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Incarcerated Foodways  
Japanese American Experiences During WW2

by

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Historical Resources Management

in the Department of History

Idaho State University

Spring 2018

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## Incarcerated Foodways: Japanese American Experiences During WW2

Thesis Abstract—Idaho State University (2018)

Japan's attack at Pearl Harbor marked not only America's entrance to World War II, but catalyzed one of the largest civil rights infractions in United States history. Convinced that those with Japanese descent (Nikkei) living along the Pacific coast posed a threat to national security, President Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 decreed the area a military exclusion zone. The military subsequently forcefully removed over 110,000 Japanese Americans—over two-thirds of whom held U.S. citizenship—from their homes. Unjustly incarcerated into incarceration camps scattered throughout the Midwest, Nikkei spent three years experiencing physical, mental, and cultural degradations. Using unexamined oral histories and other under-utilized primary source accounts, I use food history as a lens to better understand the Nikkei experience during World War II. With themes including emergency harvest food production, self-sustainability, and subjection to unfamiliar and culturally insensitive foods, this work makes broader implications regarding labor, race, and loyalty.

### Key Words:

United States History  
Food History  
WWII  
Japanese American  
Incarceration Camps  
Food Production  
Race

## Chapter 1: Japanese American Incarceration Following Pearl Harbor

Most popular narratives centered on examining America's experience following the "date which will live in infamy" often ignore one of the most infamous acts in America's history. On December 7, 1941, Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor catalyzed not only America's entry into World War II, but one of the largest government-sanctioned civil rights infractions in the nation's history. Targeted by fear and blatant racism, those with Japanese heritage became outlets upon which many white American citizens projected their frustrations.<sup>1</sup> This hysteria manifested in the forced removal of anyone with Japanese heritage living along the United States' west coast. Although wrongfully imprisoned, this persecuted minority—the majority of whom held U.S. citizenship—went on to provide several significant contributions to their persecuting nation. These included purchasing war bonds, military service, and supporting local economies.<sup>2</sup> They also played a pivotal role in aiding the Allied war effort with contributions in emergency harvest work and successes at maintaining domestic food caches. As they supported the nation's food production, Nikkei (those of Japanese heritage) underwent a fracturing in their own culture, including long-cherished foodways. This food history provides a way to better understand the Nikkei experience during World War II. With themes including emergency harvest food production, self-sustainability, and subjection to unfamiliar and culturally insensitive foods, this work makes broader implications regarding labor, race, and loyalty.

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<sup>1</sup> "Personal Justice Denied," Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, *Japanese Americans*, National Archives, accessed March 18, 2018, <https://www.archives.gov/research/japanese-americans/justice-denied>; Roger Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trial: Japanese Americans in World War II* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), 29.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Hughes, "A Personal Preface-The Camp at Minidoka (in part)," in *Hunt for Idaho*, ed. Bessie M. Shrontz-Wright (self-pub., 1994), 132; Teresa Tamura, *Minidoka: An American Concentration Camp* (Caldwell: Caxton Press, 2013).



Located on undeveloped and federally owned sagebrush desert in south-central Idaho, the Minidoka Relocation Center sprawled over 33,000 acres. Occupied largely by former Portlanders, Seattleites, and Bainbridge Islanders, Minidoka became the new home for nearly 13,000 Japanese Americans during 1942-1945. Staffed by white appointed personnel from all over the country, the War Relocation Authority oversaw daily camp operations. The harsh desert climate proved a challenge for all residents, but served as an especially demoralizing element to Nikkei. Hailing from the predominantly high-precipitation areas of the Pacific Northwest, the ever-present dust, heat, and lack of water became serious inhibitors to Nikkei health and happiness, as detailed further in the subsequent chapters. The following map shows the general layout and physical structures of Minidoka:

[illegible]

Public interest and scholarly focus on WWII has been dominated by more familiar topics such as domestic home-front mobilization efforts and military conflicts on the battlefields. Although Nikkei greatly influenced both of these factors during the war, their experiences remain a glaringly understudied area in American history. By increasing our understanding of the sacrifices and efforts faced by these wrongfully incarcerated Nikkei, we gain a greater appreciation for relationships between racism and loyalty during wartime. While an expanding

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group of literature has increasingly been addressing this topic's exclusion from mainstream narratives, food production and consumption remains an excluded topic. This topic's exclusion from mainstream narratives viewing Nikkei experiences through the lens of food history allows a fresh perspective on America's experience during WWII, specifically Japanese Americans and minority treatment during wartime. Nearly all primary source accounts centered on Japanese American incarceration heavily reference food. Emergency harvesters viewed their willingness to contribute vital foodstuffs to a hungry United States and its military efforts as crucial elements in proving their loyalty to a distrustful nation. Food also became a tool which incarcerated Nikkei used to attempt maintaining elements of their identity and culture. In contrast, limited control over family mealtimes in communal mess halls led to a significant deconstruction in family structures even as false perceptions of excessive food in the centers created widespread public backlash against the camps as perceptions of "coddling" became common.<sup>4</sup> In-depth examination on each of these topics in later chapters shows that food production and consumption played a vital role in Nikkei incarceration experience; one which greatly altered public perceptions of race and loyalty as well as changed the projection for many Japanese American lives post-incarceration.

This chapter highlights the main methods scholars have used in studying Nikkei incarceration. Although several works contribute greatly to this narrow field, most focus on the injustices that incurred and Nikkei attempts at keeping up morale during their incarceration. Secondary literature examining the incarceration most often refers to food simply as an obstacle

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<sup>4</sup> Arthur Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary," (Unpublished: 1942-1945). Physical Location: Twin Falls Public Library and "Bob Sims Collection," Boise State University Special Collections.

to overcome, with only brief references to their role in food production in 1942-1943. Although overlooked, food's integral impact on domestic and military successes means food's importance during the war cannot be overstated. Works focusing on food culture during war, experiences of common people, household management, nutrition, and sustainability all abound in other topics.<sup>5</sup> Scholars overlook those who actually produced the food, though. In the case of Japanese American contributors, the situation becomes even more complex. They not only experienced the same food shortages as the rest of the nation, they also contributed to their persecuting nation's food supply and war effort while wrongfully incarcerated. Such ironies abound in this uncomfortable—yet rich—history. In short, one group of scholars tend to look at lives of the incarcerated while another examines food's importance to society and the military during the war. A study of those incarcerated producing the food themselves has remained absent, until now. In addition to a more in-depth look at scholarly examinations focusing on Nikkei incarceration experiences and WWII wartime food culture, this chapter highlights the current state of food and war studies by discussing trends in the broader field of mass incarceration and race relations. Observation of traditional Japanese food customs will then help establish a background that allows a fuller appreciation for the hardships and turmoil undertaken by Nikkei. The examination of other works will culminate with a brief overview of the *how* and *why* the incarceration happened, and how it fits with other narratives of race in the nation's historical incarceration trends.

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<sup>5</sup> Iselin Theien, "Food Rationing during World War Two: A Special Case of Sustainable Consumption?" *Anthropology of Food*, 5 (September, 2009): 10-27; Brian Wansink, "Changing Eating Habits on the Home Front: Lost Lessons from World War II Research," *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, 21, no. 1 (May 29, 2013): 90-99.

## 1.1: A Note on Terminology

Terminology regarding Japanese American incarceration can prove politically sensitive. The terms I use throughout this work are a result of close collaboration with the Japanese American community and their preference in terms. I also draw from the general academic consensus—when available—regarding terminology. Although “internment” is often used in relation to the experience, many Japanese Americans refuted this phrase due to its relationship with imprisonment caused by political or military affiliation. Because the WWII Japanese American experience was centered on race, and many Japanese Americans served in the U.S. military, internment’s implication of enemy combatants provides a false categorization for many of those affected. Although President Roosevelt himself referred to the relocation centers as “concentration camps,” and Peter Black, the senior historian at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum further points out that although the term technically works, the Nazi regime so “redefined the concept of concentration camp both in image and in practice” that it becomes difficult to disassociate the American relocation centers from the death camps at Dachau and Buchenwald.<sup>6</sup> In 2011, the Japanese American Citizens League declared a “Power of Words” emergency resolution recommending the use of terms including “American concentration camp,” “incarceration camps,” and “illegal detention centers.” This work will mainly refer to the sites as “incarceration camps.”

Several terms also exist in referring to Japanese Americans. “Nikkei” refers to people with Japanese descent, “Issei” refers to first generation Japanese Americans, and “Nisei” refers to second generation Japanese Americans. Because Issei and Nisei experienced incarceration

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<sup>6</sup> Tamura, *Minidoka*, 32.

differently, I will specifically relate which group was most affected by certain events. The term “Japanese American” will be used interchangeably with Nikkei. It is important to note, though, the subtle difference between “Japanese American” and “Japanese-American.” Most Nikkei do not use the hyphenated reference because it minimizes their primary identity as “American.”

## **1.2: Food: A “deeper historical evidence”**

Food studies in historical analysis have become increasingly popular over the last couple of decades, and analyses regarding even ancient accountings of food provide context for this subject’s importance. As an outgrowth of the rise of social history over the past fifty years, food studies offer insight into several different avenues for study. This section provides an overview of food history’s development as an important avenue of study by focusing on work from some of the field’s premiere scholars; including Ken Albala and James C. McCann. Food’s earliest written accounts include Mesopotamian cuneiform tablets, Athenaeus’s third century food philosophy in the world’s oldest recipe collection, and medieval cookbooks.<sup>7</sup> Food’s importance to all societies historically cannot be overstated because if people deemed food important enough to record, food should also hold consideration as equally worthy to study. Through these historical food accounts, readers can receive what McCann refers to as a “deeper historical evidence and the meaning of food and history in cooking.”<sup>8</sup> Many works in food history focus on anthropological approaches as well as economic implications associated with food and famine. Such narrow approaches fail to acknowledge the ingenuity groups use in finding ways to

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<sup>7</sup> Ken Albala, “Analysis of Historic Primary Sources,” in *Research Methods in the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition*, ed. John A. Brett and Janet Chrzan (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), vol. VI, 183-196.

<sup>8</sup> James C. McCann, *Stirring the Pot: A History of African Cuisine* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 32.

incorporate food and its preparation in solving problems associated with environment, resource access, and class constrictions.<sup>9</sup> Ancient primary source accounts can also lack explanatory power due to the exclusion of source materials from those with lower class standing.<sup>10</sup> Instead, a top-down approach with limited breadth becomes one of the only possibilities for food histories centered on ancient societies. In short, food histories' potential for analysis increases related to the variety of primary sources available, much as any other historical study.

In contrast to medieval records, the postindustrial era has provided numerous primary source accounts related to lower-income groups. Herein lies significant potential for further understanding the ways in which socioeconomic wellbeing, occupation, and even race can reveal historical elements previously unexamined.<sup>11</sup> My study takes this method a step further, by realizing that most post-industrial historical food accounts focus on consumers who had a choice—at least so far as their socioeconomic standing allowed—in what they cooked and ate. In contrast, looking at incarcerated groups' food cultures shows those who had little choice in their dietary practices and their attempts at maintaining cultural identity through food. Specifically, Nikkei incarcerated during WWII—who did leave significant primary source records—faced a unique conundrum. Encouraged to prove their loyalty to the United States, Nikkei dedicated precious man and womanpower to outside farms at the expense of their own food. Food production then became a symbol of loyalty for many Nikkei. Difficulties within camp boundaries also arose as the inability to cook their own food often resulted in ill-prepared and inedible meals. Forced to eat food prepared by others in large mess halls where dining together

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> John M. Wilkins and Shaun Hill, *Food in the Ancient World* (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

with immediate family proved impossible created a disruption in traditional consumption customs and caused a breakdown of Japanese dining practices as well. Overall, this situation forced Nikkei to find a balance between proving their loyalty to the United States through assimilation while attempting to maintain cultural identity; often through food production.<sup>12</sup> My approach specifically examines how food was used as a controlling and manipulative factor against prisoners as well as ways in which food can be an element in maintaining certain aspects of culture. This allows me to link with other studies of resistance strategies among incarcerated such as labor slowdowns and draft resistance, as depicted in Richard Nishimoto's *Inside an American Concentration Camp* and David Yoo's *Growing up Nisei*. Examining food culture expands our understanding of resistance and patriotism.<sup>13</sup>

Breakdown of Japanese food culture, social cohesion, and identity represents an important factor in the incarceration experience for many Nikkei. Understanding the importance of food, in terms of culture and identity, further highlights the injustices they suffered. Japan's food culture changed when third-century rice cultivation transformed the nation into an agriculturally based society. Ethnologist Naomichi Ishige states, "Since that time rice has held the central place in the culinary value system of the Japanese. Above all other foods, rice has steadily been regarded as special and highly significant."<sup>14</sup> Traditional food culture became socially and formally established during Japan's nationwide policy of seclusion from 1639 to 1868. During this period, nationalism increased due to limited impact from outsiders, allowing the creation of a nationally

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<sup>12</sup> Not all wanted to practice "Japanese" customs but instead wanted to be a part of mainstream American culture. This concept is more extensively discussed in chapter three.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Nishimoto, *Inside an American Concentration Camp* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995); David Yoo, *Growing up Nisei* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> Naomichi Ishige, *The History and Culture of Japanese Food* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 138.



adopted diet centered on miso, rice, vegetables, soy sauce, and tea.<sup>15</sup> These traditions surrounding dietary staples remained central to Japanese custom through the rise of modern Japan and remained in practice when immigrants arrived in the U.S. between 1890 to 1924. After the evacuation decreed by Executive Order 9066 and establishment of the camps, relocation officials all but ignored this strong traditional Japanese food culture in the centers as each of the foodstuffs mentioned had limited availability. Understanding the food culture many Japanese Americans grew up on, regardless of citizenship status, provides a crucial foundational reference for this work. Oral histories conducted as part of larger book projects by Teresa Tamura in *Minidoka: An American Concentration Camp* and Bessie M. Shrontz in *Hunt for Idaho: Evacuees and Homesteaders* each show stories suggesting a negative alteration for Nikkei food culture, post-camp. These elements in the incarceration experience have not, however, received specific focus. Each of these works receive additional analysis later in this chapter. Oral histories conducted by Tamura and Shrontz show a change in food culture, but it has not received scholarly analysis. More works related to the U.S. experience with food during war are outlined below in the subsection “World War and Home Front Food Culture.”

### **1.3: “A link in a chain of racism”**

America has consistently had a tumultuous experience with race relations. One of the most cited writers on Japanese American incarceration, Roger Daniels, provides scathing accounts of America’s history of legalized discrimination against those without white skin.<sup>16</sup> The wartime

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 27-29.

<sup>16</sup> Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trial*.

relocation and incarceration of Japanese Americans has interesting parallels regarding food's relationship with race and cultural identity in other persecuted minority groups. As Daniels points out, the relocation "was neither mistake nor an error in judgment nor an inadvertence. The wartime abuse of Japanese Americans, it is now clear, was merely a link in a chain of racism that stretched back" and "related to the dispossession of Native Americans, the enslavement of African Americans, and the maltreatment of Mexican Americans, Catholics, Jews," and others.<sup>17</sup> The link Daniels refers to includes the concept of historically underprivileged groups. America's World War II concentration camps targeted minorities of Japanese descent and put them to work for the benefit of their persecuting society. Citizens in each era remained largely satisfied in their ignorance of the ineffective systems, yet these "histories of taking and making" present an easy-to-follow path in the evolution of relations between class, race, labor, and control.<sup>18</sup> In this way, the internment program served partially as a tool to protect capital.

Keeping consistent with colonial forms of discrimination, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century American relationships and policies toward immigrants reflected instances of earlier persecutions. Chinese workers served as the first large-scale Asian immigrants. Immediately faced with limited job opportunities, many accepted work for lower wages than white laborers. This perceived threat to the status quo—fear from white workers of reduced wages due to immigrants—culminated with efforts to curtail Chinese immigration in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.

Japanese immigrants also faced anti-Asian sentiment, but at an initially lower level than Chinese. The U.S. recognized Japan's emergence as Asia's strongest country by the 1880s and

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<sup>17</sup> Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trial*, 3-4.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

understood the nation's image as a rising superpower dictated a need for respect. Therefore, U.S. policymakers excluded Japan from the Exclusion Act.<sup>19</sup> As a result, Japanese immigration increased, filling the void of manual labor jobs previously held by Chinese. Hoping to curtail tensions with Japan, U.S. leaders acted to limit anti-Japanese legislation—especially in California—but to little avail. As many Californians viewed Japanese immigrants as “undesirables” who refused to assimilate by adopting mainstream American values, President Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese government attempted to negotiate a compromise. Known as the “Gentlemen’s Agreement” in 1907-8, Japan agreed to stop granting passports to America while America agreed to allow those Japanese already in the country to stay. This helped avoid insult to Japan as well as decrease the mounting racial tensions along the west coast. Ronald Takaki’s book *Strangers from a Different Shore* provides more analysis regarding Asian immigration to the United States and looks to break through “the stereotypes and myths of Asians as aliens and foreigners” that have become “pervasive in American society.”<sup>20</sup> Takaki accomplishes this by analyzing different phases of Asian immigration and their treatment in the U.S. John Higham contributes to this field of anti-immigrant attitudes in *Strangers in the Land*. According to Highman, the “critical attitude became heavily racist after 1900 and blatantly violent during World War I, when a vision of national unity and solidarity excluded notions of ethnic diversity and tolerance.”<sup>21</sup> Mounting tensions provided an increasingly hostile atmosphere

In this hostile environment, Issei segregated into their own social networks and communities for support. More than 51% of occupations held by Issei related to food production in agriculture

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 8-10.

<sup>20</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 224.

<sup>21</sup> John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 80.

and fishing. By 1940, Japanese farmers controlled more than 250,000 acres of land valued at \$72.6 million.<sup>22</sup> Alien-land laws formed in 1913 forbade land-ownership by non-citizens, but many found loopholes by deeding the land in their American-born children's names.<sup>23</sup> These crops comprised traditional labor-intensive Japanese-style methods that enjoyed higher yields than the "resource-intensive, low-yield American agriculture."<sup>24</sup> Although Japanese food production provided approximately half of Southern California's food and helped sustain west coast population growth, racial turmoil remained high as prewar tensions built with Japan.<sup>25</sup>

#### **1.4: Racism and Relocation**

Existing racism combined with fear after the attack on Pearl Harbor created an atmosphere where widespread relocation of an entire ethnicity became possible, and multiple groups argued for different actions regarding Japanese Americans. Spurred by fears of fifth column activities--domestic espionage and sabotage--and having seen the effectiveness of Germany's European Blitzkrieg campaigns, contingencies had already been put in place by American security agencies "to intern enemy aliens if war broke out, arrangements primarily directed at the presumed threat from Nazis and Nazi sympathizers."<sup>26</sup> Although 40,000 German aliens in the U.S. organized into pro-Nazi parties, they did not experience racial targeting. Tasked with assessing the Japanese community in Southern California, Navy intelligence officer Kenneth D. Ringle befriended many Nikkei and even pulled a convicted safe cracker from San Quentin

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<sup>22</sup> Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trial*, 22.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 24.

prison to break into the local Japanese consulate headquarters. Results from the stolen documents showed that rather than relying on Japanese Americans for intelligence on the American military or sabotage assignments, Japanese consulates condemned Nikkei as “cultural traitors.” Ringle’s final report refuted claims of a Nikkei military threat.<sup>27</sup> Many Justice Department officials and New Dealers also opposed aggressive action against Nikkei. Department of Agriculture staff that worked closely with Japanese farmers, “whose wartime assignment was to maximize agricultural production, advised the Secretary to take positive steps to protect the property and the person of Japanese farmers and thus maintain production.”<sup>28</sup> Early reports immediately after Pearl Harbor show the media’s intent to also mitigate backlash against Nikkei. Hawaiian governor Poindexter assured worried citizens that there had been “no evidence of sabotage by local Japanese residents.” *The Spokesman Review*, eastern Washington’s biggest newspaper, further emphasized a need to refrain from “shameful cruelties of ostracism and persecution against these fellow citizens.” Other army intelligence reports to Washington stated a similar doubt of Japanese sabotage.<sup>29</sup>

Despite efforts to the contrary, paranoid views overwhelmed progressive efforts. According to Daniels, early Japanese naval victories “made some of those in positions of responsibility anxious to blame someone else for their own ineptitude” and “a deteriorating military situation created the opportunity for American racists to get their views accepted by the national leadership. The Constitution was treated as a scrap of paper.”<sup>30</sup> Western Defense Commander

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>29</sup> *Honolulu Star Bulletin*, December 8, 1942, in Shrontz-Wright, *Hunt for Idaho*; *The Spokesman Review*, December 9, 1942, in Shrontz-Wright, *Hunt for Idaho*; Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trial*.

<sup>30</sup> Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trial*, 28.

General John L. DeWitt, whom the *Washington Post* labeled repeatedly a “military zealot,” and California Attorney General Earl Warren made the declaration that “If we think sabotage has not been planned for us, we are living in a fool’s paradise. The most convincing proof of a real plan is the fact we have no sabotage yet. This is the most ominous sign.”<sup>31</sup> Other political leaders urged for Japanese American evacuation in what became a political rather than military movement. Official recommendations from General Staff and FBI reports to refrain from oppressive action were ignored. Supreme Court cases in 1943 and 1944 challenged the constitutionality of the forced relocation, but the War and Justice Departments provided false reports of subversive efforts while suppressing any evidence to the contrary.<sup>32</sup> In response to efforts by the Department of Agriculture staff that military necessity dictated the protection of Japanese land and farms, politicians argued that Nikkei could still produce if relocated and Mexican laborers could move up to take over Japanese farms.<sup>33</sup>

Alas, as Roger Daniels points out, “Racial fears are more often based on fantasy than on reality” and widespread persecution of Japanese Americans took place.<sup>34</sup> Assured by misinformed and paranoid military advisors that sabotage risks from Japanese in America necessitated action, President Roosevelt succumbed to mounting pressures. On February 19, 1942, Executive Order 9066 established a military exclusion zone along the United States’ west coast. Anyone living within the exclusion zone often had only a matter of days to settle their affairs. This often included “fire sales” in which Nikkei abandoned their possessions and

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<sup>31</sup> Earl Warren, *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 22, 1942, in *Hunt for Idaho*, ed. Shrontz-Wright, *Hunt for Idaho*, 1.

<sup>32</sup> Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trial*, 36.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

property for ridiculously low prices. One example includes a Japanese American owned luxury hotel sold for as little as \$500.<sup>35</sup> During the long struggle and debate between the Justice and War Departments about what to do with this perceived threat of internal sabotage, community leaders with Japanese heritage had already been targeted and their bank accounts frozen.

As Japanese American citizens lost their constitutional rights, forced evacuations led to the largest removal of U.S. citizens in the nation's history. Torn from homes, friends, farms, and businesses, Nikkei families faced incarceration—often behind barbed wire—in one of ten internment camps scattered across the U.S. Located on undeveloped federal land tracts, a central goal of these centers included using the large labor force of relocated Japanese Americans to establish farming communities.<sup>36</sup> These goals proved successful, and eventually transformed harsh landscapes into profitable properties. Over time, this persecuted minority group exceeded all government expectations. The cost came high. As many Nikkei (largely Nisei) strove to break through racial stereotypes and prove their patriotism by supporting the Allied war effort, they neglected their own food supplies and lost certain cultural practices of their own.

Located on south central Idaho's harsh sagebrush desert, Minidoka Relocation Center—termed “Hunt” by locals—became an example for not only other camps, but the entire nation. Aiming to prove their loyalty to a distrustful nation, Minidoka sent more Nikkei harvesters to aid farmers than any other camp. Because high demand existed for farm labor from each center, Minidoka's high volunteer rate can be contributed to their desire to prove their loyalty. Volunteers from all camps not only filled labor shortages from men and women enlisting in the

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<sup>35</sup>Tamura, *Minidoka*.

<sup>36</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary,” 26; Shrontz-Wright, *Hunt for Idaho*; Tamura, *Minidoka*.

military to save a large portion of the nation's farms, but also helped sustain the domestic and military food supplies. In addition, once allowed to serve in the military, Minidoka had the largest percentage of any camp to enlist for military service; each of these contributions and burdens willingly endured by Nikkei while their families remained imprisoned behind barbed wire. Minidoka serves as a case study that shows broader trends within the system. While other experiences from additional centers will be included, events at Minidoka will remain central—and often representative—of the internment experience. This does not, however, imply prisoners at other centers experienced incarceration the same way as those at Minidoka. To the contrary, each location had its own unique hardships and triumphs. Food production, though, served as a common component among all centers. Unless otherwise specified, broad references to Japanese Americans will imply experiences at Minidoka and in Idaho.

### **1.5: World War and Home Front Food Culture**

Scholars of WWII food have traditionally examined one main question regarding the era's food: the role and success of rationing programs nation-wide. Most countries involved in WWII rationed food to some extent, and the period represents the only time of the modern era where entire governments showed consciousness of sustainability in consumption.<sup>37</sup> Iselin Theien provides noteworthy insight regarding WWII rationing. While discussing rationing programs and their impacts on families in conjunction with alternative methods of creating meals, Theien found that most accepted (rather than resort to theft, rebellion, or widespread use of the black

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<sup>37</sup> In this case, sustainability was considered as what a wartime economy could support, not what the natural environment was capable of handling. Rationing efforts should not be confused as efforts at saving the environment.

Theien, "Food Rationing during World War Two."



market for food, as many wealthy did) the limitations to their diets.<sup>38</sup> By pointing out parallels, though, in how WWII rationing programs could serve as models for current food sustainability, Theien's work ultimately became more of a food history for advising current dietary practices while depicting modern interest in food culture. In response to this emerging interest in food culture, in 2009 the National Institute for Consumer Research in Oslo, Norway conducted food testing of wartime dishes. In addition, preserving fruits without sugar has become more popular—with roots reaching to works such as Julianne Solbraa-Bay's 1942 book "We're making jam after all—without sugar."<sup>39</sup> These works show a rising interest in connecting to our past through food.

