic work she was consigned to because of her race before and after the war.³⁸

Racial discrimination by people in the government led to the incarceration of the Japanese American community, but once inside the concentration camps that same government offered to pay women for tasks that, before the war, had been unpaid household labor. When the government evacuated the Japanese American community and forced them into enclosed camps they quickly realized they would have to employ

³⁷ Nobu Suzuki, "Nobu Suzuki Interview II," Interview by Dee Goto, *Courtesy of Densho*, June 11, 1998, Segment 23.

³⁸ Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Brides*, 129.

the inmates to run the camps. The WRA paid the inmates on a scale set deliberately lower than the amount they paid American GIs.³⁹ This scale amounted to 19 dollars for professional work, 16 dollars for skilled work, and 12 dollars for unskilled labor or apprentices, a month.⁴⁰ For Japanese American women in the camps this meant they got paid for jobs they had done for their family for free. Issei and Nisei women were often waitresses and dish washers in camp, roles they had undertaken within their family structures, and now they were getting paid 12 dollars a month to do that work.⁴¹ Louise Ogawa, another Nisei girl who wrote to Clara Breed, took a job as a waitress in Santa Anita assembly center after she, “decided to do something else besides washing, ironing, and cleaning the rooms.”⁴² A little over two months later Louise Ogawa discusses how proud she is of receiving her first paycheck to Miss Breed, even though she only earns about 37 cents a day. “The distribution of our second checks began today. It was, of course, my first check. I felt so proud to receive it because I really earned it all by myself. It makes me feel so independent.”⁴³

Furthermore, the WRA paid women the same wage as men when they worked at the same rank or skill level as men. At the time they were receiving an equal wage, women were also getting paid for the domestic work they had undertaken as part of their daily household chores before the war. Gender discrimination still occurred within the

³⁹ “War Relocation Authority.” *Densho Encyclopedia*. Accessed March 5, 2019.

https://encyclopedia.densho.org/War_Relocation_Authority/

⁴⁰ Howard, “Politics of Dancing under Japanese-American Incarceration,” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 52 (Autumn 2001): 134; Matsumoto, “Japanese American Women,” 9.

⁴¹ Howard, “Politics of Dancing,” 133.

⁴² “Letter to Clara Breed from Louise Ogawa, Arcadia, California, May 7, 1942,” Louise Ogawa to Clara Breed, May 7, 1942, in Clara Breed Collection, Japanese American National Museum, 1.

⁴³ “Letter to Clara Breed from Louise Ogawa, Arcadia, California, July 15, 1942,” Louise Ogawa to Clara Breed, July 15, 1942, in Clara Breed Collection, Japanese American National Museum, 2.

camps and John Howard claims that men were more often assigned to skilled labor professions while women fulfilled unskilled professions. This again created an environment where men were often paid more than women.⁴⁴ However, when women did fill jobs in the same profession rank or skill level as men, they were paid the same wage.

Indeed, though scholars such as Alice Kessler-Harris and Ruth Milkman have noted the persistence of gender-based employment discrimination during and after the war for U.S. women overall, and in one of the most consistent employers in camp by the end of incarceration, the Community Activities Division, women received equal pay.⁴⁵ In July of 1944 in Rohwer, the community activities section paid both Isamu Sugimoto and Mrs. Sugimoto nineteen dollars to fulfill their position of district supervisor; for their roles as club advisors, both Kenneth Saga and Lily Koyama received 16 dollars a month.⁴⁶ In a report by the War Relocation Authority that shows their end of month personnel figures, while there were more men in jobs in the 19 dollar scale—4 men to 1 woman—there was a women doing the same job as a man and getting paid an equal wage. Of those newly hired jobs that fell within the 16 dollar pay scale, for the month of December women outnumbered men, with 20 women and 12 men filling jobs in that pay scale.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Howard, "Politics of Dancing," 133.

⁴⁵ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, 20th Anniversary Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work the Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana: Univ. of Ill. Pr., 1987).

⁴⁶ Rohwer Relocation Center, Community Management Division, Community Activities Section; July 1944. Griswold, Nat R. Papers; MS G88 257; LOC 732; U.S. War Relocation Authority; Rohwer Relocation Center Records, 1938-1945; Series 2. Reports; Box 2; Folder 7; Item 90. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

⁴⁷ War Relocation Authority Monthly Report, Community Activities, Dec 1944. Griswold, Nat R. Papers; MS G88 257; U.S. War Relocation Authority; Rohwer Relocation Center Records, 1938-1945; Series 2. Reports; Box 3; Folder 18; Item 260. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. No numbers were reported on personnel in the 12 dollar pay scale for that month.