The First and Second World Wars experienced similar food shortages and rationing programs. Examining a few works associated with food from each era provides relevant context for food's importance as well as shapes my own approach to studying incarcerated food production. Ann Zeide, author of the book *Canned: The Rise and Fall of Consumer Confidence in the American Food Industry* looks at food history as a link between "environmental history and the contemporary industrial food system" that helps "understand Americans' changing relationships to nature, seasonality, and consumerism."<sup>40</sup> By evaluating the rise of canned foods, Zeide emphasizes how America's food industry has lost consumer faith, a problem which depends upon using consumer purchasing power to demand a more transparent industrial food system. Zeide's approach to food history serves as more of a context to spur current change, but

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 13-14.

<sup>39</sup> Julianne Solbraa Bay, *We're making jam after all—without sugar*, (1942), mentioned in Theien, "Food Rationing during World War Two," 16.

<sup>40</sup> Anne Zeide, *Canned: The Rise and Fall of Consumer Confidence in the American Food Industry* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 85.

her emphasis regarding food's production historically highlights ways that producers have enacted change. Rae Katherine Eighmey's book *Food Will Win the War* also examines food producers by discussing WWI home front efforts at winning the war through increased food production and rationing. These efforts included feeding not only American citizens but residents of allied countries.<sup>41</sup> This provides a direct link to my analysis of Nikkei emergency harvesters and their contributions to the Lend-Lease program, as outlined in Chapter 2.

WWII food history tells us about limited food availability and efforts at making alternative food sources such as organ meats more palatable and acceptable on the home front.<sup>42</sup> Writing in-depth on this topic, Brian Wansink derived evidence from findings of the WWII Committee on Food Habits, a group of influential dietitians, economists, and sociologists enlisted by the War Department to research ways of incorporating foods perceived as undesirable. Like Theien, Wansink found wartime rationing programs to be successful overall. These examinations overlook a more basic, and important, element: where the food came from.

These works discussing WWII food histories focus on rationing programs of people who had the freedom to choose so much as the limitations imposed by the wartime economy allowed. Only brief mention is made regarding the efforts at increasing production of the foods rationed. These articles instead concentrate on the promoted ways of making due with less as well as accepting alternative food sources. These articles ignore any mention of Japanese American emergency harvesters who, as I will show, greatly contributed in upholding the rationing

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<sup>41</sup> Rae Katherine Eighmey, *Food Will Win the War: Minnesota Crops, Cooks, and Conservation During World War I* (Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2010), 208.

<sup>42</sup> Wansink, "Changing Eating Habits on the Home Front," 90-99.

program—all accomplished while being subjected to inadequate food and cultural persecution and deterioration.

### **1.6: Giving Voice: Scholarship Regarding Japanese American Internment**

A quickly expanding, yet still limited, group of literature examines WWII Nikkei incarceration in several distinct ways. This section will highlight most of the works focusing on Minidoka and a few that focus on the Nikkei incarceration in general. Many include topics such as how the experience has been portrayed, ironies involved in the sacrifices endured, coping mechanisms of evacuees both before and after, race relations, environmental connections, material culture, and politics.

Although only a handful of scholarly works specifically examines experiences at Minidoka, those that do tend to highlight many of the same elements from the incarceration experience, such as coping, military contributions, and the injustice behind Executive Order 9066. The segregated Japanese American military units which comprised the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team and 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion represents perhaps the most romanticized topics of the incarceration. English professor Jette Morache relates the units' fascinating ironies and contributions to the war effort. Morache explains how their actions “have long been acknowledged as crucial in extending the American concept of civil liberties to all citizens and in achieving redress for incarcerated.”<sup>43</sup> Russ Tremayne, a Minidoka scholar, edited a crucial collection of scholarly works covering a variety of relevant topics in *Surviving Minidoka: The*

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<sup>43</sup> Jette Morache, “The 442<sup>nd</sup>: Young Men Proved Their Patriotism with Military Service and Blood” in *Surviving Minidoka*, ed. Russell Tremayne, and Todd Shallat (Boise: Boise State University Publications Office, 2013), 75.

*Legacy of WWII Japanese American Incarceration*. Tremayne establishes his work's significance by pointing out that once the camp closed, "The legacy of racism remained and so did legal discrimination. So did shame, for some, mixed with anger, defiance, grief, and misunderstanding. *Surviving Minidoka* gives voice to those experiences and emotions."<sup>44</sup> In one of the chapters of this volume, Frank Yoshikazu Kitamoto, winner of multiple humanitarian and civil liberties awards who experienced incarceration as a child in California's Manzanar camp as well as Minidoka, observes life before incarceration by emphasizing the fear many felt as fathers and husbands got rounded up and imprisoned for questioning after Pearl Harbor. Although passionately portraying the confusion as the military enforced evacuation orders, Kitamoto emphasizes this history "must not be used to make people feel guilty nor for people to feel sorry" for Japanese Americans.<sup>45</sup> Rather than sympathy, understanding the events remains a key focus throughout this collection. Lane Ryo Hirabayashi's essay provides an overview centering on the War Relocation Authority's funded photographers hired to document and show the process as less harmful and abusive than the Jewish concentration camps. The purpose of Hirabayashi's work regarding photograph archiving serves to offer "a basic foundation for anyone who wants to look further into the Minidoka archive."<sup>46</sup> These works essentially focus on the incarceration experience's past and present portrayal in an enlightening view of people's understanding of the events.

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<sup>44</sup> Russell M. Tremayne, "An American Tragedy: Commemorating the Single Largest Forced Relocation in U.S. History," in *Surviving Minidoka*.

<sup>45</sup> Frank Yoshikazu Kitamoto, "Forgiving the Past: A Child of the Camps Reflects on History and Human Rights" in *Surviving Minidoka*, ed. Tremayne, Shallat.

<sup>46</sup> Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, "Through the Lens: Government Photographers Sold the Resettlement Program" in *Surviving Minidoka*, ed. Tremayne, Shallat, 161.

By exercising just a small amount of control on their physical environment, Nikkei reclaimed a small portion of their culture and created methods for healing.<sup>47</sup> While some Nisei (Issei were not allowed to serve in the military) coped by enlisting in military service, others expressed their feelings “by staking claim to their surroundings and appropriating leftover spaces whenever possible, the inmates took control of what freedoms and rights they could within the government controlled camps.” Anna Hosticka Tamura, National Park Service landscape architect whose family spent some of WWII incarcerated at Minidoka, goes on to characterize how gardens served as outlets for pent-up frustrations against not only their situation, but relationships between inmates and camp personnel. In their physical environments Nikkei found some form of continuity.<sup>48</sup>

Other noteworthy environmental themes presented by historians include how white-dominated western landscapes depict Nikkei experiences both pre-and post-internment. Robert T. Hayashi analyzes the significant impact Nikkei labor had on the shaping of the American West before, during, and after WWII.<sup>49</sup> In comparison, Robert Wilson focuses on the after-effects of the camps’ closing. Specifically, Wilson denounces the exclusion of Nisei from post-war homesteading lotteries on the very land they helped develop and make into producible farmland.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Anna Hosticka Tamura, “Minidoka gardens-Gardening was a cultural fusion of self-preservation and Hope,” in *Surviving Minidoka*, ed. Tremayne, Shallat, 98.

<sup>49</sup> Robert T. Hayashi, *Haunted by Waters: A Journey through Race and Place in the American West* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007).

<sup>50</sup> Robert Wilson, “Landscapes of Promise and Betrayal: Reclamation, Homesteading, and Japanese American Incarceration,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101, no. 2 (2011).

Although military contributions represent a popular theme, political aspects of the relocation control the majority of written work. Roger Daniels, a leader in this field and a heavily used resource in this chapter, presents a scathing accounting of the (un)constitutionality behind Executive Order 9066 in his book *Prisoners Without Trial: Japanese Americans in World War II*. Daniels remains consistent with other works on the topic by focusing on the injustices of the internment. Constitutional law specialist David Gray Adler contributes to this field by representing the rampant racism among politicians prior to the evacuation order in his essay “Flagrant Violations: Racism and Wartime Hysteria Corrupted Constitutional law.”<sup>51</sup> These political approaches offer rich insights to the era’s mindsets. Examinations of anti-immigration efforts show how western farmers attempted to limit Japanese competition. Furthermore, segregation and miscegenation laws against inter-racial marriage highlight Caucasian efforts at maintaining “racial purity among whites.”<sup>52</sup> Understanding these generally racist feelings during an election year aid in acknowledging how President Roosevelt could make such a drastically misconceived decision. Greg Robinson’s *By Order of the President* and Tetsuden Kashima’s *Judgement without Trial* provide additional, in-depth evaluations on the development of internment policy, which makes up a significant amount of coverage centered on Japanese American incarceration but only provides context for this study’s emphasis on life and culture in the camps. Finally, court challenges during the internment have been used by other political scientists, historians, and modern activists to help explain modern civil rights legislation.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> David Gray Adler, “Flagrant Violations Racism and Wartime Hysteria Corrupted Constitutional Law” in *Surviving Minidoka*, ed. Tremayne, Shallat.

<sup>52</sup> Greg Robinson, “Mixing the Races: Laws Restricting Marriage Denied Full Citizenship” in *Surviving Minidoka*, ed. Tremayne, Shallat.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid; Greg Robinson, *By Order of the President* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Tetsuden Kashima, *Judgement without Trial* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).

Archaeologists unearth the evidence to examine the material history of the camps. Historical archaeologist Stacey Camp has overseen the excavation and study of the Kooskia Incarceration site in north Idaho. Pointing out the increasing interest and research completed regarding the camps (thanks largely to National Park Service stewardship), Camp focuses on the incarceration's material aspects.<sup>54</sup> Specifically, Camp's work highlights the center's physical characteristics such as mess halls and recreation buildings in conjunction with cultural items including art, toys, and other personal belongings. Although "the academic field of Japanese American incarceration archaeology is relatively new," these scopes can illustrate the aspects of life behind barbed wire in ways that censored letters and government commissioned photographs cannot.<sup>55</sup> Drawing upon the work of fellow historical archaeologist Michelle Slaughter, Camp points out how the production of sake and alcohol use—of which Naomichi Ishige explained as an important element in Japanese food culture—became a "subtle form of resistance to the dominant culture's rules."<sup>56</sup> Camp gets closer to a food history of the camps than most in her discussion of mess halls and government issued eating utensils.

Scholarly evaluation concerning events once the camps closed remains quite thin, yet the topic represents an important element in establishing the longer-lasting effects of the incarceration experience. History professor and political scientist Greg Robinson, mentioned above, looks to fill this void in literature by highlighting resettlement of Japanese Americans throughout the nation. Robinson relates adjustments Nikkei endured both mentally and

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<sup>54</sup> Stacey Lynn Camp, "Landscapes of Japanese American Internment," *Society for Historical Archaeology*, 50, no. 1 (January, 2016): 171-172.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Michelle Ann Slaughter, *An Archaeological and Ethnographic Examination for the Presence, Acquisition, and Consumption of Sake at Camp Amache, a World War II Japanese Internment Camp*, (master's thesis, University of Colorado, 2013), 286. Camp, "Landscapes of Japanese American Internment," 172.

physically as they engaged in politics and interacted with other minority groups. Throughout this process, Nikkei assimilated as they adopted mainstream American values. As Nikkei took on larger roles, though, older generation Issei—the main stewards for Japanese culture in America—saw their leadership roles diminish.<sup>57</sup> Considering that many liberated Nikkei could only immediately find work as food producers or employment in food industries, the correlation between Nikkei and food production, I will show, clearly continued.

Robert C. Sims provides the central and most in-depth interpretation of the Minidoka history. With seminal works including “The Japanese American Experience in Idaho” and “Japanese American Contributions to Idaho’s Economic Development,” one of Sims’ main focuses included effects incarceration had on Nikkei as well as how they in turn impacted Idaho. Sims studied Nikkei influences on local farms, their military service, education and healthcare in the camps, what happened after their incarceration, and how they continue to reconcile the events. Because of his breadth of research, Sims’ focus on agriculture comes closer to a Minidoka food history than most others.<sup>58</sup> Finding a balance between scholarship and activism, Sims played a critical role in developing the Civil Liberties Symposium and the designation of Minidoka as a National Historic Site.<sup>59</sup>

Bessie M. Shrontz and Teresa Tamura each compiled works with several oral histories. Shrontz’s *Hunt for Idaho* provides accountings of white agriculturalists who took over the land developed by Nikkei when the camps closed, as discussed in chapter five. While Shrontz also

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<sup>57</sup> Greg Robinson, *After Camp: Portraits in Midcentury Japanese American Life and Politics* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2012).

<sup>58</sup> Robert C. Sims, “The Japanese American Experience in Idaho,” *Idaho Yesterdays*, 22 (1978), 2-10.

<sup>59</sup> “Robert C. Sims Collection on Minidoka and Japanese Americans, 1891-2014,” *Archives West*, accessed March 18, 2018, (2016), <http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv13632>.



highlights many Nikkei recollections of their suffering, this compilation largely uses a romanticized narrative portraying the white homesteaders as pioneers continuing the agricultural legacy started by incarcerated Nikkei.<sup>60</sup> Tamura's *Minidoka: An American Concentration Camp* provides a more personal story from former incarcerated. Full of personal stories and essays written by those who experienced incarceration—many which reference the inability to continue familial dining practices and the ensuing fracturing of the family unit, Tamura's work provides valuable references for this study.

Some younger generation Japanese Americans have turned to poetry in an attempt to regain some of the cultural elements lost during WWII. Lawrence Matsuda, a third-generation Japanese American (Sansei) born in Minidoka composed a series of poems which outline both traditional Japanese values and how their experience of imprisonment affected them. Using vivid imagery, Matsuda provides a sweeping overview of camp life for a culture which has historically struggled with relating their experiences. Providing accounts of residing in animal stalls at assembly centers, the permeation of fear and sadness, a breakdown in traditional Issei cultural values, and the bombs on Hiroshima, Matsuda provides a powerful narrative.<sup>61</sup> Beginning with observations of pre-internment from a child's memories, Matsuda ends with an adult's reflections on modern conflicts in the Middle East and connections to the Japanese American experience. Creative writing professor Mariko Nagai provides another work of poetry in *Dust of Eden: A Novel*. Although she never lived in an incarceration camp, Nagai uses her research to highlight the dehumanizing effects from having names replaced by numbers upon departure for

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<sup>60</sup> Shrontz-Wright, *Hunt for Idaho*.

<sup>61</sup> Lawrence Matsuda: *A Cold Wind From Idaho* (Black River: Black Lawrence Press, 2010).

camp as they were “given name tags to wear as if” they “were no longer human, but were luggage, or animals.”<sup>62</sup> While supplying numerous references to cultivating the land and efforts at gaining acceptance, Nagai never connects the early emergency harvesters and their first examples of improving race relations. With some of the major themes and works related to WWII relocation in America established, a more in-depth analysis of specific experiences can begin.

### **1.7: Conclusion: Production is Power**

Food expresses power in general and represents a standard of living. Whether it is the ability to provide food for oneself and family, or a nation’s ability to feed its citizens, food comprises an underlying element which cannot be ignored. When groups such as incarcerated Americans of Japanese descent have poor food and little choice in what they consume or its preparation, their power gets reduced in proportion to their violated human rights. In contrast, to have as large of an influence as they did on the entire nation’s food supply and Allied war effort, Nikkei harvesters exercised significant power in that aspect.

Through an examination of the existing secondary literature, it becomes evident that there exists a definite lacuna: one which fails to address the full impacts of food on Nikkei incarceration and America’s wartime experiences. To be incarcerated for no reason aside from racism, fear, and misunderstanding, Nikkei’s foundational beliefs in American democracy were greatly shaken. Works which examine WWII food tend to focus on rationing programs and only briefly mention efforts made to increase food production. These articles instead concentrate on

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<sup>62</sup> Mariko Nagai, *Dust of Eden: A Novel* (Park Ridge: Albert Whitman & Company, 2014), 81.

the promoted ways of making due while ignoring a group who faced the ultimate method of making due with less: incarcerated Japanese Americans.

Scholarly examinations which address the incarceration experience focus on a broad array of topics, with the underlying theme being cultural sacrifice. These include the politics and injustices of incarceration, environmental aspects, loss of identity, military contributions, racial relations, and minor reflections regarding food production. Examination of the primary source accounts from those who experienced internment in America shows an additional story: one of food's importance during their imprisonment. This work adds newly conducted oral histories from former incarcerated people and people who interacted with the camps to the numerous diaries, newspapers, memoirs, and interviews. It also makes connections between Lend-Lease documents and correspondence between the Department of Agriculture in Washington and President Roosevelt with national dependence on incarcerated food production. Analysis of these sources relate interned Japanese Americans' efforts at contributing to the war effort while undergoing a stripping of their own identity. The WWII incarceration of Japanese Americans remains largely absent from Idaho's educational curriculum. The high schools that do teach it tend to comprise English classes that justify the study by reading through various incarceration literatures.<sup>63</sup> Without acknowledging and studying these factors, we miss out on a central aspect of an already engaging narrative. Without including these elements, we greatly inhibit our understanding of war and race.

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<sup>63</sup> Hanako Wakatsuki, Chief of Education and Interpretation, Minidoka National Historic Site, interviewed by Andrew Dunn at Minidoka National Historic Site, ID, February 1, 2018.

## **Chapter 2: Feeding the Allied War Machine**

Incarcerated Nikkei harvest work for farms outside Minidoka's barbed-wire confines represents one of their more influential and longest-lasting legacies. The results were short-term contributions which remain remembered and honored. This chapter will focus on several different components involved in outside harvest work. Beginning with a depiction of rationing and food shortage issues compounded by a depleted labor pool, I highlight the rampant success of incarcerated Nikkei workers, success achieved despite initial reluctance from citizens in local communities to employ Nikkei on their farms. Although racial conflicts inevitably arose, willingness on the part of Minidoka's prisoners to ignore blatant racism and shoulder the burden of sustaining the nation's food supply led to greatly improved race relations. In short, this chapter argues that the Nikkei—including both Issei and Nisei—emergency harvester program's success and military contributions improved race relations.

Nikkei harvest work also created immense ramifications for Allied military success, measured by the amount of food the government credited them with saving. This section will include two related components. The first highlights how evacuated labor contributed to food production deemed essential to military success by harvesting crops used to feed soldiers on the frontlines and used as bargaining chips in Lend-Lease agreements. The second part includes ways in which incarcerated food production directly impacted Allied military success through Lend-Lease programs and munitions production. Finally, this chapter highlights what these contributions meant to, and how they affected, Japanese Americans in particular.

## 2.1: Short Term Contributions Through Domestic Food Production

As America entered WWII, a food shortage plagued the Allied powers. America had been providing aid to foreign powers since May 1941 through a Lend-Lease program consisting of foodstuffs produced on American farms and sent to nations requesting aid.<sup>64</sup> Although most historical accounts describe Lend-Lease as only military hardware, food shipments served as a significant portion of the program.<sup>65</sup> After Pearl Harbor and America's official entrance to the war, the country had to take drastic steps at protecting its own food supply. To help alleviate this crisis, a rationing program went into effect in the spring 1942. This program placed many foods under restrictions—largely sugar, meats, and canned goods.<sup>66</sup> National security concerns mandated compliance with the rationing program, and government sponsored propaganda encouraged people to eat alternative proteins such as organ meats.<sup>67</sup> Making due with less became a matter of national pride, considered by many as doing one's part for the war effort, and national security. Despite the rationing program's aim to alleviate the nation's food crisis, the manpower necessary to fulfill it had become severely limited. In the patriotic fervor following Japan's attack on Hawaii, large swaths of American men and women rushed to enlist for military service.<sup>68</sup> The ensuing exodus from America's farms created a dire shortage in available labor for American industries and farms, compounding food supply issues and putting future crop production in jeopardy.

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<sup>64</sup> Lend Lease Bill, dated January 10, 1941. Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, HR 77A-D13, Record Group 233, National Archives, accessed November 1, 2017. <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=71>.

<sup>65</sup> Vladimir Kotelnikov, *Lend-Lease and Soviet Aviation in the Second World War* (Solihull: Helion and Company, 2018); Steven J. Zaloga, *Soviet Lend-Lease Tanks of World War II* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2017).

<sup>66</sup> Wansink, "Changing Eating Habits on the Home Front," 90-99.

<sup>67</sup> Iselin Theien, "Food Rationing during World War Two."

<sup>68</sup> James Jones, *WWII: A Chronicle of Soldiering* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

Convinced by the narratives leading to relocation that portrayed Nikkei as dangerous, communities looked to different minorities and programs to fill their labor shortages first.<sup>69</sup> Initiated in 1942, the Bracero Program emerged as one alternate avenue for food production. This agreement between Mexico and the U.S. allowed Mexican nationals to receive work visas and perform harvest work in the states.<sup>70</sup> Despite controversies from white laborers surrounding Mexican laborers' willingness to undercut jobs by accepting low wages, they contributed significantly to the nation's overall Food for Victory Program. As Nikkei gained acceptance, though, farmers increasingly requested aid from relocation centers.

An early cold season in 1942 threatened to destroy a large portion of the nation's remaining food supply. Although the confinement site at Minidoka had only been in operation since August 1942, plans for the site polarized public opinion before the first busload of Japanese Americans arrived. In February 1942, a farmer's congress from nearby Twin Falls voted in favor of importing Mexican laborers, but decided 371-41 *against* utilizing evacuee labor.<sup>71</sup> Reasons for this public hesitancy at mingling with Nikkei varied, but a general hesitancy to allow them mobility outside the center became prevalent, as emphasized by Robert C. Sims article "A Fearless, Patriotic, Clean-Cut Stand."<sup>72</sup> At their annual meeting in February 1942, the Idaho Grange also voted against Nikkei farm labor.<sup>73</sup> In contrast, the Idaho Beet Growers Association

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<sup>69</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary,"; "Burley Herald Praises Evacuee Labor, Conduct," *Minidoka Irrigator*, April 8, 1944; "Letter Commends Hunt's Harvesters," *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 30, 1943; "Vermont Farmer Protests Racial Discrimination," *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 14, 1944.

<sup>70</sup> David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 746-797; "Bracero History Archive," *Center for History and New Media*, 2017, accessed December 1, 2017, <http://braceroarchive.org/about>.

<sup>71</sup> Arthur Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."

<sup>72</sup> Robert C. Sims, "'A Fearless, Patriotic, Clean-Cut Stand' Idaho's Governor Clark and Japanese American Relocation in World War II," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (April, 1979): 75-81.

<sup>73</sup> "Idaho's Japanese Americans: A Chapter in Idaho's Growth," unpublished manuscript in Bob Sims Papers, Idaho State University Dept. of History, p. 8.

argued that need outweighed prejudice. As the first harvest season since America's entry to the war approached in the fall 1942 and labor shortages became more acute, another argument in favor of utilizing Nikkei labor gained influence.

From the initial murmurings of a potential relocation, many southern Idaho production leaders favored and foresaw a need for Nikkei presence on local farms. Manager H.A. Elcock of Amalgamated Sugar Company—one of the nation's leading sugar producers—served as a major proponent for Nikkei labor and urged farmers that “Unless Japanese labor is obtained for sugar beet fields in Twin Falls, Minidoka, and other counties—and such help gets here by the end of next week—conditions will reach a ‘critical stage.’”<sup>74</sup> Idaho counties finally succumbed and requested harvest aid from Minidoka. Northern Utah residents also grudgingly approved Nikkei aid with the stipulation that they remained “closely guarded.”<sup>75</sup> Although these requests for aid came only after a long period of deliberation and final acknowledgement of the desperate situation, this request officially opened the doors for Nikkei to impact the war effort on the domestic and military fronts.

With requests for labor pouring into Minidoka's Placement Office, many internees saw labor assistance as an answer to proving their loyalty to a distrustful nation. Labeled as “Enemy Alien” by the government after Pearl Harbor, Nikkei—even those holding U.S. citizenship—had been cut off from enlisting in military service. This provided a large blow as many viewed the military as the best means for proving their commitment and loyalty.<sup>76</sup> Still others experienced the same

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<sup>74</sup> H.A. Elcock, “Beet Crisis Looming if Jap Labor Fails,” *Times News*, May 22, 1942.

<sup>75</sup> “Utah Residents Qualify Approvals as Farmers Lag on Relocation Poll,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 14, 1942.

<sup>76</sup> Tamura, *Minidoka*.

fervor as non-Japanese men and women by simply wanting the chance to fight for their country. For those of Japanese descent, this feeling became particularly strong because their ancestral nation served as the aggressor.<sup>77</sup> Many of the early volunteers to leave camp to work on local farms consisted of young, single males without children who were frustrated at their inability to help through military means. Instead, they enthusiastically accepted the one contributing means open to them: food production.

A major medium for evacuee employment resided in the Farm Security Administration. Established in 1935 as part of the New Deal programs designed to alleviate strains during the Great Depression, the FSA aimed to help lower-income rural farmers.<sup>78</sup> As a leader in food production, the FSA had the foresight to acknowledge the future need of a large labor pool as the local workforce continued to decline. With an established presence already in place throughout Idaho, the FSA already had positioning to handle many of Minidoka's laborers as soon as local agencies requested them. As Nikkei showed their willingness to answer calls for aid, the FSA set up additional camps throughout Idaho to handle larger groups, and many offered long-term living accommodations for \$0.50 per week and \$1 per day for meals.<sup>79</sup> From these camps, Nikkei received transportation to local farms or larger farm sites, such as those maintained by the Amalgamated Sugar Company. To keep the FSA camps attractive for evacuee laborers, the War Food Administration received federal funding to improve their Idaho locations. Improvements included winterizing the existing facilities to provide warmth during Idaho's harsh winter months, installing showers, and constructing more houses with the hope to use the camps year-

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*. 746-797

<sup>79</sup> "51 Farmers Desire Hunt Farm Workers," *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 2, 1943.



round.<sup>80</sup> To ascertain that Nikkei housed at FSA sites received adequate living conditions, a group of representatives from Minidoka regularly visited the establishments to check on the Minidoka residents residing there. The group found conditions to be “satisfactory,” and praised the lack of friction between Japanese Americans and others in the camp.<sup>81</sup>

Another major utilization of evacuee labor occurred privately between local farmers and incarcerated Nikkei. These employment terms often included wages and housing accommodations at the farm sites predetermined through agreements between the government and farmers. The prevailing wage amounted to \$16 per month for grueling work. A typical day in the fields began at 4:30 a.m. unloading coal. By 6:30, workers would huddle in the back of an open truck for at least a 30-minute drive to the field. After warming themselves by a bonfire, they began harvesting onions as the sun rose. A quick lunch at 12:00 broke the day before returning to the hot and backbreaking work of bagging sugar beets and potatoes. At 5:00 workers returned to FSA camps for a shower, their “one pleasure after a hot and grimy day.” Then for those with enough energy to eat, dinner preparations entailed purchasing ingredients from several blocks away with the hope of eating by 9:00. By the time they cleaned their dishes and prepared the next day’s lunch, many did not go to bed until after 11:00.<sup>82</sup> This schedule provided by Tadako Tamura is indicative, but not representative, of many emergency harvesters’ work days.

To supplement meager wages, additional benefits offered to emergency harvesters included the freedom to prepare their own meals on site. This held great appeal as those remaining within

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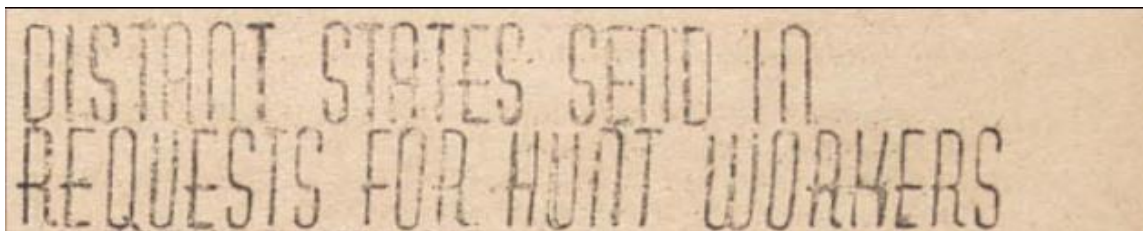
<sup>80</sup> “Hazelton FSA Camp To Be Improved,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, September 18, 1943.

<sup>81</sup> Roy C. Lane, “80 Nisei Farm Workers Used At Twin Falls,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, September 18, 1943.

<sup>82</sup> Tadako Tamura, “Life in Onion Fields Is No Bed of Roses,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 7, 1942.

the camp confines had thus far been subjected to unappealing food and dining conditions within the camps.<sup>83</sup> Another benefit allowed dependents remaining within the centers to receive their meals without charge so long as a family member continued working on an outside farm. Later offers also included transportation directly from the camp project to the fields, allowing for workers to return daily to camp and avoid leaving their families for long periods of time. With transportation provided by outside employers, though, free meals within camps became forfeit and their dependents again required to pay the \$0.25 for camp meals.<sup>84</sup> This last perk shows the importance laid on harvest work. As soon as Nikkei became eligible for military service, volunteers' dependents also received free meals.

Within the first few weeks of internment, 1,280 Nikkei answered the call for harvest aid.<sup>85</sup> The camp-run, evacuee-written newspaper the *Minidoka Irrigator* spearheaded this effort by encouraging workers to volunteer, with its first issue headlined “Project Work to Start: Beet Workers Leaving First.” Requests for labor first went through a San Francisco WRA office, followed by 30-day work furloughs issued by the individual camps. Below are some of the headlines advertised in the *Irrigator*:



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<sup>83</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."

<sup>84</sup> "No Charge For Subsistence," *Minidoka Irrigator*, February 17, 1943.

<sup>85</sup> "This Must Be Our Goal!" *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 10, 1942.

<sup>86</sup> "Distant States Send in Requests For Hunt Workers," *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 14, 1942.



These job offers served as the first opportunities for Nikkei to leave the camps. By convincing WRA personnel of their loyalty and contributions to harvest work, Nikkei could apply for longer releases.<sup>89</sup> Individuals most often took advantage of these programs, but entire families also partook of the opportunities. Fujiko Tamura-Gardener recalled how “going to the farm labor camp, Twin Falls, that really saved my father,” and expressed gratitude “to the Idaho farmers for wanting us to help them harvest their crops. I’m grateful that Twin Falls had the farm labor camp where we could go and live.”<sup>90</sup> Although these events took place under terrible circumstances, many evacuees gratefully accepted the opportunities as an escape from camp life and regain a semblance of balance from their pre-internment lives.

Not everyone supported Japanese American presence in the fields. A small group of residents in neighboring Twin Falls petitioned to ban Nikkei from entering town because additional contact made locals nervous.<sup>91</sup> In response, an angry president of the Twin Falls Chamber of Commerce, Claude Detweiler, claimed the ban would serve as a monumental

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<sup>87</sup> “Evacuees Aid In Saving Beet Crop,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, November 14, 1942.

<sup>88</sup> “Ogden Hears Plea for Nisei,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 20, 1943.

<sup>89</sup> “Many Job Offers For Family Groups On Outside Farms,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, September 18, 1943.

<sup>90</sup> Fujiko Tamura-Gardener, interviewed by Andrew Dunn at Lakewood, WA, February 25, 2017.

<sup>91</sup> Claude H. Detweiler, “Worry Over Job Loss,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 6, 1943.

detriment to the war effort by alienating Japanese Americans and losing their harvest aid. In a passionate statement, Detweiler criticized dissenters as not understanding their new “friends” and “warned that Magic Valley farms faced the loss of 2,700 Japanese laborers next season, most of whom are Hunt colonists, when the war needs would be calling for food production greater than ever.” He went further with his claim and proclaimed “The agents of Hitler could think of nothing better in this area to aid his cause than to bring a curtailment of agriculture. But the loss of labor from the Hunt colony is not only possible but probable if people do not keep their mouths shut.”<sup>92</sup> This group of locals again grudgingly toned down their hostilities, but resentment continued elsewhere.

Utah and California also initially responded adversely to Nikkei aid. A residential census in Utah regarding Nikkei emergency harvesters showed that a “general strain of distrust ran through the comments of those who opposed off-project work. “Once a Jap, always a Jap...Don’t let them compete with American labor...Lock them up,’ were typical comments.”<sup>93</sup> This concept of competition with American aid proved very short sighted as Nikkei only responded and worked at places that requested their help. California representative (and future Supreme Court chief Justice) Earl Warren adamantly assured the state’s residents that the “entire state [would] be prohibited to Japs.” In other locales, such as Colfax County, New Mexico, residents claimed the three Nikkei working in the area represented widespread Japanese infiltration, leading to the dismissal of the Japanese American workers.<sup>94</sup> As with Idaho, the labor crisis forced officials to rethink their racist and hostile stances and request aid from the nearest incarceration center.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> “Utah Residents Qualify Approvals as Farmers Lag on Relocation Polls,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 14, 1942.

<sup>94</sup> “N.M. Residents Oppose Entry of Japanese,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, December 30, 1942.

Although officially accepted and promoted by local and state labor groups, conflict still arose at individual job sites. The largest issue in the 1942 harvest cycle centered on labor disputes caused by farmers hedging on original commitments and failures to uphold their end of contracts. One conflict, which dominated headlines and conversations, occurred between the Shelley Beet Growers' Association chairman and eight young incarcerated men tasked with working his beet fields. Investigation into the grievances of each party—complaints that the Nikkei quit after only giving five days' notice versus Nikkei unhappiness at low wages from not enough work at the particular job site—showed a deeper violation of contract agreements. Instead of providing the advertised house for living quarters, the Beet Growers' Association housed the eight young men in chicken coops without sanitary cooking accommodations.<sup>95</sup> With other similar situations of mistreatment becoming more common, evacuees began filling out questionnaires upon their return. These surveys specifically addressed elements such as “living conditions, employer attitudes, [and] wages.”<sup>96</sup> Finally, evacuees created a fair labor board to oversee the handling of complaints between farmers and laborers. Despite this service, farmers still attempted to recruit individuals outside the Fair Labor Practices in what many viewed as attempts to take advantage of Nikkei.<sup>97</sup>

The *Irrigator* served as another means for evacuees to voice their dissatisfaction with experiences and conditions. Claiming their desire for the success of the “nation's Victory program” and a desire to help save the area's crops, the *Irrigator* called out beet farmers and others for “hedging on original commitments and misrepresenting provisions of signed

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<sup>95</sup> “Editorial: A Sound Suggestion,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 17, 1942.

<sup>96</sup> “Data On Harvest Conditions Sought Thru Questionnaire,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, December 19, 1942.

<sup>97</sup> “Unauthorized Recruiting Hit Labor Board Takes Step To Halt Practice,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, November 4, 1942.

contracts.”<sup>98</sup> They go further by pointing out—via thinly veiled threat—that farmers would need to call on Nikkei incarcerated to serve in harvest work again the following year, so much of the future harvest successes depended on their present treatment.<sup>99</sup> The ability to save over 2,400 pounds of sugar on just one month’s allotment proved a feat respected by many, and contributes to their reputation as saving the sugar harvest.<sup>100</sup>

In contrast with, and likely in response to, these negative reports, stories of positive interactions flooded the *Irrigator* office. Seven Idaho and Oregon counties representing farming groups and sugar beet companies promised to “continue to strive to promote a better understanding between evacuees and the permanent residents of our respective counties and communities and of our states as a whole.”<sup>101</sup> Oregon governor Charles A. Sprague, specifically thanked Minidoka residents for their aid in the harvest and also expressed hope that he could help them adjust to their difficult situation both presently and upon their final release from internment. Another satisfied farmer reported that “I’m glad that I had the opportunity to meet these young women. Not only because they helped save a large part of my crop, but because of the friendship that has been formed will help to strengthen our country to unity again.”<sup>102</sup> Through these experiences, farmers realized the hard-working nature of Nikkei, which won the respect and support of farmers.

With improving relations, working outside the camps became a major benefit of internment life—even though it included backbreaking work for low wages, and nearby communities

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> “Editorial: Unfair to Victory,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 14, 1942.

<sup>100</sup> “Farmer ‘Startled’ By Nisei!!! Camp McCoy Soldiers Highly Praised; Record Excellent,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 23, 1943.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> “Letters to the Editor: A Nampa Farmer Speaks,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, December 19, 1942.

consistently requested both domestic and physical labor assistance from Minidoka. “Harvest Vacations” became routine breaks for high school students aged 16 to seek work outside the camp as well.<sup>103</sup> These usually lasted one month, but if harvesting work remained incomplete, schools extended the “vacations.” An orchestra comprised of Nikkei from Minidoka called the Harmonaires even travelled amongst the workers and performed for outside towns, adding to the festive spirit of these events. Thanks in large part to cumulative efforts by Minidoka’s residents, the 1942 crop yielded 12,969,000 tons—a record year in what could easily have been a catastrophe.<sup>104</sup>

A study conducted from letters of support to both Minidoka and local newspapers after the first emergency harvest in 1942 confirmed that Idahoans in general finally accepted and desired Japanese Americans to live and work amongst them.<sup>105</sup> Similar reports continued throughout the internment period, and Minidoka began its legacy by sending out the most, and sometimes twice as many, emergency harvesters compared to the other centers. They became such a valuable labor pool to the surrounding areas that sugar firms and other large enterprises visited the center to recruit share-croppers. Farmers also often requested the same workers each subsequent year. As stories of their contributions and work ethic spread, requests began arriving for Nikkei from as far as New York and New Jersey.<sup>106</sup>

Sentimental with success stories and feeling justifiable pride in their contributions, Minidoka claimed that “This then, should be the 1943 resolution of every red-blooded American—to do his every bit, uncomplaining and willingly, toward the United States’ all-out

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<sup>103</sup> “Harvest Vacation For High School,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, September 25, 1943.

<sup>104</sup> “A Crop is Saved,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, November 14, 1942.

<sup>105</sup> “Idaho Counties Favor Evacuee Employment,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 30, 1943.

<sup>106</sup> “Distant States Send In Requests for Hunt Workers,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 14, 1942.

effort that the victory as well as the peace that follows shall be ours.”<sup>107</sup> Recruitment efforts from farmers and other food production companies became the main form of advertisements in the *Irrigator*. FSA camps occasionally offered wage increases to continue enticing Nikkei workers. One relocation officer even pointed out how “in many cases, employers seem to be anxious to make even a better deal for the evacuees than they would for local labor in the community.”<sup>108</sup> Understanding that much hostility from white Americans focused on minorities undercutting jobs by working for low wages, Nikkei made a point by honoring federal labor regulations regarding wages. Efforts such as these led to farmers requesting Nikkei aid over Mexican Braceros, even from those who adamantly rejected employees from relocation centers earlier.

Outside farm labor became such an integral part for communities in southern Idaho that wild speculations grew in other areas. One story published by the *San Francisco Examiner* highlights lingering hostilities toward Nikkei from those who had limited contact with them. Hearing reports about the widening acceptance and mingling between Minidoka’s incarcerated and the local communities, the *Examiner* reported on the takeover of Twin Falls by Japanese. Claude Detweiler, the same Chamber of Commerce president who compared critics of Nikkei labor to agents of Hitler in 1942, wrote a letter to the editor in San Francisco to clarify the situation. Detweiler claimed “The citizens of Hunt Relocation Center have performed a most patriotic service to the farmers of Southern Idaho and the war effort, since their evacuation here,” and “without their help thousands of acres and tens of thousands of tons of food-stuff would have

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<sup>107</sup> “Farmers Desire Evacuee Labor,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 30, 1943.

<sup>108</sup> Vernon B. Kennedy, “Kansas City,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, August 7, 1943.



rotted in the fields each year.”<sup>109</sup> Even with such substantial contributions, Nikkei desired a larger role.

## **2.2: Nikkei Contributions to the Military Through Food Production**

One significant factor behind many Nikkei’s motivation to succeed with outside harvest aid centered on the need evacuees felt to concretely contribute to the American military. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, all individuals of Japanese descent received classification as “enemy alien,” making them ineligible for military service during 1942. This section highlights how foodstuffs factored into Allied military success. How sugar’s role as both a calorie supplement for soldiers and munitions ingredient made this commodity a matter of national security will receive specific focus. Japan’s occupation of the Philippines—a large producer of American sugar—compounded restricted food issues and added even more stress to domestic sugar producing sites. Ships previously used for transporting sugar got repurposed as wartime vessels, which created increased difficulty on importing sugar, even from previously available sources such as Cuba. Understanding sugar’s importance for wartime success, coupled with frustrations at their inability to serve in a more concrete way, Nikkei emergency harvesters not only saved the nation’s supply of sugar, but sustained Allied military efforts.

Sugars manufactured from fruit, milk, and sugarcane comprised common components used for explosives in the years following the First World War. Between WWI and the onset of WWII, munitions producers found that cane sugar provided the most efficient source. Specifically, nitroglycerin explosives depended on chlorate mixtures created from processed

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<sup>109</sup> “Detweiler Clarifies Twin Falls Situation,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 1, 1944.

sugar.<sup>110</sup> Because cane sugars enjoyed a relatively cheap and easy production cycle, sugar became a major commodity for national security. Before America's official entrance to the war, sugar became so widely ingrained in weapons manufacturing that a different ingredient could not easily replace it.<sup>111</sup> As WWII military efforts came to increasingly rely on heavy bombing campaigns, ability to produce sugar reflected on nations' ability to maintain its efforts.

The ability to produce sugar domestically and options to import it from outside markets served as crucial armament and military strategies in Europe. England in particular acknowledged sugar's importance to military success. Part of the nation's naval goals centered on protecting its sugar imports, while understanding there would come a time when its ability to do so would end.<sup>112</sup> Because England entered the war before America, they relied on sugar imports from the U.S. On December 8, 1941—the day after Pearl Harbor— Japanese military forces occupied the Philippines, one of America's main sugar suppliers. Immediately after, "Farmers were encouraged to plant sugar beets as a patriotic measure," and sugar became the first item rationed in the U.S.<sup>113</sup> America's ability to maintain its sugar harvests—largely and literally on the backs of incarcerated Nikkei—allowed sugar's use as a bargaining chip between Allied Nations to continue.

Lend-Lease documents between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. further reveal sugar's appeal as an explosive and foodstuff. For the period July 1, 1942 to June 30, 1943, the U.S.S.R. requested 3,000 tons of nitroglycerin powder per month from the U.S. This totaled 36,000 tons, worth

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<sup>110</sup> Harold A. Lewis, *Nitrated Sugar Explosive*. U.S. Patent Application No. 1947530 A, filed December 22, 1931.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Lippert S. Ellis, "The Tariff on Sugar" (Freeport: The Rawleigh Foundation, 1933).

<sup>113</sup> "The Sugar Act of 1937," *The Yale Law Journal*, 47, no. 6: 982.

\$108,000,000. The response from America that “Nitroglycerin powder not available—when granulation desired by U.S.S.R. is made known to War Department, negotiations can begin as to availability” suggests the dire lack of sugar at this early point in the conflict.<sup>114</sup> Correspondence between the Department of Agriculture and President Roosevelt in 1942 suggest a desire to take advantage of the potential monetary benefits by receiving future payments on goods provided. These documents show efforts for quick negotiations between requested agricultural materials in conjunction with what could become available and a desire to quickly increase crop production. The amount available for Lend-Lease then depended upon what farmers and emergency harvesters could salvage from the coming sugar beet harvest in 1942. As pointed out in the previous section, Nikkei workers not only saved the 1942 harvest, but provided record yields.<sup>115</sup> The following chart shows the amounts of food the U.S. sent to the Soviet Union through Lend-Lease.

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<sup>114</sup> Franklin Roosevelt, National Archives. *Executive Order 9066*, Document for February 19<sup>th</sup>. Executive Order 9066: Resulting in the Relocation of Japanese. Accessed February 10, 2016. [www.archives.gov/historical-docs/?dod-date=219](http://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/?dod-date=219).

<sup>115</sup> U.S. Agricultural Department, *Minidoka Irrigator*, 1942.

**Table 2.1: Lend-Lease Food Sent to the Soviet Union<sup>116</sup>**

Item	Supply Volume per Thousand Tons
Cereal products	1044
Meat products	787
Animal fat	625
Vegetable fat	465
Sugar	624
Concentrates	330
Seeds	34
Total:	3,909 Thousand Tons

Although the specific amounts that Nikkei soldiers harvested that went to Lend-Lease remains unclear, their contributions to providing food for the domestic front greatly helped allow availability for goods sent to Allies. The Department of Agriculture reported on a record amount of 12,960,000 tons of sugar harvested in 1942, which they credited Nikkei for saving:



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<sup>116</sup> Georgy Kumanev and Nokolay Ryzhkov, "Food and other strategic deliveries to the Soviet Union under the Lend-Lease Act, 1941-1945," *Russian Academy of Sciences* (Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, undated), accessed March 1, 2018, <https://histrf.ru/uploads/media/default/0001/12/df78d3da0fe55d965333035cd9d4ee2770550653.pdf>.

<sup>117</sup> "Evacuee Role in Saving of Beet Crop Cited in Booklet," *Minidoka Irrigator*, November 14, 1942.

Requests for American aid existed outside European nations, and China became another major requester for American supplies. In a communiqué between President Roosevelt and the acting secretary of the Navy, the U.S. agreed to provide \$500 million in financial aid to China. Condition 4 specifically spelled out the necessity to “prevent hoarding of foods and other materials,” such as a rationing program similar to the United States’.<sup>118</sup> Stockpiling foods—including sugar—became an increasingly greater problem in Eastern nations as well as the Western nations that installed rationing programs.

Feeding troops emerged as another War Relocation Authority goal behind Nikkei food production, in addition to sustaining the ration program and saving local farms. It remains unclear how much of the food harvested by emergency laborers went directly to soldiers on the front, but the exact amount does not matter. By feeding the domestic population, other foods became available to go overseas. Carrots and sugar harvested by Nikkei represent two foods which did go directly to soldiers’ rations, though.<sup>119</sup> Carrots and their role in the war provide a particularly interesting element.

Legends surrounding carrots’ importance for improving eyesight and night vision began with British propaganda campaigns. Victims of German nighttime bombing raids, Britain employed mandatory blackouts to make it more difficult for bombers to select targets.<sup>120</sup> With the secret creation of Airborne Interception Radar, British pilots could detect and attack German

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<sup>118</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration, “Program of Requirements for Armaments Equipment, and Materials for Supply to the U.S.S.R. by the Government of the United States During the Period of July 1, 1942 to June 30, 1943,” in National Archives Catalog, Collection: FDR-FDRPSF: President Secretary’s File (Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration), 1933-1945. Series: Confidential Files, 1933-1945. File Unit: Lend Lease, March-April 1942 and October 1942. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/16609867>.

<sup>119</sup> Carol Ash, interviewed by Andrew Dunn at Minidoka National Historic Site, ID, February 1, 2018.

<sup>120</sup> David E. Nye, *When the Lights Went Out: A History of Blackouts in America* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology 2010).

planes before dropping their sugar-infused bombs. To keep these radar capabilities a secret, the British Ministry of Information claimed carrot-enhanced eyesight as the reason behind their pilots' nighttime successes.<sup>121</sup> A large propaganda campaign ensued which credited carrots as a critical component in soldiers' diets. To supplement this narrative, the British government encouraged its citizens to eat carrots to improve their ability in moving around a darkened landscape. Britain's own citizens believed the deception, and the myth has remained a common misconception.<sup>122</sup>

Despite the ploy behind carrots' exaggerated eyesight enhancement, carrots provided significant health value. High in vitamin A, carrots did indeed help keep eyesight strong as well as provide a nutritious staple for soldiers. Carrots represented a major focus for relocation center production efforts, and many Nikkei spent the harvest seasons working carrot crops.<sup>123</sup> The belief that carrots helped the military provided a slight appeasement to many Nikkei desires for providing a more direct contribution to the war effort, and historian Teresa Tamura credits Nikkei with saving this "critical crop."<sup>124</sup> As important as carrots became both psychologically and physically, sugar provided an even more crucial staple for soldiers.

Some of the sugar harvested by Nikkei went into munitions production or Lend-Lease, but a significant portion went directly to soldiers' diets. The majority of evacuees labored on Idaho sugar beet fields. Sugar refineries produced the most requests for evacuee labor, and beet

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<sup>121</sup> "Carrots and Night Vision—WWII," *World Carrot Museum*, 2015, accessed December 1, 2017, <http://www.carrotmuseum.co.uk/ww2seeinthedark.html>.

<sup>122</sup> K. Annabelle Smith, "A WWII Propaganda Campaign Popularized the Myth That Carrots Help You See in the Dark," *Smithsonian.com*, August 13, 2013, accessed December 1, 2017, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/a-wwii-propaganda-campaign-popularized-the-myth-that-carrots-help-you-see-in-the-dark-28812484/>.

<sup>123</sup> Russell M. Tremayne, "Nakashima woodworker: Each cut was made with precision. Each piece of wood was unique" in *Surviving Minidoka* ed. Tremayne and Shallat.

<sup>124</sup> Tamura, *Minidoka*, 32.

workers received priority passes to leave their camps for outside harvest work. Sugar companies regularly made rounds to the camps in recruitment efforts, and provided numerous job advertisements in the *Irrigator*.<sup>125</sup> The Manzanar relocation center located in California answered this call and sent several Nikkei to Idaho fields to aid Minidoka emergency harvesters.<sup>126</sup>

Work on sugar fields proved extremely difficult for Nikkei. Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, incarcerated at Manzanar as a child, recalled some of her family members' experiences who went to Idaho: "It was grueling work up there, and wages were pitiful, but when the call came through camp for workers to alleviate the wartime labor shortage, it sounded better than their life at Manzanar. They knew they'd have, if nothing else, a room, perhaps a cabin of their own."<sup>127</sup> Pay for beet workers often ranged from \$1.10 to \$1.55 per ton. Despite this contribution, the centers received only small portions of sugar, and only then after others outside the camps received their rations. The backbreaking work caused a great appreciation for the sugar they could access, as their calculation pointed out "250 pounds of sugar can be gotten from a ton of good beets. From a load of beets, one gets \$5 to \$6 and oodles of callouses, blisters, and backaches."<sup>128</sup> In total, the 1942 sugar harvest totaled 915,000 tons of beets from 80,000 acres from western states. This amount produced 265,000,000 pounds of sugar, a significant portion of which came from Minidoka emergency harvesters.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Russell M. Tremayne, "an American tragedy," in *Surviving Minidoka*, ed. Tremayne and Shallat.

<sup>126</sup> "80 Workers From Manzanar House In Twin Falls Camp," *Minidoka Irrigator*, May 15, 1943.

<sup>127</sup> Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt publishing Company, 1973).

<sup>128</sup> Sumi Itami, "From the Beet Fields," *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 24, 1942.

<sup>129</sup> "Writer Lauds Evacuee Labor," *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 20, 1943.