This change in job equality within the camps occurred, in part, because of the labor shortages during World War II and the course of women's roles in labor followed a similar path to working women outside the camps. Ruth Milkman's study of women in the automotive and electrical engineering fields showed that the gendered labels applied to certain jobs shifted during the war to allow women to work in what had been termed "men's work." After the war gendered ideologies amongst management, women, and unions helped shift the labels back after World War II ended.⁴⁸ Job equality in camp did not exactly mirror Ruth Milkman's study, but it ran along similar lines. As men and women relocated the WRA had less people to fill jobs either as activity directors or as secretaries and legal aids. Women fulfilled these roles but when these jobs led to independence in Japanese American women there was a movement by the government, and to some extent the Japanese American community, to compel women back into the roles they had fulfilled before.⁴⁹ Many Issei and older Nisei women found themselves regulated to the same types of work they had filled pre-war. However, during World War II, Japanese American women were making money at the same rate as men and sometimes for jobs they had traditionally done without pay.

That earning power reshaped women's understanding of themselves and of the possibilities they had. Letters written by Louise Ogawa, Fusa Tsumagari, and Haru Miyazaki suggest that, no matter if these women were in camp or not, earning that first paycheck greatly increased their confidence and their independence. In addition, just the possibility of being able to provide for themselves was attractive to some. As one noted:

⁴⁸ Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work the Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana: Univ. of Ill. Pr., 1987), 123-124.

⁴⁹ Howard, "Politics of Dancing," 137-138.

“If luck is with me I have a chance working part time as a typist and going to school. Of course I will be paid for that job then I will not have to trouble my folks for the necessities when school begins.”⁵⁰ Margaret Ishino’s letter shows how she wants to be able to provide for her supplies for high school and the opportunity to work as a typist could give her the funds to do so.

To receive the training required to advance their careers many Nisei had to leave the camps to attend college, but for many Issei the classes offered in the camps were their first opportunity to receive any schooling beyond their primary education. Many different types of classes were offered beyond the elementary, middle, and high school classes that Nisei below the age of eighteen were required to take. English language classes, sewing, typing, business, and ikebana or flower arranging classes were a few options that were available for anyone. Issei women took advantage of the opportunity to attend classes while they were in camp, but rarely did the skills they acquired translate into better job opportunities once the war was over.

World War II and the incarceration of Japanese Americans caused long lasting emotional trauma within the community and fractured the social and cultural structures that bound Japanese American women into the gender roles their mothers had inhabited. Changes in these gender roles had begun to occur before the war, but the consequences of incarceration and relocation accelerated the changes in the Nisei and opened up new opportunities for women. These opportunities helped women move into roles they had previously been denied because of both gender and race, if they chose to inhabit these

⁵⁰ “Letter to Clara Breed from Margaret Ishino, Poston, Arizona, September 28, 1942,” Margaret Ishino to Clara Breed, September 28, 1942, in Clara Breed Collection, Japanese American National Museum, 7-8.

new roles. For the most part Nisei women sought jobs during the war years as secretaries, clerks, nurses, doctors, teachers, domestics, and school girls where they could find opportunities to do so. Other Nisei women choose to complete college degrees in cities such as Salt Lake, St. Louis, Chicago, and Denver before moving onto jobs in civil service or the medical fields. Many only worked for a few years during and immediately after the war before getting married and having children, but there were also a few who broke through glass ceilings in both education and careers for themselves and for the Japanese American community. Ruby Inouye left Minidoka to complete her education and residency to become one of the first Japanese American female doctors and Sharon Aburano's sister Chiyeko Rose, spent the war years at Washington State College getting her chemistry degree and running the chemistry lab there after she finished her education.⁵¹ The effects of World War II on the Japanese American community were devastating and long lasting, but the breakdown of the tight cultural and social bonds inherent in the community also gave women the opportunity to make choices to put their education and careers before their desire to get married or have children.

⁵¹ Inouye, "Ruby Inouye interview" Interview by Alice Ito and Dee Goto; Sharon Aburano, "Sharon Tanagi Aburano Interview I," Interview by Tom Ikeda and Megan Asaka, *Courtesy of Densho*, March 25, 2008, Segment 29.

Conclusion

The mass incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II broke apart families, stripped an entire generation of their life's earnings, and incarcerated approximately 120,000 people—two-thirds of whom were American-born citizens. All this happened without a trial. The cultural, emotional, and economic repercussions of this act still impact the Japanese-American community. Even during this horrible event Japanese American women were able to find opportunities to improve the situation of their families, their communities, and themselves. Circumstances that resulted from the mass incarceration—job loss, the breakdown of familial ties, the student relocation movement—created opportunities for women to choose different paths for their lives than what their culture may have pressed upon them before World War II. The stress upon the Japanese American community brought about by World War II allowed, and sometimes pushed, women to choose new paths regarding marriage, children, higher education, and careers.

Before Pearl Harbor and the start of World War II in the United States Issei and Nisei their communities expected women to fulfill specific roles. The expectations from these roles had been adopted from the image of the ideal upper-middle class wife, named *ryosai kenbo*, a woman who took care of the house and the home while the husband supported the family. This ideal did not match the reality of the Japanese American immigrant life, but in order to promote the picture of a civilized Japanese American society the Japanese American community leaders presented the ideal of the perfect wife to mainstream white American society in hopes of appearing more cultured. The desire to project this image was so dominant in Issei society that women often portrayed the image

of the good wife and wise mother to everyone, even their husbands and children. Despite the idealized image, Issei women were leaving the house to work as domestics or helping their husband run farms or urban businesses. The growing gap between the reality of the hardworking mother and the image of the perfect wife often left the Nisei with their own distorted view of their mothers. The oral histories revealed that while Nisei women often found their own mothers to be exceptional—they were fluent in English or were well educated—they believed that most other Issei women were not.