The sugar companies credited the sugar harvests' success to incarcerated Japanese Americans. When one group of girls from Minidoka single-handedly topped 950 tons of beets, they became a widespread sensation. The Amalgamated Sugar Company took videos of them topping and loading beets for use in promotional movies, and then gave the girls a special permit to tour the sugar factory. This tour represented a very special occasion because sugar's status as a national security item forced the factory to close to the public.<sup>130</sup> The company's quarterly issue of "The Sugar Beet" further credited the roles of relocation center evacuees in saving the sugar harvest. The issue showed illustrations of Nikkei working in the fields, and stated they "voluntarily saved a substantial part of the crop that now flows in an unbroken stream of sugar from our warehouse to the men of the Army and Navy, to most of our States and for Lend-Lease and to our Allies."<sup>131</sup> The *U and I Cultivator*, a publication put on by the Utah-Idaho Sugar Company based in Salt Lake City, highlighted sugar's importance best when they proclaimed: "we need the beets to beat the axis."<sup>132</sup> At last, Nikkei saw the direct connections between their labor's contributions to the soldiers on the front lines that many desperately wanted to join.

Desires to enlist in military service became a reality on February 1, 1943, which led to a significant impact on domestic food production.<sup>133</sup> Shortly after this designation, the War Manpower Commission predicted a 50 percent reduction in evacuee labor for years following 1942.<sup>134</sup> One hope centered on increasing the number of Mexican Bracero laborers to replace departing Nikkei. Due to lingering reluctance among white farmers, though, the War Food

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<sup>130</sup> "Letters to the Editor: A Nampa Farmer Speaks," *Minidoka Irrigator*, December 19, 1942.

<sup>131</sup> "Evacuee Role In Saving of Beet Crop Cited in Booklet," *Minidoka Irrigator*, February 17, 1943.

<sup>132</sup> Ford Scalley, "Well, We Got the Beets Out," *Minidoka Irrigator*, March 6, 1943.

<sup>133</sup> Peter K. Wakamatsu, "442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team," the 442<sup>nd</sup>.org, accessed December 6, 2017, <http://www.the442.org/442ndfacts.html>.

<sup>134</sup> "Letters to the Editor: A Nampa Farmer Speaks," *Minidoka Irrigator*, December 19, 1942.



Administration had to look to draw workers from other labor pools, including 250 Jamaican farm laborers.<sup>135</sup> With an increasing acceptance rate and established work ethic, most recruitment efforts remained aimed at incarcerated from the camps. Praise increased for those willing to work, and comments aimed at Japanese Americans “who are desirous to help win the war are demonstrating this ambition in the agricultural field,” reassured them that harvest work remained a meaningful contribution to the war effort.<sup>136</sup> Additional methods for maintaining Nikkei involvement occurred in a recurring *Irrigator* ad about farming titled “the man behind the gun,” in which an excerpt reads:

He’s the man who is really going to win this war. The funny thing about it though, he may not even realize that he’s one of the most important cogs in the defense machinery. Everybody knows that you can’t win a war—a modern war—without bigger and better guns, ships, and planes than the other fellow has. Everybody knows, too, that we’re going to win this war because American factories are capable of producing those bigger and better guns, ships, and planes. But this man on his 80 acres is the man who is really behind the gun in our defense effort, because he supplies the nation with the biggest defense weapon there is—food. He deserves a salute, because he’s one of the best soldiers Uncle Sam has.<sup>137</sup>

That this ad appeared in the *Irrigator* suggests Nikkei inclusion and consideration as contributors to wartime success from groups outside the centers. Although they could no longer provide food for soldiers from their homes and farms, this ad acknowledged their contributions.

Relocation to cities outside the military exclusion zone and enlistments for military service drastically reduced the number of Nikkei able to work on Idaho’s farms by 1944.

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<sup>135</sup> “250 Jamaican Farm Laborers Expected to Soon Arrive in County,” *Minidoka County News*, September 28, 1944.

<sup>136</sup> “Nisei Farm Arid Locale In War Effort,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, February 13, 1943.

<sup>137</sup> Globe Seed and Feed Company, “He’s a Farmer By Trade...But...He’s the Man Who Is Really Behind the Gun,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, September 16, 1943, Part 3.

While a substantial number remained to aid throughout the duration of the war, officials had to look for workers outside minority groups to maintain production. A major source that emerged at this point included prisoners of war. With camps established in Idaho for the sole purpose of providing labor when the state needed more workers, German and Italian POWs' only responsibilities included agricultural work.<sup>138</sup>

A stark contrast developed between Nikkei and POW treatment. Nikkei workers strove to distance themselves and make clear the distinction that the German and Italian POWs had recently been at arms against the U.S. while the majority of Nikkei considered themselves Americans who only served the American war effort. Despite the attempts, POWs received drastically better treatment than Nikkei. Inequities began upon arrival of POWs, as the *Minidoka County News* pointed out: "It is understood that the Germans, tired and hungry after their long boat and train journey, were greatly surprised at the amount of food offered them, expressing the belief that they were being given a week's ration instead of for one day."<sup>139</sup> German POWs at first even refused the difficult potato picking tasks.<sup>140</sup> When each group worked side-by-side in the fields the difference in treatment became even more obvious. POWs enjoyed lunches prepared by military stewards in shady groves while Nikkei hurried and ate whatever food they had been able to pack themselves. Tamura-Gardener recalled working amongst German POWs:

On this farm we were working right alongside of German prisoners of war. And I thought 'gee they got it made.' The army truck would come and pick them up for lunch time to

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<sup>138</sup> Carolyn Gallegos, "Prisoner of War Camp," in *Hunt for Idaho*, ed. Shrontz-Wright; "Labor Situation Is Viewed Here; Need Many Men," April 6, 1944, *Hunt for Idaho*, ed. Shrontz-Wright; "War Prisoner Labor Plentiful Says Colonel: LLt.-Col. Smith Tells Rotarians He Now Has Manpower to Care for All Certification," June 1, 1944, in *Hunt for Idaho*, ed. Shrontz-Wright, 197, 203.

<sup>139</sup> "Large Group of Germans Now at Prisoner Camp: Special Train Brings Large Number Here From East Coast—Taken In Normandy," *Minidoka County News*, September 28, 1944, in *Hunt for Idaho*, ed. Shrontz-Wright, 92.

<sup>140</sup> Hughes, "A Personal Preface," in *Hunt for Idaho*, ed. Shrontz-Wright, 135.

take them back to camp so they could have lunch while we would have to sit outside in the hot Idaho sun, sometimes in a ditch just to keep cool, eating our rice balls or whatever we made for lunch. So I always felt that the German prisoners had it pretty good.<sup>141</sup>

Few justifications exist which answer to the discrepancy in these treatments, but much of it likely had to do with skin color, as the original evacuation had.

The *Irrigator* pointed out that although they had been, “Barred from participation in defense industries, evacuated by ‘military necessity’ to relocation centers and hooted at, even assaulted by unthinking outsiders the Japanese here have, nevertheless, contributed in no small way to the nation’s victory program and have proven, that they, in the only way possible, are loyal Americans.”<sup>142</sup> This contribution came at a cost in addition to the civil rights violations they endured, as several Nikkei died while sustaining America’s food. A reversing beet truck ran over a female farm worker on an Idaho ranch, and another died after being run over by a truck following a fall.<sup>143</sup> Nikkei became such an integral part in the labor movement that government agencies considered any harm to them as an assault on the war effort. When a group of white teenagers drove by a Nikkei labor camp in Utah and opened fire with guns, the FBI arrested the group and labeled them “terrorists.”<sup>144</sup> Nikkei reacted to these situations by requesting more rights, including better food and protective gear while on job sites. Most often officials ignored these movements, but one case gained national attention.

The December Riots occurred at the Manzanar camp in California, one year after the attack on Pearl Harbor. With tensions mounting due to low wages, poor food, and the overall degradation of life in an incarceration camp, the tipping point occurred after the arrest of a young

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<sup>141</sup> Tamura-Gardener interview.

<sup>142</sup> “A Crop is Saved,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, November 14, 1942.

<sup>143</sup> “Farm Worker Fatally Hurt; Rites Monday,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 24, 1942.

<sup>144</sup> “Hoodlums to Be Punished For Molesting Jap Laborers,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 7, 1943.

cook and some of his accomplices regarding their accusations against white camp personnel regarding the rapid disappearance of sugar. The cook had been pushing for the development of a union for kitchen workers. After charging the white chief steward of stealing sugar to sell on the black market, tensions spilled over. This claim strengthened existing suspicions that several infants died because mothers had been forced to resort to using unfit sugar substitutes in formulas. WWI veteran Joe Kurihara led the ensuing riot, which began, with speeches claiming “the administration had used [an earlier] beating to cover up the sugar fraud.”<sup>145</sup> Over the course of the day the crowd escalated into a mob as they scoured the camp looking for those friendly with the camp personnel. When the group stoned an army captain confronting them, MPs used tear gas, and several began shooting. Two Nikkei died, and the camp hospital treated ten more with gunshot injuries.<sup>146</sup> This event served as one of the only widespread revolts during the incarceration.

Work on outside farms and the ensuing credit heaped upon them for exceeding expectations in emergency harvest work allowed Nikkei a platform from which to speak out for greater rights. The Utah State Labor Commission proclaimed: “We can just as well face the facts, if it had not been for Japanese labor, much of the beet crop of Utah and Idaho would have been plowed up.”<sup>147</sup> A letter written by a high school student returning from a harvest vacation stated:

Last year, the Japanese Americans saved a large percentage of the crop. Still, there was an air of ill-feeling! True, among certain regions there were many friendly people, but on the other hand there are many people who are hostile. Last year we saved their crop; this year we saved their crop; next year we’ll save their crop, and the year after that! So what! Do they show their appreciation? No! true, in some instances individual farmers realize their need for our help and show their gratitude. Regions around Denver; lots of beets are

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<sup>145</sup> Wakatsuki Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 68.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Utah State Labor Commission, in *Hunt for Idaho*, ed. Shrontz-Wright, 150.

grown there. The Japanese Americans have helped out. Still there are people and organizations presenting a rise of ill-feeling against us. They highly publicize the danger and menace of having 'Japs' (as we are called) in this country. [Are] they so prejudiced and ignorant that they know not what they are saying.<sup>148</sup>

This letter emphasizes the frustration many felt from the continued hostility from local communities, despite their efforts to prove their loyalty.

### **Conclusion**

Military officials, local farmers, food organizations, and politicians credited Nikkei emergency harvesters with supporting domestic farms while providing food for the Allied war effort. Contributions made to local farmers have been remembered as one of Minidoka's longest lasting legacies. Working on outside farms also helped improve race relations between Nikkei and residents in local communities. The impact they had on munitions production and soldier's rations remains an overlooked element in narratives addressing military success as well as Nikkei incarceration. We cannot achieve the full meaning behind WWII's effects on American life or Allied military success without examining these underlying events that have been pushed aside because they are uncomfortable and do not fit in with mainstream narratives of American greatness.

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<sup>148</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary," 457-458.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Incarcerated Life: Culture and Family Deterioration**

Food production outside camp improved race relations between incarcerated Nikkei and local residents, increased Allied wartime success, and raised comfort levels for many in America, but Nikkei experienced the largest changes to their own lives while imprisoned inside the site's boundaries. After first providing context with an overview discussing Minidoka's construction and general physical layout, this chapter then examines how incarceration deteriorated family life and culture. Specifically, incarceration inhibited many Nikkei family traditions, including food production and mealtimes. This change destabilized family structure and fractured relationships between generations. Second, I outline the ways Nikkei improved morale, specifically through celebrations, beautification of their surroundings, and other community activities. Although food sometimes receives only limited mention in this section, depicting ways that Japanese Americans responded to adversity and ways they attempted to increase morale emphasizes their struggle. As Nikkei faced these degradations, they received backlash—often centered on food—from a misinformed public accusing those incarcerated of living in luxury. By highlighting physical surroundings, cultural changes, attempts at improving their situation, and the shifting relationships between those residing at Minidoka and the broader public, this chapter emphasizes the elements which contributed the most to many Nikkei's experiences at Minidoka, and the ingenuity they displayed in responding to challenges.

### 3.1: Building Minidoka

Accommodations for about 10,000 Nikkei represented a significant undertaking, but one with financial opportunities, for southern Idahoans. This section highlights initial repercussions of Minidoka's creation on local communities, the camp's general layout, reactions from Nikkei as they arrived, and an introduction to daily operations and camp management. Local contractors began developing the site's infrastructure on June 5, 1942.<sup>149</sup> The Morrison Knudsen Company out of Boise, Idaho received \$4.6 million to build the roads, hospital, administration buildings, and a nearby rail line to receive the incarcerated and future supplies.<sup>150</sup> Jonathan Hughes, a contemporary, local economic historian, relates the immediate economic benefits by claiming that building "the Camp ended the depression of the 1930s in southern Idaho."<sup>151</sup> During this initial financial boom, Hughes points out that in place of any (misguided) fear from incoming Japanese Americans or outrage at the civil injustice involved, locals viewed the camp simply as "a matter of money" and "political rewards of various kinds for our statesmen."<sup>152</sup> This emphasizes the economic advantages that constructing the site provided. Even with this large monetary output and significant manpower devoted to building Minidoka, though, completion remained incomplete when evacuees began arriving in August 1942. Upon their entrance to Minidoka, many Nikkei received work constructing their own incarceration camp alongside private contractors.

After leaving the predominately lush, green, and high moisture areas of the Pacific Northwest region, arrival in a dry environment dominated by brown brush provided a significant

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<sup>149</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."

<sup>150</sup> Tamura, *Minidoka*.

<sup>151</sup> Hughes, "A Personal Preface," in *Hunt for Idaho*, ed. Shrontz-Wright, 132.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

transition for most Japanese Americans. As Nikkei made their journey to south-central Idaho's sagebrush desert, they received transportation aboard trains with blacked-out windows.<sup>153</sup> Fujiko Tamura-Gardener recalls her initial reaction after exiting the train in Idaho and peering at her surroundings while a bus took them on the last stretch to Minidoka: "All I could see was just mounds and mounds of brush all over dry land." Then "Boom, all you could see was black buildings. Tarpaper buildings."<sup>154</sup> Tamura-Gardener points out that at this point, as Nikkei attempted to breathe through the stifling dust and viewed the area's desolate landscape for the first time, "*then* people really thought 'how could we have been brought here to *nothing*.'"<sup>155</sup> The dust and drear which permeated Minidoka also made it nearly impossible to entice personnel to stay employed at the camp, leaving it understaffed by War Relocation officials.<sup>156</sup> Incarcerated Nikkei and appointed personnel alike spent significant energy attempting to make the environment more livable, as highlighted in the section on morale as well as the next chapter [see below].

Tasked with overseeing daily camp operations, the newly created War Relocation Authority undertook responsibility for providing the daily needs in food, medical care, education, clothing, and living accommodations.<sup>157</sup> With a staff including about 170 appointed personnel, head of student teachers and future superintendent of education at Minidoka Arthur Kleinkopf served as a particularly important figure by leaving detailed accounts of life in the center and as a proponent for incarcerated Nikkei rights.<sup>158</sup> Highlighting contact amongst the Nikkei and

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<sup>153</sup> Tamura-Gardener interview.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, iii.



between the appointed personnel, and difficulties experienced by all involved, Kleinkopf's diary addressed two purposes, as he outlines in his War Relocation Authority (WRA) mandate: "First, it was felt that War Relocation Centers and their stories would be a unique chapter in American History and that day by day recordings of events behind the scenes in them would have much historical value. Secondly, such a diary would prove valuable in helping to solve some of the many racial problems of minority groups."<sup>159</sup> Kleinkopf's daily recordings of camp life serve as the primary source of information for this chapter. When compared with material from the camp-run newspaper *The Minidoka Irrigator* and oral histories, a more detailed account of daily struggles emerges—many highlighting issues related to food.

The partnered work between Morrison Knudsen Company, incarcerated Nikkei, and other local contractors at Minidoka resulted in an expansive and fully functioning town. The center included 400 residential barracks split up into 36 blocks, three miles long.<sup>160</sup> Each block consisted of 12 barrack buildings serving as living quarters, a mess hall, a laundry building which eventually included lavatory accommodations, and a recreation hall. The barrack buildings also served as administrative offices, churches, and classrooms. Each barrack—20' by 120'—accommodated six families in apartments ranging from 16' by 20' for a family of two through a 24' by 20' apartment for a family of six to eight.

This amounted to an average of only 114 square feet, or an area amounting to six feet by nineteen feet, of living space per incarcerated. Because of the need to quickly provide housing for arriving evacuees, the buildings received rudimentary construction consisting of tarpaper

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid, iv.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

covering wood frames void of any insulation.<sup>161</sup> Security included a guardhouse at the front entrance area manned by military police who checked identification cards of those entering and leaving the camp confines. Eight guard towers scattered the camp's perimeter and barbed wire fencing enclosed the 13 miles of camp buildings.<sup>162</sup> A 196 bed hospital provided medical care while a warehouse area with 22 buildings oversaw maintenance needs. As the center's population grew to nearly 10,000, it received its own post office and designation as an established town—Idaho's seventh largest at the time.<sup>163</sup> Although most commonly referred to as "Minidoka" today, the postal designation referred to the town as "Hunt" to avoid confusion with the nearby, yet unaffiliated, Minidoka County and larger Minidoka water project. As evacuees arrived, they faced living quarters including only a cot, two wool blankets, and a mattress per person. One light bulb hanging from the ceiling and a pot belly stove per apartment completed the sparse accommodations.<sup>164</sup>

Minidoka's infrastructure experienced critical issues despite the significant time, effort, and money invested. One problem, sewage disposal, persisted throughout the camp's existence. Before the sewage treatment plant became operational—several months after the camp's opening—residents depended on an unsanitary and inefficient public latrine system. Constantly busy, filthy, and infested with flies, the latrines regularly leaked their contents into the three wells that supplied the center's water. A heavy chlorination process became required to treat the water, giving it an unpleasant odor and terrible taste.<sup>165</sup> Raw sewage from public latrines also

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<sup>161</sup> Friends of Minidoka, "Minidoka NHS Walking Tour App," Mia Russell (2016), <http://www.minidoka.org> (accessed January 1, 2018).

<sup>162</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."

<sup>163</sup> Shrontz, "Evacuees Arrive: The War Relocation Authority," in Shrontz-Wright, *Hunt for Idaho*.

<sup>164</sup> Friends of Minidoka, "Minidoka NHS Walking Tour Application."

<sup>165</sup> Untitled article, *Minidoka Irrigator*, September 25, 1942.

entered ponds used for recreational activities. When this happened in the winter, the sewage froze into the ice-skating rinks, creating additional contamination issues.<sup>166</sup> Even after a sewage disposal plant replaced the public latrines, which Kleinkopf referred to as “the Project’s great health menace,” facilities remained inefficient and sanitation issues continued.<sup>167</sup>

Inadequate food and improper handling techniques created additional adverse health conditions. Storage in buckets of ice or placed in crates outside the mess halls made milk spoil, and Patricia Tomoko Yorioka, born in Minidoka, remembers that the milk often made her sick.<sup>168</sup> Fujiko Tamura-Gardener also recalled seeing the milk stacked up outside: “Because of the Idaho heat, the lid was popped, and the foam would already be out of the bottle.”<sup>169</sup> Repulsed by the sight and understanding that it made others sick, Tamura-Gardener avoided consuming milk, a habit which she has continued through her life.<sup>170</sup> On another occasion, over 60 residents from one block became hospitalized in a few-day-stretch from ptomaine poisoning (foodborne illness) which originated from unsanitary preparations in dining halls.<sup>171</sup> An ensuing investigation by state health authorities found bacteria in pickled vegetables as the cause.<sup>172</sup> In an effort to improve sanitation, the appointed personnel hosted periodic dining hall cleanliness contests. Emphasizing proper food handling and serving techniques, the cleanest dining halls received parties with music and food, which many viewed as valuable prizes.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary.”

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>168</sup> Patricia Tomoko Yorioka, in Tamura, *Minidoka*, 77.

<sup>169</sup> Tamura-Gardener interview.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Untitled story, *Minidoka Irrigator*, September 29, 1942.

<sup>172</sup> Untitled story, *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 2, 1942.

<sup>173</sup> “Pick Winner In Dining Hall Contest Soon,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, February 6, 1943.

Infrastructure deficiencies extended beyond contaminants and food storage facilities to include basic transportation. Although the Morrison Knudsen Company constructed a series of roadways at Minidoka, they remained inadequate and unable to provide safe and convenient transportation for the sprawling compound. Kleinkopf recorded the constant difficulties faced by teachers in their miles-long treks through ankle-deep mud to their classrooms.<sup>174</sup> Although white appointed personnel eventually received transportation accommodations, Nikkei student teachers remained banned from buses and continued walking. Distraught parents pleaded with local shoe companies for assistance. Although some shoe sellers seemed to sympathize with their plight, rubber's inclusion in the rationing program meant unavailability for Nikkei. Instead, incarcerated children faced sickness from exposure during their long walks without boots or other adequate footwear.<sup>175</sup> The existence of food-related problems and transportation difficulties, each crucial elements for daily life, emphasize the inadequacy of an infrastructure ill-prepared to safely provide nutrition to the evacuees.

### **3.2: Cultural Adjustments and Family Destabilization**

Perhaps the most significant adjustment many Nikkei felt during their incarceration centered on their inability to continue cultural practices and the ensuing sense of altered identity. This section examines how incarceration ruptured traditions, fractured ties between generations, and destabilized families. Attempts to maintain certain practices and efforts at improving morale receive additional attention.

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<sup>174</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

Because Nikkei identified themselves in various ways—American, Japanese, and Japanese American—and they all experienced incarceration differently, use of terminology like “culture” can prove confusing and potentially contentious. Referring to cultural changes can also imply a uniform—yet inaccurate—background and lifestyle of those portrayed. Primary sources used in this section suggest that Issei (first generation Japanese Americans) felt stronger ties to traditional Japanese practices than the younger Nisei (second generation Japanese Americans). The incarceration brought many of these viewpoints to the forefront as people faced the choice between identifying as part of their nation of birth/nation they adopted as their own, depending on their citizenship status, versus the nation of their ancestors. The majority continued self-identifying as American, and many attempted to prove their loyalty by distancing themselves as much as possible from anything associated with “Japanese.” The *Irrigator* emphasized this *Hunt for Idaho*, ed. Shrontz-Wright, sentiment when it proclaimed that “Almost all of the Japanese who came to this country came for the same reason that other immigrants came—to get away from less pleasant situations; they rejected the customs of Japan and adopted the culture of this country as far as they were permitted to do so.”<sup>176</sup> This quote points out many Nikkei’s initial hopes for assimilation into mainstream American culture. Despite these distancing efforts, references from diaries, oral histories, and newspapers point out Issei insistence on maintaining certain customs such as bowing to authorities or during flag ceremonies, tea ceremonies, wearing Japanese kimonos and performing Japanese dances for special occasions suggest the continuation of many Japanese cultural practices.<sup>177</sup> To navigate the potential difficulty regarding

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<sup>176</sup> Untitled article, *Minidoka Irrigator*, May 1, 1943.

<sup>177</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary”; Tamura, *Minidoka*; “Portlanders Here for ‘Y’ Tea,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 10, 1942.

terminology and how evacuees self-identified, this section refers to “culture” in general terms as practices utilized by Nikkei pre-evacuation.

Incarceration provided a stark contrast to Nikkei family dining practices before their relocation. Nikkei ate their meals from what historical anthropologist Stacey Camp refers to as “plain, government-issued institutional wares” that would have been in stark contrast to the delicate china sets many left behind.<sup>178</sup> Generally consisting of meals prepared by the matriarch and consumed communally at large tables, they often ate seasonal foods grown themselves.<sup>179</sup> Furthermore, mealtimes served as the main occasion for the family to come together and bond.<sup>180</sup> The mess hall-style dining available at Minidoka made continuation of these cultural practices impossible. Kleinkopf’s mealtime description in October 1942—just two months into the camp’s opening—shows the immediate repercussions felt during camp mealtimes:

“When the gongs ring announcing mealtime in the mess halls all block residents hurry to their respective mess halls to eat...A line is formed; each person as he passes by the serving counter takes his food and finds a seat wherever he can. This method of serving and eating destroys the family table style of dining, thus resulting in less of parental control over the children. This may give rise to serious social and moral complications if continued, so today an appeal was made by the evacuees to the Project Steward to order the family style of service and table seating so that this threat may be checked.”<sup>181</sup>

Although this entry proves that WRA staff recognized the threat of destabilized families caused by cafeteria-style dining early on, no real efforts arose to halt the familial destruction.

By October 1942, Kleinkopf already observed a fracturing between Issei and Nisei: “Many Japanese deplore the fact that they no longer have any home life, can no longer sit together at the

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<sup>178</sup> Camp, “Landscapes of Japanese American Internment,” 171-172., Ishige, *The History and Culture of Japanese Food*.

<sup>179</sup> Tamura-Gardener interview.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary,” 41-42.

dinner table and talk over the day's events. Delinquency on the increase when family ties are broken—culture breaks down.”<sup>182</sup> The “social and moral complications” which worried Kleinkopf became a reality as children ate apart from their parents, resulting in abandoned table manners and lack of parental authority. A study conducted by elementary school principal Mildred Bennett showed that over 37% of the fathers with children enrolled there came from jobs related to food. These included farmers, restaurant managers, grocers, and cooks.<sup>183</sup> Although many children came from food production backgrounds, many Nikkei began viewing that work as dishonorable. This study suggests the efforts of younger generations to assimilate by adopting mainstream American values. As Nisei broke from cultural ties and traditions, family structures destabilized, as pointed out by incarcerated Mitsuye Yamada:

“Two of the main changes in our lives were that Mother no longer cooked our meals, and we no longer ate together as a family. We ate our meals in a large mess hall with our friends and our co-workers. Since Tosh and I both worked long hours in the hospital, we hardly saw Mother or our brothers. We simply went to the dining hall with whomever we happened to be with when the dinner bell rang.”<sup>184</sup>

Unhappiness regarding separation from parents during mealtimes, as this quote points out, became increasingly evident in younger children. When a sixth grader wrote a letter to his teacher expressing what he missed most at Hunt, he related his mother's sadness over her inability to bake pies, and how much he missed eating them.<sup>185</sup> The patronizing tone used in describing the letter suggests that the education personnel interpreted this letter with humor as a boy's desire for sweets, overlooking the simple wish of a child to eat food prepared by his

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>183</sup> Mildred Bennett elementary schoolers survey, in Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary,” 547.

<sup>184</sup> Mitsuye Yamada, “Minidoka Revisited,” in Tamura, *Minidoka*, 38.

<sup>185</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary,” 40.

mother. Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston recounts a similar experience at California's Manzanar camp during mealtimes:

Now, in the mess halls, after a few weeks had passed, we stopped eating as a family. Mama tried to hold us together for a while, but it was hopeless. Granny was too feeble to walk across the block three times a day, especially during heavy weather, so May brought food to her in the barracks. My older brothers and sisters, meanwhile, began eating with their friends, or eating somewhere blocks away, in the hope of finding better food. The word would get around that the cook over in Block 22, say really knew his stuff, and they would eat a few meals over there, to test the rumor. Camp authorities frowned on mess hall hopping and tried to stop it, but the good cooks liked it. They liked to see long lines outside their kitchens and would work overtime to attract a crowd.

Younger boys, like Ray, would make a game out of seeing how many mess halls they could hit in one meal period—be the first in line at Block 16, gobble down your food, run to 17 by the middle of the dinner hour, gulp another helping, and hurry to 18 to make the end of that chow line and stuff in the third meal of the evening. They didn't *need* to do that. No matter how bad the food might be, you could always eat till you were full.

Kiyo and I were too young to run around, but often we would eat in gangs with other kids, while the grownups sat at another table. I confess I enjoyed this part of it at the time. We all did. A couple of years after the camps opened, sociologists studying the life noticed what had happened to the families. They made some recommendations, and edicts went out that families *must* start eating together again. Most people resented this; they griped and grumbled. They were in the habit of eating with their friends. And until the mess hall system itself could be changed, not much could really be done. It was too late.

My own family, after three years of mess hall living, collapsed as an integrated unit. Whatever dignity or feeling of filial strength we may have known before December 1941 was lost, and we did not recover it until many years after the war, not until after Papa died and we began to come together, trying to fill the vacuum his passing left in all our lives.<sup>186</sup>

Family destabilization caused by mealtime chaos, as outlined by Wakatsuki Houston, provided a significant issue for evacuees, yet camp officials largely overlooked the issue. The only acceptance of these dining styles came not from benevolent concerns over Nikkei family health

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<sup>186</sup> Wakatsuki Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 35-37.



but in a temporary and short-term effort to minimize food wastage caused by children throwing away unwanted food.<sup>187</sup> Elementary school teacher Cherry Kinshita—whose surname suggests Japanese heritage and perhaps a greater disposition to sympathize with those under her care—showed concern over the altering of terms in children’s vocabularies when they began referring to “mess halls” instead of “dining rooms.” Kinshita wondered if the children had “become so enveloped in center life that they have forgotten the meaning of family life—the normal life?”<sup>188</sup> Parents frequently requested family style dining to permanently replace the cafeteria settings, but their pleas were met with refusal from camp officials.

Inability to take meals together became one of the most significant causes for unhappiness at Minidoka. Teachers noticed the increasing lack of respect from the children, which they contrasted “to the extreme courtesy of the adults.”<sup>189</sup> Both incarcerated and appointed personnel attributed these cultural fractions to camp life, but Nikkei felt it most distinctly. The *Irrigator* advertised “Mess Education” classes addressing “the lowered morale of Hunt residents due to the impossibility of having family dinners in camp.”<sup>190</sup> Complaints became so common, and sometimes hostile, that the formation of a seven-person committee to handle complaints between dining halls and families became necessary.<sup>191</sup> Losing their main occasions to spend time as a family and parents’ lost opportunities to provide care for their children by preparing meals became a significant and infamous legacy of the incarceration, which will receive more attention in chapter four’s examination of memory.

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid; “Family Style Service Begins,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, November 14, 1942.

<sup>188</sup> Cherry Kinshita, in Shrontz-Wright, *Hunt for Idaho*, referencing the *Minidoka Irrigator*, July 17, 1943.

<sup>189</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary,” 51.

<sup>190</sup> “Forum Will Discuss ‘Mess Education,’” *Minidoka Irrigator*, November 11, 1943.

<sup>191</sup> “7-man Committee Will Intervene in Mess Disputes,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, April 10, 1943.

Alternatives to mess hall dining, such as looking for ways to hunt, fish, and prepare their own meals, provided opportunities for prisoners to take agency in their own foodways. Some Nikkei used hot plates to prepare meals purchased from a limited supply in the camp's dry goods store. Wiring only existed in some living quarters, though, and Minidoka's administration asked residents to turn their hot plates in over concern for the associated fire hazard within the first few months of their incarceration.<sup>192</sup> Others attempted to exert control over their food by hunting jack rabbits in the desert surrounding Minidoka. Warnings published in the *Irrigator* cautioned evacuees from eating the rabbits due to their high risk of carrying tularemia—a disease often fatal to humans.<sup>193</sup> Kleinkopf reported instances of residents becoming sick with rabbit fever after eating them, but it remains unclear how common this practice became.<sup>194</sup> Fishing represented a popular past-time in the nearby irrigation canals, but hopeful anglers only occasionally caught a trout, squaw fish, or carp. Kleinkopf fondly noted the occasional sight of a successful catch proudly carried through camp and envious neighbors hovering nearby as the treasured food was smoked, dried, pickled, or fried.<sup>195</sup> Some Nikkei then showed their respect for teachers by giving smoked or pickled fish as gifts. Most often, the presence of a good meal existed only in Nikkeis' imaginations. Popsicles and candy bars in the canteen, and seconds in the dining halls represented some of the hopes portrayed by Dokee, the *Irrigator's* fictional mascot.<sup>196</sup> Children also wrote letters fantasizing about soda, hamburgers, and lamenting the

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<sup>192</sup> Untitled article, *Minidoka Irrigator*, September 29, 1942.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid; Untitled article, *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 2, 1942.

<sup>193</sup> Untitled article, *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 2, 1942.

<sup>194</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."

<sup>195</sup> Ibid, 181.

<sup>196</sup> "Name Sought for 'Imp' Who Makes Debut," *Minidoka Irrigator*, December 27, 1943.

food they missed most such as crab, steak, and fresh vegetables.<sup>197</sup> One letter from a child written to his father serving in the military emphasized missing his father's cooking.<sup>198</sup> Although these methods for procuring additional food sources enjoyed only limited success, incarcerated took every opportunity to retake some form of control over their lives and food.

Kleinkopf adequately portrayed the need to increase morale by pointing out "The impact of emotional disturbances as a result of the evacuation procedures, plus this dull, dreary existence in a desert region surely must give these people a feeling of helplessness, hopelessness, and despair which we on the outside do not and will never fully understand."<sup>199</sup> These efforts occurred in various ways, some unrelated to procuring food. Significant effort went in to beautifying their surroundings, and incarcerated planted rye in all residential areas to keep the dust down while preparing the ground for subsequent adoption of grass, trees, and shrubs.<sup>200</sup> Nikkei also built walks around the residential areas and incorporated small ponds and bridges wherever possible. Some Kokita, a doll maker before incarceration, dealt with camp-life by creatively continuing her practice at Minidoka. Using rice saved from her dinner to make glue, Kokita pasted layered toilet paper over molds to craft dolls before dressing them in cut-up curtains.<sup>201</sup>

Other efforts attempted to include more participants by offering sporting opportunities. At least twelve baseball fields scattered throughout the camp offered regular recreation activities, and tournaments took place nearly every weekend in the warmer months. Once relationships began improving with local communities because of Nikkei emergency farm labor, local schools

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<sup>197</sup> Untitled article, *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 2, 1943.

<sup>198</sup> "Somewhere in South Pacific Area," in Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary," 355-356.

<sup>199</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary," 3.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid; "Rye Planted to Create Dustless Hunt," *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 7, 1942; "1300 Prepsters Join in Campaign For Beautification," *Minidoka Irrigator*, May 1, 1943.

<sup>201</sup> Tamura, *Minidoka*, 242.

invited Hunt teams to play outside the center. After two youths drowned while swimming in canals, two swimming holes fed by irrigation water with permission from the Northside Canal Company provided a much-needed (and safe) escape from the desert heat.<sup>202</sup> Basketball, football, and golf comprised additional recreational activities used to increase morale.

### 3.3: Holidays

Holidays served as an occasion where Nikkei attempted to balance pressure to assimilate with desires to use the occasions as a time to maintain cultural practices and temporarily overlook adversity. As the first Thanksgiving at Minidoka drew near in 1942, many wondered how incarceration behind barbed wire would affect their holiday experience. News that the project steward ordered 7,000 pounds of turkey for Thanksgiving celebrations initiated large-scale efforts to make the event as festive as possible. While enjoying social events such as dances, or “Turkey Hops,” appointed personnel provided optimistic—yet patronizing—messages that Nikkei fair treatment and freedom depended upon their willingness to assimilate.<sup>203</sup> These messages ignored, though, that most Nikkei already practiced American customs and holidays prior to Pearl Harbor. Minidoka’s population continued celebrating Thanksgiving all three years the center remained in operation, but they steadily declined in fervor and optimism. Specifically, President Roosevelt’s decree that incarcerated remain working on food production during holidays reduced much of the romanticized excitement many associated with Thanksgiving. Mealtimes also became more strictly regimented in regard to

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<sup>202</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary.”

<sup>203</sup> H.L. Stafford, “Director Stafford Extends Thanksgiving Message,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, November 20, 1943.

when each block could report to their respective dining halls. After the first Thanksgiving, turkey became unavailable to incarcerated Japanese Americans, who instead relied on eating chickens they raised themselves.<sup>204</sup> With such little power to exert during this holiday, many looked forward to exercising more influence and proving their loyalty by showing mainstream Christian Americans their own enthusiasm for Christmas.

The Christmas season enjoyed more consistent celebratory practices than Thanksgiving. Thirty-six Christmas committees worked to raise money, wrap gifts, organize entertainment, and decorate dining halls and trees in an effort for what Kleinkopf called “a grand Christmas Celebration.”<sup>205</sup> “Santa Remembers Minidoka” motifs became popular accessories and highlighted the hope many held for inclusion in the holiday.<sup>206</sup> Eager evacuees decorated dining halls to showcase their skill and ingenuity by making extravagant displays using only scrap materials. These included Christmas wreaths made from sagebrush and wood, and ornaments crafted from saved egg shells, cupcake wrappers, and orange peelings.<sup>207</sup> Themes chosen for these decorations often lamented the absence of family members serving in the U.S. military and bygone days of freedom.<sup>208</sup> Holiday efforts aimed heavily at the schools. Each classroom received promises for “nice” Christmas trees, but Kleinkopf claimed these often only comprised decorated clumps of sagebrush. Unwilling to let their surroundings ruin their spirit, many children spent significant time singing American Christmas carols taught by their teachers.<sup>209</sup> On

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<sup>204</sup> “Thanksgiving Day To Be Observed On November 23,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, November 18, 1944.

<sup>205</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary,” 95-96.

<sup>206</sup> “Special Christmas Fund Drive On December 3-5,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, November 28, 1942.

<sup>207</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary,” 95-96.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

Christmas day, each dining hall held a party for their associated blocks, complete with a visit from Santa Claus bearing gifts for the children.<sup>210</sup>

The holidays further represented a time of increased (but temporary) acceptance and support from those outside the camps. Donations poured into Minidoka from churches and those employed at the camp, which they used to purchase 3,000 pounds of candy and 500 pounds of nuts.<sup>211</sup> When 17,000 gifts arrived for children from nearly every state, the *Irrigator* celebrated that “Christmas this year will not be a disappointment for Hunt’s youngsters.”<sup>212</sup> Businesses from nearby towns who catered to Nikkei customers also flooded the *Irrigator* with ads and well-wishes. During Christmas 1945, the *Irrigator* staff sent several five-pound food packages consisting of dehydrated soup, dried shrimp, nori, and rice to soldiers on the front in gratitude for the “Merry Christmas” ad paid for by members of the 232<sup>nd</sup> Engineers.<sup>213</sup>

In contrast to much of the Christmas hype and community support, the meals available over the holidays only partially fulfilled Nikkei desires. When evacuees discovered only 27 sacks of sweet-rice—which they used heavily in New Year’s recipes—they lamented their inability to make traditional foods.<sup>214</sup> Teriyaki chicken—a meal served on important occasions—proved another absent staple due to the need for sugar to enrich the sauce. To their credit, the camp steward division ordered mochi, an important holiday food that many enjoyed pre-incarceration. Part of this food’s importance, though, resided in its preparation by multiple family members, an element lost at Minidoka. Tamura-Gardener related the bonding which took place during the

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> “Gay Christmas Day Seen As Donations Pour In,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, December 19, 1942.

<sup>213</sup> “Food Packages Sent,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, March 31, 1945.

<sup>214</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary.”

synchronous art of making mochi; which entailed timing the process perfectly and darting one's hands in to flip the dough as others pounded it.<sup>215</sup> Many similar family acts of passing on cultural traditions were lost behind Minidoka's barbed wire.

As with Thanksgiving, Nikkei reflection on the loss of their former lives led to a counter-narrative promoted by white officials which increasingly pushed the concept of assimilation onto Nikkei. Although this emphasis by those in power led many Nikkei to favor assimilation as a means of demonstrating loyalty to obtain freedom, the messages remained misguided through their failure to realize that Nikkei had already assimilated and adopted American customs before the war.<sup>216</sup> They simply desired to retain some of their cultural heritage by cooking their own meals, eating together as families, and eating the food they grew up with. Those hostile to Nikkei saw any Japanese practices as inherently threatening and failed to acknowledge that white Americans followed similar customs every year with their own family traditions.

### **Conflict: Misconceived Perceptions of Camp Luxuries**

This section examines the early relationships between Minidoka and local communities. Once the initial construction period ended and inhabitants at nearby towns no longer had the immediate economic benefits from rapid construction to distract them, they grew increasingly weary of their incarcerated neighbors. First, a (potentially surprising) look at ways the public treated white personnel affiliated with Minidoka provides context for a more in-depth look at the deep animosity many outside the centers felt toward Japanese Americans. This includes ways

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<sup>215</sup> Tamura-Gardener interview.

<sup>216</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary," 95-96.

politicians and other officials portrayed Minidoka to the outside population, which resulted in unforeseen consequences and hostility. The section—and chapter—culminates with a view of the realities inside Minidoka. These elements highlight changes in the camp’s perception by different groups, and underscores the Nikkei incarceration experience.

Racial backlash extended beyond incarcerated Nikkei to those associated with the camp. Reverend Emery Andrews followed his Baptist congregation from Seattle to Minidoka and received hostile treatment in local towns from his reputation as sympathetic and friendly toward Japanese Americans. Restaurants in Twin Falls refused to serve the Andrews family, and hostile confrontations with neighbors caused them to move.<sup>217</sup> Arthur Kleinkopf also experienced discrimination, recounting a trip to Twin Falls where an old acquaintance grew angry upon learning of Kleinkopf’s association with Japanese Americans. The acquaintance recommended Kleinkopf “take a gun and shoot them.”<sup>218</sup> Other local businesses, such as barbershops and pharmacies, refused to serve anyone affiliated with the camp.<sup>219</sup>

Tensions extended to the children of camp personnel. Connie Thorson, whose parents worked in Minidoka, attended the camp’s elementary schools. Feeling out of place and receiving a small taste of life as a minority, Thorson put peanuts in her eyes at night in the hope of making them less round so she could look more like her classmates.<sup>220</sup> Although those associated with Minidoka received racial backlash for their affiliation, their children did not live normal childhoods and they also spent years behind barbed wire, they had lives to return to and options

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<sup>217</sup> Tamura, *Minidoka*; E. Brooks Andrews, “My story of life with my father Rev. Emery Andrews,” (presentation, Minidoka Pilgrimage, Twin Falls, ID. 2016).

<sup>218</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary,” 35.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 174.

<sup>220</sup> Tamura, *Minidoka*, 103.



away from Minidoka. Nikkei were the only ones involved who lost their Constitutional rights and way of living.

Public perceptions of camp life—encouraged by government statements and popular misconceptions—contributed to initially hostile relationships between incarcerated Nikkei and inhabitants of local communities. The first War Relocation Authority director, Milton S. Eisenhower, claimed the goal for the WRA included creation of isolated evacuation centers for providing work opportunities, schools, and a place where evacuees could live in “modest comfort.”<sup>221</sup> Eisenhower consistently romanticized terms, and even mandated terminology to refer to relocation centers as “pioneer community” and its prisoners as “pioneers” and “colonists.”<sup>222</sup> Believing public relations depended upon widespread approval for the centers, WRA media teams published misleading photos of comfort in newspapers and magazines.

Depression-era photographer Dorothea Lange became a main photographer of the relocation centers, but received heavy censorship guidelines on what she could document for life in the camps. Forbidden images included guard towers, barbed wire, and armed soldiers: anything suggesting a similarity to the notorious Jewish death camps in Europe. As Teresa Tamura points out, “The government wanted the successful sequestration of *Nikkei* documented, but not too well documented.”<sup>223</sup> Instead, images showcasing scenes of happy Nikkei families living in comfortable homes flush with accommodations provided by the government created a false image of excess enjoyed by incarcerated Japanese Americans.

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<sup>221</sup> Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trial*, 57.

<sup>222</sup> Robert T. Hayashi, *Haunted by Waters*, 2007, 43.

<sup>223</sup> Tamura, *Minidoka*, 27.

The WRA's media campaign inspired resistance and resentment from locals suffering under food rations and other wartime shortages, causing Minidoka officials to increase public relations campaigns.<sup>224</sup> With the hope of notifying the public regarding the harsh realities and inhumane living conditions inside Minidoka, Kleinkopf made several trips to organizations in nearby towns to explain camp life. Through these interactions, Kleinkopf noticed that a significant "number of people believed that the government was pampering the Japanese; that they lived in luxury at the Relocation Center while the rest of the country suffered for necessities which were never denied the Japanese."<sup>225</sup>

With the aim of heading off these rumors before they spread, camp officials gave site tours to any interested organizations. Reports from these interactions all showed how widespread the rumors had become. While giving a tour to state superintendents, one "asked to see the apartments with the white tiled bathrooms about which she had heard so much."<sup>226</sup> Others failed to dress appropriately for adverse weather conditions, likely because "they expected city sidewalks," as Kleinkopf suggested.<sup>227</sup> Touring guests received the same meals as incarcerated to further emphasize the harshness of camp life. Requirements that visitors use their ration allowances for unappealing food at the project further emphasized the discrepancy between camp meals and the much better quality available outside Minidoka.<sup>228</sup> One report from Kleinkopf in January 1943 points out WRA hopes that public exposure to the same food as evacuees would reduce misunderstanding: "They were served fat meat with a small serving of vegetables for

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<sup>224</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid, 59-60.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>228</sup> "Guests Must Bring Ration Books—OPA," *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 26, 1943.

lunch. No butter, no milk, no sugar. I wish more people from local communities would come and see the conditions under which the residents, and Federal employees, too, live and work. Perhaps so many rumors about pampering would never start.”<sup>229</sup> Despite these localized efforts, reports of pampering continued in several regions around incarceration sites, gaining national attention as public outcry increased, as outlined next.

Multiple media outlets spread harsh and false narratives regarding living conditions in war relocation centers. An article in *Baptist Magazine* titled, “What Has Happened to America’s Japanese,” portrayed lavish meals and excessive food.<sup>230</sup> The Denver Post furthered these claims by reporting the centers made Nikkei “lazy and soft” by hoarding food denied to everyone else.<sup>231</sup> Larry Smith’s NBC show provided further misdirection by criticizing “those Easy-on-the-Japs Club, who carried cakes and gifts to Japanese in assembly centers” and said “I don’t want to hear about the Jap gardener who did a good job around the house. I don’t want to hear about the Jap farmer who sold tomatoes cheaper than the white man.”<sup>232</sup> Although these reports provided inaccurate portrayals, they directly reflected anti-Nikkei sentiment and helped form public opinion regarding camp life.

Rumors regarding coddling by the government resulted in investigations into the centers’ food supplies. Leading this charge, California Representative F. Leroy Johnson called for a Congressional investigation. Per Johnson’s report: “According to the summary of information, and rumors from many sources concerning the situation in the Japanese relocation centers, a

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<sup>229</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary,” 110.

<sup>230</sup> “Article in Missions About Evacuees Disappointing” response to *Missions* article “What Has Happened to America’s Japanese,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, February 3, 1943.

<sup>231</sup> “WRA Answers Denver Post’s Charges Of Food Hoarding and Soft Life,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 5, 1943.

<sup>232</sup> “An NBC Announcer Comments,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, May 8, 1943.

large quantity of eggs, butter, sugar, coffee, and meat is being received at these centers. On the contrary, the people who live in the nearby towns of these centers are not even receiving necessary portions for their food supply.”<sup>233</sup> Although these claims eventually proved false, the public accepted them as true. When Senator Reynolds of North Carolina joined his voice in calling for a similar investigation, Wyoming’s incarceration center at Heart Mountain and Minidoka each published open invitations for the public and senators to visit the sites and view the harsh realities of camp life for themselves, such as the one below.<sup>234</sup>



Kleinkopf claimed a big reason many outside the incarceration sites jumped on these claims centered on existing racism and eagerness to accept any inflammatory statements—in this case pampering charges—as a cause to promote further anti-Japanese sentiment.<sup>236</sup>

With the public, media, and politicians largely against them, the WRA and camp newspapers began making more concentrated efforts to refute pampering charges in early 1943. In a letter to her teacher, one student vented her frustrations at the pampering charges by asking: “Because we are in centers, is our food supposed to be poorer than what the American families

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<sup>233</sup> “Rep. Sheppard Spikes Rumors of WRA Food Extravagance,” *Minidoka Irrigator* January 9, 1943.

<sup>234</sup> “See Luxuries for Yourself-Heart Mountain Invites Sen Reynolds,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 27, 1943.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary.”

are now eating outside.”<sup>237</sup> Significant attention focused on emphasizing low costs spent on feeding evacuees: less than 52 cents per person per day on average for many centers.<sup>238</sup> The official WRA report proclaimed that the “center residents are rationed on the same basis as the civilian population.”<sup>239</sup> A response published in the *Irrigator* to the media reporting on camp luxuries stated: “You give a mouth-watering account of the food and the menus, but does it ever occur to any American outside the camps that even a Japanese might want to eat just what he wants rather than what is shoved out to him?”<sup>240</sup> Although the camps provided food, the injustice behind a lack in choosing what they ate became a factor which seemed lost on the various politicians and media outlets reporting against the camps. These assurances about low costs spent on evacuee diets, emphasis on rationing practices in the camps, and promoting understanding enjoyed only minimal success. The biggest way to prove their lack of luxuries came to rely on increased community awareness.

To address public hostility, Minidoka held an open house for officials and individual citizens to view camp realities for themselves. With the public grudgingly adopting the rationing program, food allotments became one of the first elements examined. Although this program proved difficult for many to understand, and the points required to purchase various items changed during the war depending on availability, observing quantities allotted each group provides valuable insight into racial discrepancies and treatment during the war.<sup>241</sup> Those living

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid, 219.

<sup>238</sup> “WRA Answers Denver Post’s Charges Of Food Hoarding and Soft Life,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 5, 1943.

<sup>239</sup> “Cody Director Answers Food Waste Charges,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, May 15, 1943.

<sup>240</sup> “Article in Missions About Evacuees Disappointing” response to *Missions* article “What Has Happened to America’s Japanese,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, February 3, 1943.

<sup>241</sup> “World War II Rationing,” United States History, accessed January 18, 2017. <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1674.html>.

in Twin Falls received ration coupons, providing them with more purchasing power than prisoners living in WRA centers. Initially, coffee drinkers outside confinement sites received eleven pounds for five weeks.<sup>242</sup> In comparison, residents in the WRA centers could only access one pound in six-week allotments, or less than one-percent the amount of regular ration allowances.<sup>243</sup> Sugar, which chapter two defined as a crucial wartime good, received even more careful distribution. Under these guidelines, consumers could access only one-half pound of sugar per week, about half their normal use, while WRA mess halls made 1.5 pounds last for 90 meals.<sup>244</sup> Kleinkopf further observed sugar's absence in Nikkei dining areas while it remained available on the white-only administrative tables.

Before, during, and after WWII much of the United States' meat went to feed soldiers overseas.<sup>245</sup> Many of these non-perishable and high protein goods became unavailable to the camps before regular citizens had difficulty acquiring them. The military rationing system included types C and D rations. Field Ration Cs included canned meats and beans high in nutritional value. Field Ration Ds served as "reserve" and "emergency" rations consisting of bars made from peanut butter, sugar, and chocolate.<sup>246</sup> These included square biscuits (type 'C' ration), whole-wheat crackers, whole dried powdered milk, vegetable purees, dehydrated tomato cocktail, and whole dried eggs. The inaccessible canned goods included bacon, concentrated orange juice, all beans, corned beef, fresh roast-beef, carrots, processed cheese, chicken,

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<sup>242</sup> "Ration Coupons on the Home Front, 1942-1945," David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University Libraries Digital Repository, accessed January 19, 2017. [https://repository.duke.edu/dc/hfc?f%5Bactive\\_fedora\\_model\\_ssi%5D%5B%5D=Item&page=5](https://repository.duke.edu/dc/hfc?f%5Bactive_fedora_model_ssi%5D%5B%5D=Item&page=5).