The duality that existed among Issei mothers closely mirrored the dual nature of the sense of self that developed within the Nisei generation. Where Issei women were hard working family supporters who presented themselves as traditional Japanese women, Nisei struggled to find a balance between embracing Japanese culture and being American citizens. This shared dichotomy could have brought the two generations of women closer together, but as Nisei women struggled to define their place in the world they grew away from the projected image of the Japanese good wife and wise mother.

From a young age, Nisei women were adopting American ideals and assimilating them into a unique culture. Romantic love, going to college, and having a career were goals that many Nisei women embraced as possible for themselves as American women. These were not necessarily goals that were supported by the Japanese-American community, especially for women. Nonetheless, these hopes had inundated the Nisei community, and even before Pearl Harbor and World War II the desire to see these hopes realized had begun to affect the actions of the Nisei. Arranged marriages were normal among Issei couples, but many Nisei started resisting the arrangement of marriages by their family members. Attending university was usually a privilege reserved for men both

within the Japanese American community and to a lesser extent in mainstream American society. Despite this, small groups of Nisei women attended women's, religious, or business colleges before World War II. Many young Nisei women went to school for shorthand, typing, or teaching before World War II, but because of racial and gendered discrimination they struggled to find jobs outside of the Japanese American community that allowed them to use their education. This discrimination limited their ability to have a career outside of working in the family business or taking on domestic work from non-Japanese American families.

These changes in the Nisei community had begun to occur before World War II and mass incarceration, but both pressure from the Japanese American community and mainstream American racism limited how much Japanese American women could effect change in their lives. It was through the disruptions caused by the forced removal of the Japanese American community that women were allowed more opportunities to choose different roles than their mothers. The paths these women chose varied based on factors such as personality, family situation, and their own goals. Some women were so impacted by incarceration and the changes it wrought that they either never married or never had children. Others chose to finish their education, work for a few years, and then get married and have children, following a path similar to their parents a generation before. For all of its devastating effects, the loosening of family and cultural restrictions that occurred because of incarceration gave women the option to choose to change which gender roles they took on and what those roles looked like.

This study investigated but a fraction of the oral histories archived on the Densho website or the letters digitized by the Japanese American National Museum. To truly

understand more of the changes that Nisei and Issei women underwent during mass incarceration and World War II more in-depth research needs to be conducted. Nisei oral histories provide a great resource for their own experiences and the changes they underwent during and after the war, but their own perceptions likely skew their images of their parents. Going forward a more thorough examination of how the lives of Issei women changed from before World War II to after would not only reveal more about an under researched section of our society but help provide a fuller understanding of the changes that occur in gender roles during traumatic and physical disruptive events like the forced incarceration of World War II.

Gender started as the main focus of this study but it was quickly apparent that the differences experienced by each generation was as important to this study as gender. The reactions of women varied greatly depending on whether they were Issei or Nisei and their experiences before the war influenced the actions they took during and after their forced incarceration. Issei women's transformation tended to be minor or relatively short-lived, such as taking control of the family decisions for the months between Pearl Harbor and when they entered assembly centers. Many of the actions and choices of Issei after World War II mirrored what they had been doing before. This is where the largest difference between the Issei and Nisei women can be seen. Nisei women began to choose different paths. Where before the war marriage and children were assumed but some Nisei women chose not to engage in either practice during or after the war. Other women simply chose to delay marriage and children while they worked for a few years or finished college. Looking at these choices today may make them seem like small actions on the part of the Nisei, but these changes were the beginning of a shift in women's

position in Japanese American society. “[O]ur first son says..., “I still remember Dad making buckles, covered buckles and buttons for Mama.” And then even if it was, woman’s liberation wasn’t then... he says, “I remember Dad going to the sink and washing the dishes so that Mama could finish up her sewing.””¹

Incongruously, Nisei women were able to take advantage of opportunities that arose during World War II that allowed them to attend universities, work in jobs besides domestic service, and have more choices in marriage. The changes that occurred during World War II didn’t always remain though. Like Caucasian women who went to work in factories during the war but returned to their roles as mothers after the war ended, Nisei women followed a similar pattern.² During the war Nisei women worked as secretaries, teachers, and in medical fields. These are employment areas that Caucasian women moved out of when they started filling roles caused by the men’s labor shortage.

¹ Kay Matsuoka, “Kay Matsuoka Interview,” Interview by Alice Ito, *Courtesy of Densho*, December 29 & 30, 1999, Segment 40, <http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-1000-48/>

² Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work the Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana: Univ. of Ill. Pr., 1987), 123-125.

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