<sup>243</sup> "Pound per 6 Weeks Limit Imposed on Coffee Drinkers," *Minidoka Irrigator*, February 27, 1943.

<sup>244</sup> "Meals in Project Comply With Rationing Orders," *Minidoka Irrigator*, April 10, 1943.

<sup>245</sup> Wansink, "Changing Eating Habits on the Home Front," 90-99.

<sup>246</sup> "Army Operational Rations," Army Quartermaster Foundation (2018), accessed March 20, 2018, <https://www.qmfound.com/article/army-operational-rations-historical-background/>.

preserved butter, corned beef hash, meat and vegetable hash, hominy (lye), mincemeat, pork sausage, sweet potatoes, Vienna style sausage, tuna fish, asparagus, apricots, dried prunes, sweet cherries, and pineapple juice.<sup>247</sup> Meat rationing in Minidoka included 2.5 pounds of undesirable cuts per week for adults, including fat and bones, in comparison with two pound allotments comprising good cuts (not including fat and bones) for free citizens.<sup>248</sup> Limited food supplies left cooks scrambling to create adequate meals in a camp-wide effort to provide well-balanced meals costing only 40-42 cents per person per day.<sup>249</sup> To make their weekly allotments last, camp policies dictated that chefs serve meat once per day and allow only one egg per person four times per week.<sup>250</sup> Despite these efforts, block managers often complained to Project Steward Krumenacher regarding the lack of variety in mess hall meals. In reference to these petitions and quality of food, Kleinkopf noted:

“The residents have petitioned the Project Steward to serve more salmon and halibut and less link cod. The cod is terrible. One needs a gas mask. Forty-five cents per day per person is the amount allotted for buying food for the evacuees and this does not permit the buying of better foods. The milk situation is still bad. One-half cup per meal is allowed children under 12 years of age, elderly people, invalids, and pregnant mothers.”<sup>251</sup>

Although milk and butter already proved difficult to obtain, as this quote points out, these commodities regularly received additional cutbacks, and meatless days became common.

Mitsuye Yamada, a Minidoka hospital worker, recalled that limited access to high-nutrition

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<sup>247</sup> “Restriction Placed on Food Items,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 2, 1943.

<sup>248</sup> Sarah Sundin, “Make It Do—Meat & Cheese Rationing in World War II,” accessed January 19, 2017. <http://www.sarahsundin.com/make-it-do-meat-and-cheese-rationing-in-world-war-ii-2/>; “Meat Rationing Planned by WRA,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, December 12, 1942.

<sup>249</sup> “Steward Division Plans Balanced Meals for Residents’ Consumption,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 23, 1943.

<sup>250</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary.”

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid*, 143.

foods such as fruits and vegetables caused painful and nearly constant indigestion in most incarcerated.<sup>252</sup>

The food which Nikkei could access often proved unappetizing or physically difficult to eat. After walking significant distances (sometimes miles) to their dining halls, incarcerated often remarked on the terrible amount of grit in their mouths from all the dust, and how it made eating difficult.<sup>253</sup> Leaking sewage provided another off-putting element to dining experiences. When the poorly constructed treatment plant seeped raw sewage into the ponds, the wind often blew the foul smell across the camp, ruining many appetites.<sup>254</sup> Kleinkopf carefully recorded many of the meals served at Minidoka, and quickly pointed out the numerous flaws in variety and preparation by cooks who often had no experience preparing food. Comments such as “Lunch was terrible,” “Lunch poor,” and “food too rotten, left the table very hungry” became routine descriptions for meals.<sup>255</sup> The following entries in Kleinkopf’s diary portray fish’s substitute for other unavailable protein sources, and the inadequacy of its preparation:

December 11, 1942: “Black cod was served for dinner. Black cod is bad to smell and worse to eat. It looks and tastes as if it had been embalmed for a year or more. Most of us refuse it. There were minced ham and potatoes for those who can’t eat fish.”<sup>256</sup>

This entry suggests available alternatives to fish for appointed personnel, an option unavailable to evacuees.

December 17, 1942: “The food being served at the administrative mess hall is becoming worse day by day. On fish days, which is every Friday, and sometimes two Fridays come in a week, we eat fish or nothing. The smell of fish permeates the outside air so that we know what the menu is without going inside. When we sniff the smell we oftentimes turn

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<sup>252</sup> Mitsuye Yamada, “Minidoka Revisited,” in Tamura, *Minidoka*, 38.

<sup>253</sup> “Time Out,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, April 3, 1943.

<sup>254</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary.”

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, 12, 38.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.



around and go back to our offices. It is possible to eat the soup and the dessert, though the soup usually contains so much curry powder that I find it impossible to eat much of it.”<sup>257</sup> January 25, 1943: “Had smelt for lunch. It was underdone and many refused it. Having fish twice a week now. At twenty-five cents per meal, one can’t complain, but we’d all be willing to pay more and have the menu changed.”<sup>258</sup>

Kleinkopf’s unhappiness with the increasing occurrence with which fish was served and the willingness to even pay more for different food emphasizes the lack of control even appointed personnel had over camp meals.

February 2, 1943: “See people going to the dining hall door, pause a moment, then turn and leave. It’s fish.”<sup>259</sup>

A student essay titled “Kind of World I would Like to See,” showed a desire for a world “where mess halls, dust storms, wire fence, sentries, ration stamps and Friday fish be a thing of the past, where the farmers return to their soil.”<sup>260</sup> This suggests that the fish was unappetizing to Nikkei as well as appointed personnel. Herein lies a direct example of cultural degradation related to traditional Japanese foodways. Naomichi Ishige, mentioned in Chapter One, emphasized the importance of fish to the Japanese diet. To receive such an important cultural staple prepared so inadequately and inedible—and served on plain, metal, government institutional wares in comparison to the elaborate China sets Nikkei used pre-incarceration, as emphasized by Stacey Camp in Chapter One—proved a significantly harsh humiliation to the Nikkei incarceration experience at Minidoka.<sup>261</sup>

March 8 1943: “An impossible concoction of ground spiced meat and eggs was served for lunch. Took two bowls of soup and saved the meat dish for the garbage. There’s a

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>260</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary,” 436-437.

<sup>261</sup> Camp, “Landscapes of Japanese American Internment,” 171-172., Ishige, *The History and Culture of Japanese Food*.

great waste of food here because of food preparations that many people can't eat.”<sup>262</sup>

Although these records come from a white staff member, Kleinkopf—who admitted to better access with better food and dining conditions than the center's Nikkei—provides insight into other records. The *Irrigator* consistently entreated its readers to forgo wasting food by pointing out that “The wastage of food is as important as food rationing itself.”<sup>263</sup> Reading only these records provided by Nikkei could lead to the false interpretation that food wastage occurred from picky eaters or excess quantities. Including Kleinkopf's references shows the major culprit for un-eaten food came not from choice but an inability to eat inedible food.

Following investigations into living conditions, relationships between Minidoka and local communities began improving. An ensuing *Times News* article from nearby Twin Falls not only adamantly refuted all rumors, it provided an extremely favorable account of Nikkei and offered a scathing rebuke to coddling reports. Highlighting the economic hardships imposed from abandoning their homes and property, their damaged self-esteem, and the ever-present dust mentioned along with the Spartan living arrangements and plain meals provided angry citizens with an entirely unexpected revelation for life at Minidoka. The article stated that “All in all, the evacuees are cheerfully making the best of a bad situation—and without being coddled.”<sup>264</sup> As local groups and individuals realized the inadequate and almost inhumane living arrangements Nikkei dealt with, they began showing more support.<sup>265</sup> For example, noticing the landscape

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>263</sup> Untitled article, *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 9, 1943.

<sup>264</sup> O.A. Kelker, “Nothing Luxurious or Fancy at Jap Camp; Tour Blasts Rumors, *The Times News*, August 14, 1942, accessed February 1, 2016.  
<http://access.newspaperarchive.com.libpublic3.library.isu.edu/Viewer/fullpagepdfviewer?img=169420406>.

<sup>265</sup> “Twin Falls Residents Donate Bulbs, Shrubs, Flower Seeds to Hunt,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, March 27, 1943.

void of any trees, flowers, shrubs, and green grass, the Twin Falls Chamber of Commerce, local churches, nearby garden clubs, and private citizens donated seeds and plants for beautification projects.<sup>266</sup> Efforts to reclaim their physical landscape while creating their own self-sustained farming system served as the next major hurdle faced by Nikkei, as explored in Chapter 4.

### **3.5: Conclusion**

Nikkei families faced cultural degradation and inhumane living conditions while imprisoned inside Minidoka's barbed wire fences. An inability to produce and cook their own food combined with pressure to assimilate, resulted in an abandonment of traditional cultural practices while chaotic mealtimes destabilized family structures. Recreation, beautification efforts, and holiday celebrations served as a few ways incarcerated individuals attempted to increase morale and re-take some modicum of control over their lives, but these received only minimal success. Instead, misinformed outsiders rallied against the incarceration centers accusing Nikkei of living in luxury. The reality behind living conditions centered on exclusion from access to quality foods and deteriorating identities. Each of these elements factored into the major changes incarceration imposed on Nikkei families.

This chapter further emphasizes Nikkei attempts at exerting food agency despite limitations and barriers from government restrictions, hostile outsiders, and inadequate resources. Upon insistence from politicians, investigations into the centers proved a reality much harsher than the general public anticipated. Knowledge of the terrible conditions surrounding the camp foodways ultimately changed local perceptions and attitudes towards Nikkei.

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<sup>266</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."

## **Chapter 4: Food Production and Relocation**

A significant and impressive feat accomplished by incarcerated Nikkei included developing untamed desert into an entirely self-sustained food production system capable of feeding everyone at the center. As the herculean efforts to create these farms came to fruition, though, the War Relocation Authority (WRA) changed its emphasis from food production to once again relocating Nikkei, this time into regular society. This chapter addresses these major components in two sections. Section one outlines the farming program created at Minidoka, including labor shortages created by the Nikkei's volunteer work on local farms. Section two emphasizes the WRA's shifting goals from establishing farming communities to re-integrating Nikkei back into regular society. Overall, this chapter highlights how Nikkei balanced pressure to produce their own food while maintaining pre-incarceration foodways.

### **4.1: "Instantly needed was food:"<sup>267</sup> Camp Farming and Food Production**

Although Nikkei neglected their own food supply in favor of volunteer work and military service, they created a diverse food supply by participating in the nation's Victory Garden program, developing a complex irrigation system to water crops, and establishing hog and poultry farms. As they moved toward self-sustainment, Nikkei found more opportunities to use food production as a means for gaining control of their surroundings as well as reclaiming some of their cultural traditions lost during their early incarceration. Issues surrounding supply shortages, as portrayed in chapter three, combined with a WRA mandate that the Centers become self-sufficient compounded this problem of feeding incarcerated Japanese Americans. Nikkei at

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<sup>267</sup> Shrontz "Evacuees Arrive : The War Relocation Authority," in Shrontz-Wright, *Hunt for Idaho*.

Minidoka addressed these problems through Victory Gardens, an elaborate farming system, and livestock production. Although Minidoka's placement on sagebrush desert made food production difficult, this remained a crucial aspect for the camps.

The Bureau of Reclamation chose incarceration sites for each of the relocation centers based on government land-development goals.<sup>268</sup> Each of the centers were built in isolation, often in deserts and swamps overrun by mosquitos. Many of the camps' placements on large, undeveloped federal land-tracts provided significant labor pools to cultivate the areas and establish farming communities.<sup>269</sup> Idaho's Northside Canal already provided irrigation to the state's southern region, but some areas remained in need of additional labor to develop the sagebrush desert.<sup>270</sup> Placed near Jerome and Twin Falls, the Minidoka incarceration site's labor potential and proximity to water access from the Northside and Milner-Gooding Canals provided the development opportunity relocation officials desired. Specifically, the War Relocation Authority notified its personnel in the first few months of the camp's operation that "the primary reason for the choice of the location for the Minidoka Center was the great amount of unused Federal land lying on the north bank of the North Side Canal. Here were great possibilities for the development of a large irrigation tract."<sup>271</sup> Former incarcerated Shizu Yamamoto's recollection that "When we came here, you didn't see anything green" emphasizes the difficult task ahead of incarcerated Nikkei in manipulating the harsh desert landscape into productive farmland.<sup>272</sup> Each

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<sup>268</sup> Tamura, *Minidoka*.

<sup>269</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."

<sup>270</sup> Tamura, *Minidoka*.

<sup>271</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary," 4.

<sup>272</sup> Shizu Yamamoto, quoted in Theresa Tamura, *Minidoka*, 208.

of these points provide scope and context to the environmental and mental spaces in which evacuees took resided.

## **4.2: Victory Gardens**

This section highlights the different ways gardening affected the Japanese American incarceration experience. All Americans, free citizens and incarcerated Nikkei, took part in the Victory Garden program, an initiative that linked food production and self-reliance with the war effort and broader ideals of patriotism and U.S. citizenship. Victory Gardens at private residences and urban landscapes became part of the domestic front's mobilization in the national all-out war effort for supplementing the ration program. Incarcerated Nikkei used the gardens as extensions for regaining control of their surroundings, beautification efforts, dietary supplements, and at the behest of WRA administrators. Different gardens served two major purposes: food production and extensions of the beautification and morale efforts mentioned in chapter three.

Victory Gardens boosted national food output. The first demonstration for vegetable gardens as part of a war effort occurred in Manhattan in 1917, during the First World War. Crop blight caused by insects mitigated success for this early phase of the program, but genetically modified strains of vegetables made the program more successful during WWII. Secretary of Agriculture Claude R. Wickard urged Americans to begin growing their own produce in earnest with the expectation that many familiar items like lettuce, melons, and celery would soon disappear from the markets due to emphasis on more easily preserved and shippable foods like tomatoes and

potatoes.<sup>273</sup> Head of the Victory Garden Program H.W. Hauchbaum spearheaded the efforts for public production and set lofty goals calling for 15 million public gardens in cities and suburbs and 5 million additional plots developed privately by families at their homes.<sup>274</sup>

Recommendations from the Department of Agriculture included early-yielding crops such as raspberries, strawberries, soybeans, broccoli, and kale for home gardeners unfamiliar with food production. By 1945, 20 million Victory Gardens produced 40 percent of the United States' vegetables.<sup>275</sup>

Minidoka incarcerated participants in the nation-wide Victory Garden program shortly after their arrival. Understanding land development and food production served the Relocation Centers' food demands, project administrators designated 320 acres around barrack living quarters as garden space.<sup>276</sup> Although their arrival at Minidoka in August 1942 proved too late for immediate planting, Nikkei prepared the ground for a successful 1943 crop by clearing sagebrush and outlining plots with the ever-present basalt rock. The first food harvested in June 1943 reflected the transfer of Japanese foodways behind the camp's barbed wire fence: 17 baskets of Daikon, a type of Japanese radish many Nikkei ate pre-incarceration.<sup>277</sup> After spending a year suffering from inadequate—and often inedible—food from the dining halls, Victory Gardens supplied the Project Steward with fresh fruits and vegetables like watermelon,

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<sup>273</sup> Claude R. Wickard in F.F. Rockwell, "Wanted: 20,000,000 Gardens Wanted," *Saturday Evening Post*, (February 6, 1943), MasterFILE Premiere, accessed February 20, 2018, <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.libpublic3.library.isu.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&sid=5474f955-d34a-4f6d-b1ff-fcb184b0d54d%40sessionmgr4010>.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> "World War II Rationing," *United States History*, accessed January 18, 2017. <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1674.html>.

<sup>276</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."; Anna Hosticka Tamura, "Minidoka gardens," in *Surviving Minidoka*, ed. Tremayne and Shallat, 69.

<sup>277</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary," 147.

cantaloupe, pumpkin, squash, and tomatoes.<sup>278</sup> Minidoka Victory Gardens achieved such success that some classes in the Project schools developed additional plots, which teachers eagerly participated in, and by June 1943 vegetable gardens were grown around every barrack building.<sup>279</sup> These gardens provided Nikkei with the opportunity to not only supplement their diets, but to regain partial control over their lives.

Nikkei expanded on their early seed and shrub planting beautification efforts by creating elaborate rock gardens. Although Minidoka's environment often included harsh weather conditions ranging from exceedingly hot summers to bitterly cold winters, evacuees beautified their surroundings, and broke up the camp's desolate scenery. Nikkei used gravel, lava rock, and sagebrush to create walkways, cover mud, and decorate free spaces to claim power in an overwhelmingly powerless situation. Evacuees became so adept at handling bitterbrush that they even used the plant to create beautiful ash trays, hat racks, flower holders, and walking sticks that residents from local towns travelled to Minidoka to see.<sup>280</sup> Taking control of freedom wherever they could served as outlets for pent-up frustrations and relationships between other incarcerated and camp personnel.<sup>281</sup> Like the Victory Gardens, these designed landscapes allowed Nikkei to hold on to aspects of their culture and methods for healing.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> "Residents Soon To Have Home Grown Vegetables," *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 12, 1943.

<sup>279</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."

<sup>280</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."

<sup>281</sup> Tamura, "Minidoka gardens-Gardening was a cultural fusion of self-preservation and hope," in *Surviving Minidoka* ed. Tremayne and Shallat. 98.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*



### 4.3: Creating Self-Sustained Food Production

Although Victory Gardens allowed for a greater meal variety, they remained inadequate to feed Minidoka's entire population. This section examines incarcerated efforts at becoming self-sustained. My focus includes the original reason for the mandate that evacuees produce their own food, how Nikkei developed the land, and the different methods for producing food they used. Although every year of the center's operation will receive analysis, 1943 and 1944 held the peak populations, produced the most food, and therefore hold the major focus of this section.

A 1943 meeting of War Relocation Center authorities in Washington D.C. decreed self-supporting food production systems as the primary goal for all Nikkei incarceration sites.<sup>283</sup> This mandate, borne from the long-term goal of establishing farming communities on federal land, immediate demands for food from Lend-Lease, military needs, rationing programs, and public hostility toward incarcerated regarding food (as outlined in chapter three) in what Chief of Agricultural Division Ervin J. Utz described as "one of the most critical shortages of certain types of food in its entire history."<sup>284</sup> WRA Director Dillon S. Myer informed Minidoka officials the expectation that all relocation sites produce food valuing \$253,000 in 1943, and \$5,000,000-worth in 1944. Myer further cautioned that if "production falls below this figure, we will be unable to provide a ration of the quality and quantity now planned."<sup>285</sup> With limited fruit and vegetable supplies nationwide, regular markets excluded relocation centers in distributing those goods, meaning Nikkei had to grow any produce they consumed.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."

<sup>284</sup> "Diet of Evacuees Depends on Center's Farm Outputs," *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 12, 1943.

<sup>285</sup> "Director Stafford Relates Ultimate Objectives of the Minidoka Center," *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 19, 1943; "SOS! More Farm Workers Needed!" *Minidoka Irrigator*, July 3, 1943.

<sup>286</sup> "Lack of Workers Retards Projects Farming Program," *Minidoka Irrigator*, May 22, 1943.

Minidoka officials embraced the need for self-sustainment. Project Director Stafford prioritized “subjugating as much land as possible” by determining that: “New construction, assignment of labor, and everything else on the project will be reloaded directly or indirectly to the production, processing, and conservation of food.”<sup>287</sup> This resulted in the construction of root cellars and bakeries instead of schools. Stafford further urged his charges that: “We are engaged in a hard war and everything we do on this project must be done to aid the nation’s war effort. If something is not essential to the war effort then it is not essential to this project.”<sup>288</sup> Camp administrators also encouraged incarcerated to grow vegetables and other farm crops by initiating a series of forum discussions regarding Victory Gardens and farms. Immediate goals included planting 400 acres with vegetables, including 30 acres string beans, 10 acres broccoli, 20 acres cabbage, 20 acres carrots, 20 acres sweet corn, 10 acres table beets, 20 acres lettuce, 25 acres peas, 20 acres radishes, 10 acres nappa, 10 acres rutabagas, 10 acres summer squash, 25 acres onions, 10 acres tomatoes, 10 acres turnips, and 70 acres potatoes. Experimental crops such as spinach, cucumbers, cauliflower, burdock, soy beans, eggplant, and melons took up the remaining acres.<sup>289</sup> Although they received increasing pressure to establish farms, Nikkei remained reluctant to fully embrace the concept of developing unfamiliar land they had few ties to.

To increase Nikkei willingness to embrace the farming program, WRA officials presented the concept of production as an answer to racism and a way for gaining acceptance from

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<sup>287</sup> “Director Stafford Relates Ultimate Objectives of the Minidoka Center,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 19, 1943.

<sup>288</sup> “Fire Department, Farm Division Are Given Larger Quotas of Workers,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, July 10, 1943.

<sup>289</sup> Untitled Article, *Minidoka Irrigator*, April 24, 1943.

mainstream, white Americans. Drawing on the recent issues regarding negative public perception of the sites, Myer pointed out that “public criticism will make it particularly difficult” to live in peace with their neighbors if they “hold agricultural land in idleness and do not make full use of the labor and skills of the evacuees”<sup>290</sup> After receiving notification for significantly decreased future food allowances, Minidoka’s Agriculture Division Chief Bob Davidson urged that: “I do not think there is any question but that evacuees will have to get out in the fields and work if dining hall meals are to be kept to their present levels.”<sup>291</sup> Stafford also asked the *Irrigator* to publish that: “Nothing will injure public relations more than to assume that we have land, manpower, water and seed and yet fail to produce our own food.”<sup>292</sup> With outside citizens unwilling to tolerate the centers’ purchasing rationed foods, self-sustainment was presented as a crucial piece in race relations: a topic many Nikkei held dear on account of their incarceration based on race.

Most Nikkei genuinely desired to support the war effort while improving their own situations, but their willingness to answer the call for outside emergency harvesters proved detrimental to their own food supplies.<sup>293</sup> With more than 2,000 of Minidoka’s best workers employed on sugar beet and potato fields, the camp’s food development programs could not progress as planned.<sup>294</sup> As the *Irrigator* pointed out:

In its largest sense, the leaving of men for harvest work is an integral part of the national all-out program for victory. It is a happy thought to know we are sharing in that program. However, the full gravity of the exigencies of labor created within Hunt must not be

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<sup>290</sup> “Myer Stresses Necessity Of Active Participation In Agricultural Program,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, May 22, 1943.

<sup>291</sup> “Diet of Evacuees Depends on Center’s Farm Outputs,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 12, 1943.

<sup>292</sup> “Director Stafford Relates Ultimate Objectives of the Minidoka Center,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 19, 1943.

<sup>293</sup> Tamura, *Minidoka*.

<sup>294</sup> “This Must Be Our Goal!” *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 7, 1942.

discounted. Men are needed, and needed badly, for vital jobs—jobs upon which hinge the comfortable living of the people.<sup>295</sup>

Labor shortages continued to plague incarcerated at Minidoka throughout the camp's duration.<sup>296</sup>

The following plea issued by the *Irrigator* further emphasizes how desperate they became for labor:

The project farm program is behind schedule. It is lagging because not enough men are on hand to do the irrigation and soil preparation work. Individuals employed in the different departments who were farmers before evacuation are being transferred to the agricultural division, and school children and volunteers from various work divisions are serving as shock-troops to speed the preparations for food raising. But they are not enough.<sup>297</sup>

Faced with the choice of giving into pressure to prove their loyalty by saving local farms and easing tensions from the same groups whose food supplies they labored so hard to protect with their own well-being, Nikkei strove to achieve all goals; even when it came at the expense of their own leisure, comfort, and education.<sup>298</sup>

To supplement labor shortages caused by emergency harvesting efforts, relocation out of the center (described later in this chapter), and volunteering for military service, Harvest Vacations utilized adolescent labor for food production.<sup>299</sup> Camp administrators usually scheduled Harvest Vacations every October, but they often extended into November to ensure maximum food output from the camp farms. These breaks required students and teachers to work on camp

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> "Colony's Acute Labor Shortage Now Relieved," *Minidoka Irrigator*, December 9, 1942; "Three-Point Program for Labor Cited," *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 7, 1942; "Labor Shortage In Center Acute," *Minidoka Irrigator*, April 10, 1943; "Positions Open For Farm Workers Here," *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 5, 1943.

<sup>297</sup> "Project Food Shortage A Possibility," *Minidoka Irrigator*, April 17, 1943.

<sup>298</sup> , "Sheehan Outlines Irrigation Plans," *Minidoka Irrigator*, April 24, 1943; *Minidoka Irrigator*, "Need Workers to Push Farm Plans," April 10, 1943.

<sup>299</sup> "Farm Program Guidance Set," *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 21, 1942.

farms, or teenagers to work local sugar beet and potato fields.<sup>300</sup> P.E. classes also devoted their time to clearing sagebrush, and school programs often required children to remain after school to work on the farms.<sup>301</sup> The high school also received responsibility for developing and maintaining an additional 50 acres of land, emphasizing the WRA's efforts to utilize every available source of labor.

Clearing and preparing the land for farming proved immensely challenging. Farm machinery remained largely nonexistent due to rubber rationing and high demand for farming equipment on outside farms producing food for the rationing program, so Nikkei completed the work almost entirely by hand, including working through and around large deposits of massive basalt rocks.<sup>302</sup> Although Nikkei determination and ingenuity allowed for immediate crop yields, the *Irrigator* pointed out that: "prepar[ing] these fields from raw sagebrush has taken several times the amount of labor required to cultivate ordinary farm land."<sup>303</sup> Efforts at developing an irrigation system to water the crops suffered greatly from labor shortages, and Nikkei initially resorted to keeping their precious plants alive by carrying buckets of water from canals to the fields.<sup>304</sup> Evacuees worked tirelessly developing a five-mile lateral off the Milner-Gooding Canal which irrigated 1,100 acres east of the camp.<sup>305</sup> This system supplied 20 gallons of water per

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<sup>300</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Donald E. Hausler, "History of the Japanese-American Relocation Center at Hunt, Minidoka County, Idaho" (master's thesis, Utah State University, 1964).

<sup>303</sup> "Myer Stresses Necessity Of Active Participation In Agricultural Program," *Minidoka Irrigator*, May 22, 1943; "Lack of Workers Retards Projects Farming Program," *Minidoka Irrigator*, May 22, 1943.

<sup>304</sup> "Green Issues Call For 150 Men To Work On Improving Canal," *Minidoka Irrigator*, March 27, 1943; "Irrigation Workers Needed Immediately," *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 26, 1943; "Construction of Irrigation System Nears Completion," *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 5, 1943; Harvey Floyd in "Irrigation Workers Needed Immediately," *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 26, 1943; "Workers Needed!" *Minidoka Irrigator*, July 3, 1943.

<sup>305</sup> "1100 Acres To Be Farmed," *Minidoka Irrigator*, March 20, 1943; "Workers Needed!" *Minidoka Irrigator*, July 3, 1943.

second into the camp, which then received distribution to the fields and some blocks' Victory Gardens.<sup>306</sup> Evacuees became so dependent on irrigation water that they conducted repairs on the seeping Milner-Gooding canal even when the damages occurred miles away from Minidoka and they held no obligation to do so.<sup>307</sup> As laborers cleared the land in preparation for planting, others prepared to make the first harvest as successful as possible. Agricultural workers planted tomatoes, eggplants, pepper, cabbage, broccoli, and 10,000 celery plants (each of which thrive in hot, dry climates) in hot beds for later transplanting once the fields became ready.<sup>308</sup> To assist, Utah's Topaz incarceration camp sent its agricultural research leader Hi Korematsu to Minidoka to survey Minidoka's program and offer suggestions, showing the resources, collaboration, and emphasis relocation centers placed on successful food production.<sup>309</sup>

The War Relocation Authority initially established aggressive farm development plans. Calling for 3,000 to 4,000 acres of cleared sagebrush fed by the Milner-Gooding canal, agriculture officials estimated that Minidoka could produce 688 pounds of vegetables for each evacuee, per year.<sup>310</sup> Then, with each of the ten camps growing different crops, a trade system allowed self-sufficiency. Joseph P. Bacca, the senior engineer in charge of planning Minidoka's development, called for: "truck garden crops ranging from lettuce, peas and beans to tomatoes, potatoes and sprouts."<sup>311</sup> These early plans focused on food in terms of nutritional value, and

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<sup>306</sup> "Sheehan Outlines Irrigation Plans," *Minidoka Irrigator*, May 22, 1943.

<sup>307</sup> Marna Sorenson, "U.S. Citizens Forced to Live in Minidoka Internment Camp," in *Hunt for Idaho*, ed. Shrontz-Wright, 191-193.

<sup>308</sup> "Plants in Hotbed Are Transplanted: Davidson Voices Hope for Four Hundred Acres of Vegetables Planted by End of June," *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 19, 1943.

<sup>309</sup> Untitled Article, *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 23, 1943.

<sup>310</sup> "Maintenance of Diet Standards Up to Evacuees," *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 19, 1943.

<sup>311</sup> "Huge Farm area in Project Plan," *Minidoka Irrigator*, September 18, 1943; "3-Day Conference to Open on Farm Self-Subsistence," *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 10, 1942.

only limited mention of daikon, nappa, or other traditional Japanese crops suggests officials did not prioritize Nikkei food culture. Before Nikkei could exert influence over determining crops included in large-scale food production, they needed a successful 1943 harvest season.

Hard work and ingenuity on the part of Nikkei accounted for a successful 1943 harvest and the first steps toward self-sustainment.<sup>312</sup> Farmers toiled an average 12.8 hours per day planting, weeding, and watering in the desert surrounding Minidoka.<sup>313</sup> Nikkei spent so much time amongst the sagebrush that complications from Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (fever, rash, and headache) caused by tick bites served as a significant detriment to worker health, causing additional slow-downs in land development.<sup>314</sup> Before workers completed the irrigation system, farmers walked miles to fill buckets from nearby canals and hand-watered hundreds of acres. Despite these difficulties, the 1943 harvest proved successful, and incarcerated began eating their own mass-produced vegetables in July, 1943 (peas).<sup>315</sup> Following is a table produced from the 1943 Project Farm Report made by the Agriculture Section director W.E. Rawlings:

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<sup>312</sup> “Stride Noted In Food Program: More Livestock Farms Planned For WRA Centers; Vegetable Output Huge,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 20, 1943.

<sup>313</sup> “Farm Wages Hit High on June 1,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, July 24, 1943.

<sup>314</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary.”

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*

**Table 4.1: 1943 Minidoka Project Farm Report<sup>316</sup>**

<b>Crop</b>	<b>Pounds</b>
Potatoes	979,700
Green and dry onions	302,319
Squash	101,814
Watermelon	92,440
Nappa	87,150
Carrot	79,325
Turnips	55,591
Green peas	38,491
Green beans	36,983
Sweet corn	26,420
Green peppers	22,823
Cantaloupe	22,100
Honeydew	14,195
Celery	13,860
Cucumber	10,276
Eggplant	2,201
Lettuce	1,010
Broccoli	480

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid, 309-310.



<b>Total</b>	2,221,512 lbs
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Although over two-million pounds of produce resulted from the first harvest year, the yields could have been even higher without the delay of access to a fully-functioning irrigation system before planting. Insects devoured significant portions of cabbage, broccoli, and four acres of cauliflower. Furthermore, turnip, lettuce, and nappa (a type of Chinese cabbage) crops were hindered by a lack of water.<sup>317</sup> Production goals did not account for adverse weather conditions such as flooding, droughts, early cold seasons (as occurred in 1942 and 1943), and blight. Instead, Nikkei continued receiving regular threats from camp officials that failure to provide their own food would result in the meals available to them declining drastically both in quality and quantity.<sup>318</sup>

Nikkei used 1943's harvest success to negotiate allowances in growing more traditional Japanese foods. Convinced that they fully embraced the need for self-sustainment, Project Director Stafford agreed to incorporate Gobo into future farming plans. Gobo, also referred to as burdock, served as a Japanese delicacy believed to hold rejuvenation powers. Nikkei cooked and used the roots in various ways for numerous dishes such as stew and pudding or boiled and fried like potatoes. Gobo already grew wild along the canals near the Project, so Stafford simply sent a group to gather the seeds. After travelling several miles, the Nikkei gathered a few pounds by hand, which covered a few acres in the spring 1944.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid, 309-310.

<sup>318</sup> "Diet of Evacuees Depends on Center's Farm Outputs," *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 12, 1943.

<sup>319</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."

Similar to the incorporation of Gobo as reward for their hard work, 1944's reports show an even greater presence of traditional Japanese foods. Despite continued—and increasing—labor shortages, food production steadily rose at Minidoka. The camp farms produced 3,817,311 pounds of vegetables in 1944; nearly 1.6 million pounds more than 1943's already impressive harvest. Crops included: radishes, lettuce, spinach, peas, onion, beets, potatoes, beans, tomatoes, cantaloupe, corn, honeydew, watermelon, carrots, cabbage, turnips, green pepper, cucumber, celery, straw, wheat, oats, barley, rye, and alfalfa hay (the hay was used on the Project livestock farms, discussed below). The reason for growing these foods, in addition to their ability to grow in the desert, included the center's inability to receive them from outside the camp. The Japanese foods grown increased from just nappa and daikon in 1943 to include nappa, mustard green, daikon, eggplant, shingiku (an edible chrysanthemum) and gobo in 1944. Growing traditional Japanese foods allowed Nikkei to reconnect with a few elements to their pre-incarceration foodways and culture. Camp officials stored surplus vegetables for future use and sent some to help self-sustainment efforts at other centers. Minidoka also sent 1,000 pounds of spinach to soldiers on the front.<sup>320</sup> Although establishing an elaborate food production system provided an impressive feat, many farm workers claimed they did the work not for the \$16 per month, but for the Victory program and to have traditional side dishes during their meals.<sup>321</sup> Fujiko Tamura Gardner's fondly remembers foods her family consumed pre-Minidoka:

Before camp we were financially poor but rich in so many other ways because we had all the fruits and vegetables to eat all the time. We were all really healthy. We could only afford to buy one pound of hamburger at a time, so we mixed it with lots of vegetables from our garden. Then, when salmon ran through the creek that cut through our farm our

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<sup>320</sup> "3,817,311 Pounds Vegetables Grown On Project in 1944," *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 20, 1945.

<sup>321</sup> "Agriculture Program Gathers Speed; Volunteers Help Food Production," *Minidoka Irrigator*, July 10, 1943.

mother would grab one, hit it on the head with a baseball bat, and that would be our dinner, again with lots of fruits and vegetables.<sup>322</sup>

Tamura Gardner's emphasis on the inclusion of fresh fruits and vegetables—traditional Japanese staples—grown by her family, shows the importance that produce played on Nikkei lives before their incarceration. The ability to regain some of those items by growing them in Victory Gardens and on the Project farms helped alleviate a portion of the cultural degradation suffered at Minidoka.

Hog and poultry farms complimented fruit and vegetable production by providing Minidoka's main protein sources. The first 50 pigs arrived June 5, 1943, but an additional 200 arrived soon after. The expectation behind using hogs included that they raise enough pork to supply the Project while aiding in the camp's garbage disposal.<sup>323</sup> By 1945, the hog farm produced 306,921 pounds of pork annually. Of this amount, Minidoka's incarcerated consumed 181,326 pounds while trading the remaining 125,595 pounds to camps without pork supplies.<sup>324</sup> Once complete, the "Swine Ranch" included seven feeder houses, two storage houses, two garbage sorting sheds (which determined what garbage the hogs ate), and 69 farrowing houses. The first 2,500 chicks arrived at Minidoka in May 1943, and egg production began with 10,000 chickens in September 1943.<sup>325</sup> As chickens continually arrived—the number believed adequate for egg and poultry sustainment was 20,000 chickens—labor shortages caused delays in building infrastructure to support the poultry farm which included 14 laying houses and 13 brooder

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<sup>322</sup> Tamura Gardner Interview.

<sup>323</sup> "3-Day Conference to Open on Farm Self-Subsistence," *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 10, 1942; "Fowl, Hog Population Hits New High; Self-Subsistence Seen in Future," *Minidoka Irrigator*, July 24, 1943.

<sup>324</sup> "3,817,311 Pounds Vegetables Grown On Project in 1944," *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 20, 1945.

<sup>325</sup> "Farm Production Takes a New Upward Trend," *Minidoka Irrigator*, July 31, 1943; "50 Hogs Coming, Davidson Reveals," *Minidoka Irrigator*, May 29, 1943.

houses.<sup>326</sup> Once fully functioning, poultry supplied 62,720 eggs per year and over 28,000 pounds of meat. Although early plans called for a dairy to provide the camp's milk and beef, limited labor made establishment of another farm infeasible.<sup>327</sup>

Minidoka's food industry included preservation facilities. A fully functional cannery, dehydration plant, and pickling plant, all completed in time for 1943's harvest, decreased food wastage.<sup>328</sup> Because the camps could not receive vitamin C foods, processing the Project's tomatoes received priority.<sup>329</sup> A root cellar built by Nikkei and designed to maintain a relatively even temperature provided safe storage space for canned goods.

Expanding their food production capacities allowed Nikkei more freedom in offering food for special events and purchasing goods from outside vendors, allowing Nikkei to maintain/retain ties with traditional Japanese foodways that they practiced pre-incarceration. Growing soy beans allowed the creation of a tofu manufacturing plant which employed 19 Nikkei who produced 1,500 tofu cakes daily in their attempt to re-introduce this main staple back into Nikkei diets.<sup>330</sup> Although these statistics imply significant evacuee access to tofu, Tamura Gardner recalls only having tofu a couple times during her time at Minidoka.<sup>331</sup> Miso—another traditional dish made from soybeans—also made periodic appearances in mess halls. The Community Activities section used surplus food supplies to offer feasts for military volunteers

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<sup>326</sup> "Lack of Workers Retards Projects Farming Program," *Minidoka Irrigator*, May 22, 1943); Paige A. Parker, "Hunt Camp fades with memories of World War II," *North Side News*, (Jerome, ID), July 1, 1976, in *Hunt for Idaho*, ed. Shrontz-Wright; "3,817,311 Pounds Vegetables Grown On Project in 1944," *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 20, 1945.

<sup>327</sup> "3-Day Conference to Open on Farm Self-Subsistence," *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 10, 1942.

<sup>328</sup> "Pickle Plant Closed on January 6," *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 13, 1945.

<sup>329</sup> "Dehydrating Plant, Cannery Being Constructed Here," *Minidoka Irrigator*, July 31, 1943; Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."

<sup>330</sup> "1,500 Tofu Cakes to be Made Daily," *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 20, 1945.

<sup>331</sup> Tamura Gardner Interview.

prior to their departure.<sup>332</sup> Special luncheons also took place for wives and mothers of dead, missing, or wounded soldiers.<sup>333</sup> Personnel departments used food to motivate and coerce Nikkei into accepting undesired, low paying jobs such as coal workers, by promising steak dinners for those who helped.<sup>334</sup> With limited Japanese food available in the mess halls, Minidoka's co-op general store began purchasing large quantities of rice, shoyu (soy sauce), and nori (seaweed). As the camp exhausted the nearest fish supplies in Salt Lake City, local residencies complained about the lack of available goods, leading to the substance behind Nikkei merchant George S. Kashiwagi's justification for increased prices that "inter-mountain Japanese merchants have sold their stock to various relocation centers."<sup>335</sup> Fish—a pre-incarceration dietary staple for many Nikkei—became another highly desired good once incarcerated Japanese Americans gained purchasing power. Dried shrimp, funyu (fermented tofu), yaki sakana (grilled fish), sashimi (a type of tofu), salted salmon, red snapper, fresh shrimp, sardines, crab, tuna, bonita, mackerel, and sea-bass provided enough supply for the creation of Minidoka's own stand-alone fish store.<sup>336</sup> Purchasing and producing foods such as fish and tofu allowed familiar and culturally important dishes to periodically break the monotony of camp life while maintaining traditional Japanese foodways. The ability to offer food for special occasions combined with Nikkei purchasing power to allow greater flexibility and control over daily dietary practices.

Incarcerated Nikkei food production matters because it highlights a major element of their experience and it contributed to the war effort. Nikkei ability—and willingness—to supply their

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<sup>332</sup> "Huge Banquets to Fete Enlistees, Wives, Parents," *Minidoka Irrigator*, March 13, 1943.

<sup>333</sup> "Luncheon Planned For Next of Kin of War Casualties," *Minidoka Irrigator* January 13, 1945.

<sup>334</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."

<sup>335</sup> Untitled article, *Minidoka Irrigator*, September 25, 1942.

<sup>336</sup> Untitled article, *Minidoka Irrigator*, March 13, 1943.

own food meant the center consumed less outside supplies, allowing more goods available for soldiers, Lend-Lease, and rationing programs. With assistance and rations cut-off to incarceration centers, Japanese Americans' welfare literally depended upon their ability to feed themselves. In doing so, they exerted more control over their physical environment while maintaining a modicum of control and culture.

#### **4.4: Relocation**

Relocating Nikkei from the west coast military exclusion zone and to smaller concentrations in remote areas away from their homes served as a major focus for the War Relocation Authority. During their incarceration, WRA teachers strove to provide Nikkei with skills to increase their chances of success upon their release. Some of these efforts represented benevolent actions from compassionate workers, but many of the jobs for which they received training fell under service categories which perpetuated their standing in lower socioeconomic groups. This section examines several aspects associated with relocation, including ways in which Nikkei faced the concept of moving again and how the centers attempted to prepare them (and often failed). The section also highlights Nikkei experiences in situations designed to perpetuate their subservient roles in food industries and agriculture. Finally, this chapter culminates with accountings of the different welcomes Nikkei received, where they relocated to, and some of the lasting effects incarceration had on their lives.

Relocation served as the second priority for incarceration sites after food development.<sup>337</sup> Four avenues existed for Nikkei to leave the incarceration centers. The first included temporary

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<sup>337</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary."

leave passes for emergency harvest work. Educational opportunities represented the second avenue for relocation, and included students cleared by the FBI leaving to study at government approved colleges and universities east of the exclusion zones. Military service comprised the third opportunity for release. The final method Nikkei used to get out of the relocation centers included repatriation to Japan in exchange for American diplomats and civilians held in Japan.<sup>338</sup>

Before Pearl Harbor, many government officials and private residents viewed the dense concentration of Japanese Americans living in west-coast cities as unhealthy.<sup>339</sup> These groups failed to credit Nikkei communities with establishing agricultural legacies, businesses, and spurring economic growth, and instead stood behind the WRA claim that: “Sociologically and psychologically, dispersed relocation is the best policy.”<sup>340</sup> The overarching goal behind relocation, then, focused on spreading the Nikkei population as thinly as possible in different communities. The WRA promised more jobs along the East coast, specifically around New England and Washington D.C. Efforts to relocate Nikkei near the nation’s capital seemingly overlooked the original reason for their large-scale incarceration based on the belief they posed a threat to national security. The Great Lakes region attempted to lure Nikkei fishermen as the first location to offer them opportunities.<sup>341</sup> In May, 1943, WRA Director Myer stated nationally that: “[a]fter many months of operating relocation centers, the War Relocation Authority is convinced that they are undesirable institutions and should be removed from the American scene as soon as possible.”<sup>342</sup> The new emphasis included: “Relocation of all those persons physically able or

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<sup>338</sup> Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trial*.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Untitled Article, *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 3, 1944.

<sup>341</sup> “Openings Develop For Fisherman, Merchant Seamen,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, February 27, 1944.

<sup>342</sup> Untitled Article, *Minidoka Irrigator*, May 22, 1943.

otherwise capable and the production of food for those remaining in the center are the paramount objectives of the Minidoka Relocation Center.”<sup>343</sup> The concept of relocating to areas other than their original homes, though, proved contentious amongst Nikkei incarcerated.

Although incarceration provided a fearful, derogatory, unjust, and inhumane experience for Nikkei, the thought of uprooting again caused additional angst, especially amongst the older generation Issei. Kleinkopf noted that: “There is considerable opposition to relocation among some of the residents. They are beginning to feel a sense of security here and they greatly fear going to some new community to start life all over again. This is especially true of the older people. The younger people are willing to take a chance and if they find they are not received well in one place, they quickly move on to another.”<sup>344</sup> Those with options for educations and careers—the younger generation Nisei—relocated first. Nikkei without family ties, homes, businesses, or a realistic means for making a living saw little reason to leave the relative safety of their barbed wire confines for a potentially hostile and destitute life on the outside. Some did not want to leave because they feared their ability to procure food, and Minidoka at least provided enough for them to eat.<sup>345</sup> One elderly Nikkei justified his reason to remain by telling Kleinkopf: “We don’t need to worry about relocation. WRA will change its mind. It always does.”<sup>346</sup> Minidoka held the highest relocation rate of all ten camps, but it took significant effort to get everyone to leave.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Untitled Article, *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 19, 1943.

<sup>344</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary,” 166.

<sup>345</sup> Wakatsuki Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*.

<sup>346</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary,” 476.

<sup>347</sup> Tremayne, *Surviving Minidoka*, 72.



Even after the ban forbidding Japanese Americans in the Exclusion Zone lifted on December 20, 1944, allowing Nikkei to return to their original homes, Minidoka's incarcerated maintained mixed emotions regarding relocation. Conflicting reports from those who already left and re-established themselves caused much of the reluctance from those remaining at Minidoka. Letters from former friends relating dispossessed businesses, defaced homes, and sign-bearing neighbors touting slogans such as "No Japs Here" and "No Japs Wanted" provided an ominous view for what a return to regular civilization held.<sup>348</sup> The "Remember Pearl Harbor" league in Washington state pledged hundreds of people to refuse to sell land or do business with returning Japanese Americans.<sup>349</sup> The WRA attempted to head-off negative reports by flooding the *Irrigator* with success stories and cautioned that "The longer a person stays in camp the more difficult it will be for him to readjust himself when he eventually relocates."<sup>350</sup> One significant reason groups protested against Nikkei returning to the area included reluctance in giving up a white dominated landscape. The American Civil Liberties Union director called out some of these groups when he retorted: "The only groups opposed to the return of Japanese are the West Coast agricultural groups who don't want their competition."<sup>351</sup> Only thirty-two percent of Minidoka's population returned to their homes in Seattle and Portland, further altering Nikkei lives post-incarceration.

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Title not found, *Hattiesburg American*, December 18, 1944. 4.

<sup>350</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary," 508.

<sup>351</sup> Roger N. Baldwin, "Farmers Oppose Japanese Return Says Baldwin," *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 6, 1945.

#### 4.5: Manipulations: Futures with Food

Another underlying motive behind relocation included perpetuating Nikkei placement into subservient roles in food services and agriculture. Nikkei of all ages experienced this manipulation, especially the children. The elementary schools taught their students to can vegetables and make sauerkraut after the harvest seasons.<sup>352</sup> Each grade received further responsibility for seeding and cultivating their own garden plots, which they watered by carrying buckets for miles from canals to crops. In early 1943, the high school agriculture classes received 50 acres of land, in what Kleinkopf referred to as “an experimental farm as an incentive for the evacuee boys to enroll in the agriculture classes.”<sup>353</sup> One goal for the emphasis behind placing adolescents in situations associated with food production included aiding the camp’s food supply and preparing teens for future membership in the Future Farmer Association.<sup>354</sup> Kleinkopf pointed out the main purpose also included: “We had been given specific instructions to enroll as many as possible in agricultural courses, since, eventually, Hunt is to become a farming community. [sic] Students not interested in agriculture.”<sup>355</sup> Cooking classes also prepared high schoolers for professions as waitresses and cooks.<sup>356</sup> Taking control by emphasizing specific avenues for employment deemed acceptable by the white camp authorities overseeing incarcerated Nikkei—even when they knew Nikkei did not want futures in those roles—took away additional elements of control Nikkei had in their futures.

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<sup>352</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary.”

<sup>353</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>354</sup> “Hunt’s Agriculture Club Holds Initial Session,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 27, 1943.

<sup>355</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary,” 26.

<sup>356</sup> “High School Plans Class in Cooking,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 24, 1942; “Food Class Opens D.H. 23,” *Minidoka Irrigator* March 20, 1943.

Adults also faced manipulation regarding their futures in food related work. From the earliest moments during their evacuation and incarceration at Minidoka, the WRA encouraged Nikkei to sell farm equipment, tractors, tools, and vehicles to white farmers. Those that refused to sell still lost their equipment when neighbors commandeered it—actions which the government sanctioned as wartime repurposing in support of food production.<sup>357</sup> The few who managed to hold onto ownership of their farming equipment long enough for the WRA to bring it to Minidoka in support of the camp's sustainment efforts still lost it when they left Minidoka and could not transport their goods. The farm machinery then went to white farmers at auction, and the original Nikkei owners received no compensation for their equipment.<sup>358</sup> University of California economics professor Paul S. Taylor's attempts to reassure protesting whites that Nikkei did not threaten the socioeconomic status of whites, and to instead focus on their contributions to production industries further emphasizes some of the mindsets regarding pressure toward Nikkei relocation efforts.<sup>359</sup>

Remaining consistent with assimilation efforts, adult education classes remained open longer than regular schools because, as Kleinkopf mentioned: "There is no reason to stop their Americanization program."<sup>360</sup> These classes emphasized skills in the labor-intensive auto mechanics and farm carpentry sectors, each of which had limited opportunity for upward mobility. The types of opportunities most advertised for relocation opportunities additionally

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<sup>357</sup> Wakatsuki Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*; 77. "Call Issued For Farm Machinery, Cars," *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 27, 1943; "Farm Machinery In Storage Sought," *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 27, 1943; "Cash for Tractors," *Minidoka Irrigator*, March 6, 1943.

<sup>358</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary"; "Call Issued For Farm Machinery, Cars," *Minidoka Irrigator* January 27, 1943; "Farm Machinery In Storage Sought," *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 27, 1943.

<sup>359</sup> "Japanese Return No Farm Threat Says Dr. Taylor," *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 27, 1945.

<sup>360</sup> Kleinkopf, "Relocation Center Diary," 523.

related largely to food, including sharecropping opportunities and available farm land.<sup>361</sup> Sugar beet processors and farming representatives from seven Oregon and Idaho counties unanimously voted and signed on a resolution promising to “continue to strive to promote a better understanding between evacuees and the permanent residents of our respective counties and communities and of our states as a whole.” These sugar beet companies promoted Nyssa, Oregon as an area whose citizens favored Japanese American presence and encouraged Nikkei to take employment in the region’s sugar fields.<sup>362</sup> Many of these efforts on the part of WRA workers seemed like genuine attempts at supplying Nikkei with practical skills for success in mainstream society and reflect a mindset focused on rationing food, but many overlooked that they were essentially training them to remain in subservient roles with little chance of upward mobility.

Tamura Gardner’s recollection of her family’s situation immediately post-incarceration supports the claim that many families were not in a situation for success following their release from the camps.

When the camp closed, we were short of funds. Ellis Shaffer was a big potato farmer in Eden, Idaho and he had a cottage that he let people who worked on his farm stay in. So, we left camp and went there to stay for the one harvest season. I remember one very young man—I thought he was about my age—coming from Mr. Shaffer’s house to the backyard where we were all congregating. He said Mr. Shaffer said he was loaning us out to his father’s farm. Well as he was going back [and] got to the corner of the house, he stopped and hesitated and looked back at us. I could see so much sadness on his face and I told the people “he really feels sorry for us.” You know it’s funny we never felt sorry for us at that time, but because I made that comment looking at this young man...that’s when I began to think ‘I guess we have a lot to be sorry about.’ But after we saved enough money, Mr. Shaffer took us to Shoshone, ID to catch a train to take us back to Tacoma. We still didn’t have a place to live because everything was taken away from us

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<sup>361</sup> “Farm Opportunities,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 20, 1945; “Ogden hears Plea for Nisei-Accept Nisei in Private Business, Employers Told,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 20, 1943; “Year-Round Share-Cropping Opportunity is Offered Will Interview Interested Evacuees,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 20, 1943.

<sup>362</sup> “Better Understanding Aimed in Resolution of Farmers,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 21, 1942.

because we were leasing the land. By the way, an Italian farmer took over our farm, so that's another irony.<sup>363</sup>

Many families experienced similar instances of returning to their homes to find their possessions and property taken over by others. Bainbridge Island represented a somewhat unique circumstance for returning Nikkei due to the relatively high amount of support they received from their neighbors. Japanese Americans served as crucial components in developing this island near Seattle. They installed the first large-scale irrigation system and established commercial raspberry crops.<sup>364</sup> Other minority groups honored this legacy by caring for departing Nikkei's land and property. Frank Yoshikazu Kitamoto, winner of multiple humanitarian and civil liberties awards who was incarcerated as a child in Manzanar and Minidoka, says that his family returned to their Bainbridge Island home "to find the family farm weedy but cared for by Filipinos."<sup>365</sup> The Takemoto family received further help from their church in clearing and preparing their farm for planting. Filipino Americans maintained several other farms in the area. The Rabers family purchased the Koura family farm for one dollar to keep it from being taken over by the government or other entities and sold it back to the Kouras for one dollar upon their return home.<sup>366</sup> These accountings of compassionate neighbors proved the minority, though, as most Nikkei did not have friends to take care of their possessions during their absence.

As Minidoka closed, government workers and local residents sought to utilize the remaining materials. Appointed personnel liquidated the remaining food by sending 180,000 pounds of onions and carrots to other centers.<sup>367</sup> Trucks queued in long lines for scrap lumber and other

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<sup>363</sup> Tamura-Gardener interview.

<sup>364</sup> Tremayne, *Surviving Minidoka*, 72.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid, 84

<sup>367</sup> "February Farm Report Emphasizes Liquidation Work," *Minidoka Irrigator*, March 10, 1945.

supplies, and the library and text books were given to the Indian Service.<sup>368</sup> Some WRA workers (accompanied at times by German POWs from the Rupert camp) remained at Minidoka once the last Nikkei departed to clean the areas, for what farming superintendent L.E. Rice described as: “preparation of leaving the land used for these units in good order for the closure of the WRA.”<sup>369</sup> Chapter five discusses the continued legacy of land developed by incarcerated Japanese Americans: homesteads.

#### **4.6: Conclusion**

Establishing an entirely self-sustained food production system at Minidoka represents one of the most significant and impressive feats accomplished by incarcerated Nikkei. Despite other demands on their attention such as emergency harvesting requests, emphasis from the government combined with their own desire to volunteer for military service, and pressure to relocate into potentially (and often) hostile environments, Nikkei hard work and ingenuity resulted in over 4,000 acres of irrigated farm land accompanied by fully functioning hog and poultry farms. Victory Gardens planted around all living quarters supplemented this food supply while maintaining morale and beautifying their living spaces. Successes with gardens and farming programs allowed Nikkei to exercise more control in their diets by gaining influence and purchasing power to buy more traditional foods and seed. This served as an especially important factor due to the cultural importance that traditional Japanese foods—and the ability to produce

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<sup>368</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary,” 573.

<sup>369</sup> L. E. Rice, Untitled Article, *Minidoka Irrigator*, June 16, 1945.

and prepare their own meals—held on pre-incarceration diets; an element largely lost during their time behind Minidoka’s barbed wire.

An initially surprising reluctance to leave incarceration sites highlights the fear and confusion Nikkei felt regarding their futures and the abandonment of previous lives. Encouraged to give up their pre-incarceration homes, the WRA emphasized dispersed relocation to avoid dense Japanese American communities. Faced with the daunting prospect of living in an unfamiliar area with unknown job prospects and unwelcoming locals, many older generation Issei avoided relocation as long as they could. Under the guise of preparing Nikkei for success in mainstream America, the WRA emphasized training related to agriculture, food services, and clerical work which perpetuated subservient roles with difficult upward mobility. When a group of WRA employees made their final inventories through the camp buildings, Kleinkopf noted: “To me every barrack room represented heartaches and sorrows.”<sup>370</sup> Although their incarceration officially ended, chapter five emphasizes how Nikkei suffering continued and their legacy in the area that held them for three years remains.

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<sup>370</sup> Kleinkopf, “Relocation Center Diary,” 562.

## Chapter 5

### **Lasting Legacies: Homesteading, Memory, & Commemoration**

This chapter examines two major post-incarceration elements: homesteading and memory. The homesteading section observes ongoing land use in the areas developed by incarcerated Japanese Americans. Then, studying the memories associated with the camp allows a view into how those involved tell their story. These show a reluctance in older generation Issei in remembering and relating their experiences while younger generation Nikkei attempt to come to terms with what happened to their families. Viewing the elements that Nikkei use when telling their stories emphasizes what they considered most important.

#### **5.1: Homesteading**

Once Minidoka closed, the Bureau of Reclamation took control of the farms and other land surrounding the camp and offered it as homesteading opportunities. This section uncovers what happened to many of the material goods from Minidoka, the land lotteries and what they consisted of, and how the recipients interacted with the land and buildings formerly maintained by Nikkei. These elements show how the government and private, white citizens benefited by maximizing on the labor from incarcerated Japanese Americans.

Homesteading on land developed by incarcerated Japanese Americans received heavy attention from the Bureau of Reclamation and local communities. The Homestead Act originated in 1862 with the purpose of encouraging public land development.<sup>371</sup> Establishing homesteads in

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<sup>371</sup> "Homestead Act," Primary Documents in American History, Virtual Services Digital Reference Section, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Homestead.html>.



the area surrounding Minidoka represented a primary purpose behind the location chosen for the relocation centers, as outlined in chapter four. When the camp closed in 1945, the Bureau of Reclamation took control of the buildings, camp farms, and land surrounding the site in preparation for agriculture division.<sup>372</sup> Eight thousand acres of irrigated land divided into 89 plots ranging from 69-170 acres each, plus additional waste land and 85 water shares from the Gooding-Milner Canal, represented the first phase for land lotteries.<sup>373</sup> Each recipient received two 20'x120' barrack buildings plus surplus utensils, a potbellied stove, pots, and pans.<sup>374</sup> With advertisements for homesteads on the former relocation center reaching as far away as Bluefield, West Virginia, 1,000 applicants from across the country entered their names in the drawing.<sup>375</sup> The homesteads aimed at helping white veterans returning from the war and specifically excluded those with Japanese descent, even veterans. Instead, geographer Robert Wilson observes that: "After the war, locals used the physical remnants of the camps to continue developing a white agricultural landscape."<sup>376</sup> Although Nikkei served, fought, and died in the military, and many either personally aided or had family members that worked to develop the land, they received no lasting benefit or compensation.

Smaller, less-significant goods were also heavily sought after. Private buyers purchased the larger recreation and mess halls for \$1,000 each. Nearby schools received donated supplies from

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<sup>372</sup> "Farm Land Returned to Bureau," *Minidoka Irrigator*, February 3, 1945.

<sup>373</sup> Gary Bohlen, "Homesteaders" (Non-published memoir available upon request from Minidoka National Historic Site, 2011); Untitled article, *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, April 3, 1955), 9; Gary Bohlen, "Idaho Utility Pole Story" (Non-published memoir available upon request from Minidoka National Historic Site, 2010); Carlyle Butler, per Lorayne O. Smith, "HUNT," reference to *Times News* article in *Hunt for Idaho*, ed. Shrontz-Wright, 153.

<sup>374</sup> Brian Cannon, *Reopening the Frontier* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 39-45; Bohlen, *Homesteaders* (2011); Bohlen, *Idaho Utility Pole Story* (2010).

<sup>375</sup> Ibid, 9; Bohlen, *Idaho Utility Pole Story*; "Project Farm Land Open to Bidders," *Minidoka Irrigator*, March 10, 1945.

<sup>376</sup> Robert Wilson. "Landscapes of Promise and Betrayal: Reclamation, Homesteading, and Japanese American Incarceration," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (2011).

Minidoka by the truckload, while the Bureau of Indian Affairs received all the leftover textbooks from the center—despite their outdated information and poor quality. Twin Falls transferred the camp hospital for use as a clinic, one barrack served temporarily as the Kimberly Christian Church, and the Jerome Country Club golf course used one of Minidoka's larger buildings as its clubhouse. Utility companies even moved and reset the power poles. Camp remnants can still be viewed in local fields and as backyard sheds.

Although considered fit to live in for Japanese Americans, white homesteaders considered Minidoka's living spaces entirely inadequate. When homesteaders took over the land and buildings, most temporarily lived in the same barrack buildings occupied by Nikkei for the previous three years. Eisenhower's declaration to the Senate appropriations committee reflected many complaints by homesteaders that "the construction is so very cheap that, frankly, if it stands up for the duration we are going to be lucky."<sup>377</sup> Homesteader Carlyle Butler related that everyone complained and struggled with the inefficient stoves, lack of shower and laundry facilities, drafty living quarters, inadequate roads, and the all-consuming dust.<sup>378</sup> Despite having the ability to spread out in entire barrack buildings that four Nikkei families previously crammed together in—and sometimes they used 1 ½ barracks—the poor construction quality and uncomfortable conditions resulted in barracks repurposed for livestock pens, chicken coops, and storage sheds.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> Bohlen. "Homesteaders."

<sup>378</sup> Carlyle Butler, per Lorayne O. Smith, "HUNT," 153.

<sup>379</sup> Carl Butler, "Problems of a Present Day Homesteader," in *Hunt for Idaho*, ed. Shrontz-Wright, 274; "Minidoka 2." YouTube. October 3, 2013. Accessed April 8, 2015. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UND7pSRw\\_9s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UND7pSRw_9s).

Rich oral histories, collected by Bessie Shrontz, reconstruct how homesteaders interpreted their life at post-war Minidoka. Using these narratives, Shrontz adopted a romantic view of the homesteaders, casting them as pioneers who benefited the area. Stories about small families, such as Vurel and Carrie Thomas, portray cheerful settings such as: “This family is a welcome addition to a peaceful, happy community formally known as the Minidoka Relocation Center.”<sup>380</sup> Nikkei receive only passing mention in that section and are presented more as a precursor to the area’s continued agricultural legacy. They do not receive adequate credit as the first to irrigate and develop the area, and the basic underlying injustices of the incarceration are entirely overlooked in favor of a more cheerful narrative.<sup>381</sup>

This initial lack of appreciation for Nikkei sacrifices eventually became better known and agricultural development represents one of the former camp’s longest lasting legacies. Of the three groups interned in the area during WWII—Japanese Americans, Italian POWs in May 1944, and German POWs in September 1944—the *South Idaho Press* and *Minidoka County News*’ 1979 Spring Farm Edition credited that “the Japanese-Americans at Hunt Camp probably had the most far reaching effects on Idaho.”<sup>382</sup> The WRA’s original goal to transform South Central Idaho’s harsh landscape into productive farmland was achieved by Nikkei and continued by local farmers. The next section explores this legacy and the concept of memory further.

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<sup>380</sup> “Vurel and Carrie Thomas,” in *Hunt for Idaho*, ed. Shrontz-Wright, 237.

<sup>381</sup> Cannon, *Reopening the Frontier*.

<sup>382</sup> “Minidoka County History—Minidoka County Historical Society,” *South Idaho Press and Minidoka County News Spring Farm Edition*, (Minidoka County, ID: 1979), 94.

## **5.2: Memory: “Its heritage is the stories”**

Evaluating memories connected to Nikkei incarceration allows a unique opportunity for understanding how the experience affected them and what they considered the most important elements. Neil King, former superintendent at Minidoka National Historic site, related the importance of studying memory when he claimed: “its heritage is the stories.”<sup>383</sup> This section emphasizes the memories associated with food and agriculture, while providing a brief overview of interactions with the public and various ways Nikkei coped, for context.

### **5.2.1: Food Memories**

With food references comprising a large portion of primary source accounts, it comes as no surprise the topic remained relevant in recollections. While I examine just a few of these stories, I contend they provide representative and powerful accounts of memories related to food. First, the importance of mealtimes significantly influenced the lives of Japanese Americans before and after incarceration. The importance of Japanese foodways included what was served, how it was prepared, and sharing mealtimes as a family. Mealtimes before incarceration served as crucial family bonding opportunities, as outlined in chapter 4. Many former incarcerated fondly held on to memories of dinners served on fancy dishes and accompanied by friends and family. Traditional food included meals with chicken teriyaki, egg rolls, cucumber and abalone salad, pickled vegetables, sushi, freshly caught lobster, and a roast pig with an apple in its mouth.<sup>384</sup> Food rituals also reinforced gendered roles. For example, patriarchal authority correlated with

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<sup>383</sup> Neil King in Tamura, *Minidoka*, 273.

<sup>384</sup> Wakatsuki Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 47-48.

pig carving. Fathers and sons traditionally cut and served pork. Furthermore, the dinner table served as the place many families sat to discuss important matters pre-incarceration. The following recollection from former incarcerated Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston relates how her incarceration experience “worked on” her family’s experiences with food and mealtimes.

It began in the mess hall. Before Manzanar, mealtime had always been the center of our family scene. In camp, and afterward, I would often recall with deep yearning the old round wooden table in our dining room in Ocean Park, the biggest piece of furniture we owned, large enough to seat twelve or thirteen of us at once. A tall row of elegant, lathe-turned spindles separated this table from the kitchen, allowing talk to pass from one room to the other. Dinners were always noisy, and they were always abundant with great pots of boiled rice, platters of home-grown vegetables, fish Papa caught.

This passage indicates the importance that taking meals together played on family bonding. See Chapter 2 for more information.

He would sit at the head of this table, with Mama next to him serving and the rest of us arranged around the edges according to age, down to where Kiyoko and I sat, so far away from our parents, it seemed at the time, we had our own enclosed nook inside this world. The grownups would be talking down at their end, while we two played our secret games, making eyes at each other when Papa gave the order to eat, racing with chopsticks to scrape the last grain from our rice bowls, eyeing Papa to see if he had noticed who won.

The closing of the camps, in the fall of 1945, only aggravated what had begun inside. Papa had no money then and could not get work. Half of our family had already moved to the east coast, where jobs had opened up for them. The rest of us were relocated into a former defense workers’ housing project in Long Beach. In that small apartment there never was enough room for all of us to sit down for a meal. We ate in shifts, and I yearned all the more for our huge round table in Ocean Park.

Here Wakatsuki Houston relates the how incarceration ended this family’s ability to use mealtimes for family bonding.

Soon after we were released I wrote a paper for a seventh-grade journalism class, describing how we used to hunt grunion before the war. The whole family would go down to Ocean Park Beach after dark, when the grunion were running, and build a big fire on the sand. I would watch Papa and my older brothers splash through the moonlit

surf to scoop out the fish, then we'd rush back to the house where Mama would fry them up and set the sizzling pan on the table, with soy sauce and horseradish, for a midnight meal. I ended the paper with this sentence: 'The reason I want to remember this is because I know we'll never be able to do it again.'<sup>385</sup>

This account portrays the changes many Nikkei endured during and after their incarceration, and how they struggled to regain their former cultural practices while increasingly losing their connections with family members.

Other recollections attempt to reconcile what happened by holding on to more positive experiences. Fujiko Tamura related a memory of using a ration card to purchase a popsicle while in the assembly center at Puyallup fairgrounds on her birthday in Oregon while awaiting relocation to Minidoka. Tamura now questions the validity of this memory because of the unlikelihood of refrigeration in the little huts at the site, but she emphasizes that "Things like this I tried to remember." Although she admits confusion regarding the reality behind her ability to purchase a popsicle, her emphasis on trying to remember the scattered good moments suggests an attempt at making peace with her experiences.<sup>386</sup>

### **5.3: Agriculture**

Reflections centered on agriculture emphasize the legacy that saving local farms and establishing their own food production system left on the area. Accounts from the Nikkei who originally developed the brown sagebrush around Minidoka when they revisited the site years later further emphasizes how invested Nikkei became in local agriculture. Although the homesteaders who used the land immediately after the camp closed initially overlooked Nikkei

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<sup>385</sup> Wakatsuki Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 35-38.

<sup>386</sup> Tamura-Gardener Interview.

contributions, as outlined above, the public eventually came to more widely accept that Nikkei labor greatly spurred land development in the area surrounding the camp.

When many former incarceratedees and their families take pilgrimages back to Minidoka, one of their first reactions usually refers to the area's landscape. Upon Shizu Yamamoto's return in 2006, he stated that: "When we came here, you didn't see anything green"<sup>387</sup> Instead, cornfields and feedlots now cover what used to consist of remote sagebrush desert.<sup>388</sup> A peaceful farming community now exists with little reference to the former incarceration site aside from converted barrack buildings. Although few signs remain, Francis Nomura, incarcerated at 15 years old, retains vivid memories of days spent working in the onion fields on surrounding farms and the difficult chore removing the onion smell after a day laboring in the fields.<sup>389</sup> The green farmland which has replaced the never-ending sign of brush that welcomed Nikkei to Minidoka serves as a lasting testament to their efforts.

Local communities now credit Nikkei as the first developers for the area surrounding the former camp. Such statements as "The Hunt residents were credited with possibly saving hundreds of thousands of dollars in crop losses in the local sugar beet and potato crops as well as in canneries, lumber mills, etc. in the region during the three years the center existed," and references to the irrigation systems installed by Nikkei," which transformed much of southern Idaho from dusty sagebrush desert to verdant farm land" suggests their influence reached even

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<sup>387</sup> Shizu Yamamoto, in *Hunt for Idaho*, ed. Shrontz-Wright, 208.

<sup>388</sup> Melissa R. Lavitt, in *Hunt for Idaho*, ed. Shrontz-Wright.

<sup>389</sup> Kary Miller, "Pilgrimage to Hunt Camp in 1985 draws former residents, *South Idaho Press*, May 20, 1990.

beyond producing their own farms, but also maintained farms which remain in production today.<sup>390</sup> Agriculture remains connected to Minidoka's legacy.

#### **5.4 Coping and Direct Influences from Incarceration**

After the war, and their release from Minidoka, Nikkei employed various coping strategies to deal with their experiences. Some attempted to regain their cultural roots while others buried the memories and refused to speak of them. Art emerged as an additional outlet for pent-up feelings of confusion and fear. This subsection addresses a few major methods employed by Nikkei and a growing move to advocacy.

Many Nikkei who immigrated to America did so with the desire to adopt American customs and assimilate. The forced assimilation which occurred during their incarceration, though, forced cultural loss and created situations which many struggled to cope with. For Gene Akutsu, "The land of opportunity turned to a life of grief, heartache, and loneliness" when his mother killed herself upon their release from incarceration.<sup>391</sup> For others, the anger settled in later, creating a deep sense of withdrawal and a stigma they dealt with for their entire lives.<sup>392</sup> Michi Sanada recalls her experience as: "It was not physical torture. It was mental and psychological torture."<sup>393</sup> The WWII incarceration of Japanese Americans proved a stark contrast to the pursuit of the American dream that enticed so many to come.

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<sup>390</sup> "Thousands Housed at Desert Relocation Camp" *North Side News*, 75th Anniversary Ed. August 5, 1982; Tamura, *Minidoka*, 6.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid, 161.

<sup>392</sup> Tremayne, *Surviving Minidoka*.

<sup>393</sup> Brad Bowlin, "Remembering Hunt: Concentration Camp Place of 'Mental, Psychological Torture,'" (non-published memoir available upon request from Minidoka National Historic Site, December 3, 1991).



Poetry and art emerged as one method for relating feelings. Roger Shimomura, renowned artist and professor emeritus at University of Kansas spent his toddler years incarcerated behind Minidoka's barbed wire. Shimomura created a series of art exhibitions portraying life at Minidoka. One memory which particularly stands out occurred on his third birthday and conveys his surprise at his mother's ability to secure a cake for the celebration.<sup>394</sup> His father's refusal to speak of the experience and reactions to people who deny the internments took place continue to shape Shimomura's artwork.<sup>395</sup> Another survivor, Lawrence Matsuda, 1 of 489 born at Minidoka, turned to poetry to relate his family's sadness. Matsuda relates mess halls to his mother's lasting fear: "the greasy closeness of Vienna sausage, of pungent pork and sour brine exuding from the mess halls...I wish I could remember Minidoka. I would trade those memories for the fear and sadness imbedded in my genes."<sup>396</sup>

Perhaps one of the most well-known survivors, actor and activist George Takei, shared his stirring account in a Ted talk. The recollection begins with Takei waiting outside his house for his mother and the soldiers sent to relocate them. When she finally appeared holding his baby sister and a duffle bag, "tears were streaming down both her cheeks. I will never be able to forget that scene. It is burned into my memory."<sup>397</sup> He also vividly remembers the barbed wire fences, sentry towers with machine guns pointed at him, and the search light that followed him during his night runs from his barrack to the latrines. As a child, he could not understand his situation:

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<sup>394</sup> Roger Shimomura, "Dust-shrouded Rock Garden Stirs Memories," in *Hunt for Idaho*, ed. Shrontz-Wright, 273.

<sup>395</sup> Roger Shimomura, "Yellow terror: Shimomura paints racism in wry caricature" in *Surviving Minidoka*, ed. Tremayne and Shallat, 44.

<sup>396</sup> Matsuda, *A Cold Wind From Idaho*.<sup>396</sup>

<sup>397</sup> George Takei, "Why I love the Country that Once Betrayed Me," (Ted Talks: Published July 4, 2014), accessed February 25, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeBKBFPwNc>.

“What would be grotesquely abnormal became my normality in the prison of war camps. It became routine for me to line up three times a day to eat lousy food in the noisy mess hall. It became normal for me to go with my father to bathe in a mass shower. Being in a barbed wire prison camp became my normality.” When the family returned home to L.A. with no money and their belongings looted, the family was forced to live with “derelicts, drunkards, and crazy people.”<sup>398</sup> Despite their adverse experience, Takei’s father instilled in his family the importance of democracy. Takei uses his own knowledge and memories and the stories from other incarcerated as a platform for advocacy. The focus on the *nidoto nai yoni*, or “let it not happen again” has become a platform for more contemporary civil rights movements and other formal efforts for reconciling the WWII Japanese American experience.<sup>399</sup>

## 5.5: Conclusion

The physical remains of the Minidoka and other Nikkei relocation centers testify to the significant civil rights executed by the U.S. government against legal, U.S. citizens. Despite initial criticism and fear-mongering, no evidence existed, or presented itself later, that Japanese Americans performed any acts of sabotage against the U.S. WRA Director Myer pointed out that “Military intelligence and F.B.I. records show that not once since Pearl Harbor has an American of Japanese ancestry, either here or in Hawaii, been proved as engaging in sabotage or espionage.”<sup>400</sup> Thus, as World War II ended, the U.S. military and major organizations such as the FBI recognized the unsteady ground on which internment policies stood.

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Tremayne, *Surviving Minidoka*, 23.

<sup>400</sup> “Myer, Police Commissioner Clash Over Japanese Return,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, January 20, 1945.

The lived history at Minidoka brims with examples of how incarceration camp residents contributed to the local community and national food supply. For example, when the Twin Falls hospital's blood supply ran short, camp residents donated theirs. When neighboring towns flooded, Minidoka sent volunteers to aid them. Minidoka firefighters helped outside agencies fighting wildfires. They always met their war bond quotas, and hundreds volunteered to serve in the military while their families remained incarcerated. Through their ordeal, constant perseverance by Nikkei changed the Twin Fall's community's perceptions of race and loyalty.

Looking at experiences with food provides a unique perspective in examining Nikkei incarceration experiences during WWII. Contributions to saving local farms provided food supplies both domestically and to the military. These efforts not only helped feed America but provided bargaining chips in Lend-Lease agreements while supplying ingredients for munitions. Laboring on fields outside incarceration sites jeopardized their own food supply, though. Faced with inadequate—and often inedible—meals, Nikkei lamented the loss of traditional cultural practices like preparing their own meals as their family structures destabilized from the inability to bond by taking meals together.

Cut off from the nationwide rationing program, Nikkei developed their own self-sustaining food supply. The ability and success Nikkei found turning dry sagebrush desert into producible farms allowed Nikkei greater control over their own diets. After receiving training focused on labor and other service industries while incarcerated, many Nikkei faced a future with fewer possibilities than they had pre-Minidoka. Efforts from younger generation Nikkei to come to terms with their families' ordeal, Congressional redress, and current attempts from public and private organizations to ensure that widescale persecution based on ethnicity never happens

again guarantee this topic's continued importance and need for further evaluation. This is not just a Japanese American history, it serves as a shared collective history with broad implications for loyalty, race, war, and civil liberties.

Viewing incarcerated Nikkei experiences through the lens of food history results in a new perspective regarding America's experience during WWII, specifically Japanese Americans and minority treatment during wartime. Although nearly all primary source records heavily reference food, this approach has remained largely absent from mainstream narratives. By linking incarcerated food production with Lend-Lease, the rationing program, and military provisions, a connection between Nikkei efforts and Allied military success emerges. Examining how food was used as a controlling and manipulative factor to pursue government land development goals in comparison with Victory Gardens and other efforts Nikkei utilized in producing more culturally familiar foods, readers gain an appreciation for ways that food can help cope in adverse and relatively powerless situations. As a focal point which former incarcerated use to judge much of their incarcerated experience during World War II, food represents a methodological approach that fits directly with this topic and mandates a place in the broader narratives.

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