

Both Japanese and American:  
Japanese-American Childhood Before, During, and After the World War II Internment Era

Katherine Siebenaler

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Childhood for Japanese-Americans before, during, and after internment during World War II was always a mixture of both Japanese and American cultures, with the influence of American culture taking precedence over the years. This assimilation is not surprising, given that assimilation is a purposeful attempt among immigrants' children.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, "Japanese Americans . . . assimilated . . . rapidly . . . into mainstream middle-class American life after the war."<sup>2</sup> What makes the increasingly Americanized childhood of Japanese-Americans surprising is, when compared to childhood both before and after internment, that internment did not negatively affect the growing Americanization in childhood.

While other factors may have affected Americanization indirectly,<sup>3</sup> this essay looks at how Americanization and Japanese culture were directly related to childhood generally from the 1930s to the 1950s, with some exceptions.<sup>4</sup> Because this essay looks at Japanese-American

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<sup>1</sup> David J. O'Brien and Stephen S. Fugita, *The Japanese American Experience* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), 83.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Fugita and David J. O'Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity: The Persistence of Community* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 9.

<sup>3</sup> O'Brien and Fugita, *Japanese American Experience*, 84. O'Brien and Fugita have a whole section that explains this. They state in summary, "The answer is quite complex, but it involves an interaction between changes in the structure of American society during the immediate postwar years, purposive actions by government authorities, a pent-up set of resources which Japanese Americans had built up during the prewar period, and cultural characteristics of Japanese American community life" (O'Brien and Fugita, *Japanese American Experience*, 84).

<sup>4</sup> Only a few studies of the Japanese-American children during this time exist. Most of the studies concentrate on adults, or simply mention children in passing. What work there is on children mostly concentrates on education during internment. Benson Tong, "Race, Culture, and Citizenship among Japanese American Children and Adolescents during the Internment Era," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 23, no. 3 (2004): 9-10, SocINDEX with Full Text, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=14022462&site=eds-live&scope=site> looks more at racial issues and some cultural issues, but takes a slightly different approach than this essay. While racial issues are closely connected to the topic of this essay, "Race, Culture, and Citizenship" provides a more in-depth look at these issues. This essay will leave these issues to this article. However, this issue must be kept in mind while reading the essay. Books most closely connected to children during internment (because most information on childhood before and after comes from larger studies) also cover education: Yoon K. Pak, *Wherever I Go, I will Always Be a Loyal American: Schooling Seattle's Japanese Americans during World War II* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002), Joanne Oppenheim, *Dear Miss Breed: True Stories of the Japanese American Incarceration during World War II and a Librarian Who Made a Difference* (New York: Scholastic, 2006) (covering several children's experiences) and Karen Lea Riley, *Schools behind Barbed Wire: The Untold Story of Wartime Internment and the Children of Arrested Enemy Aliens* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001). Of course, a plethora of interviews and primary documents from those who were children during internment also exists. However, some sources concentrate on adolescents (probably because it is easier to find primary documents from them) and/or usually revolves only around internment. Additionally, some excellent

*childhood* before, during, and after internment, it does not follow a specific set of children from infancy to adulthood (although there were most certainly cases where a child spent his or her childhood in more than one of these time periods).

Three terms refer to the generations of immigrated Japanese-Americans: the first generation, the *Issei*; the second generation, the *Nisei*; and the third generation, the *Sansei*,<sup>5</sup> who, for the most part, were born after the internment era.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Japanese culture in this essay focuses on Japanese traditions that may have been present in childhood—ways of retaining culture included. The term “Americanization” refers to assimilation, or adopting a more American culture and way of life. Lastly, three different types of camps existed that the children might have experienced during the internment era.<sup>7</sup> First were the assembly camps, the “twelve temporary reception centers” where the Japanese-Americans were initially sent. A second type of camp was the relocation camps (often referred to as internment camps), where “[between] June and October of 1942, residents were transferred to one of ten relocation camps administered by the War Relocation Authority (WRA).”<sup>8</sup> Lastly was the third type of camp, the camp the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service ran, Crystal City, a “camp [that] was only one of a number of centers that held Japanese, German, and Italian aliens” and their families.<sup>9</sup>

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cultural studies of the Japanese-Americans provide some information, such as David J. O’Brien and Stephen S. Fugita, *The Japanese American Experience* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991) and Stephen Fugita and David J. O’Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity: The Persistence of Community* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991). Thus, not many in-depths studies exist that cover this particular topic or piecing together of information.

<sup>5</sup> Fugita and O’Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Fugita and O’Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity*, 81.

<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that, while these camps may sometimes be termed “concentration camps,” they were not like the death camps and work camps that held Jews and others deemed less than human in Germany at the same time.

<sup>8</sup> Bryan J. Grapes, *Japanese American Internment Camps* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2001), 20-21. The WRA was “a civilian agency established by President Roosevelt to supervise the resettlement of Japanese evacuees” (Grapes, *Japanese American Internment Camps*, 21).

<sup>9</sup> O. L. Davis, Jr., Foreword to *Schools behind Barbed Wire: The Untold Story of Wartime Internment and the Children of Arrested Enemy Aliens*, Karen Lea Riley (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), xv.

Several reasons made it more difficult to live in Japan during the late 1800s. Thus, Japanese immigrated to the United States mostly during this time period until the immigration law changed in 1924. Beginning in the first decade of the 1900s, some moved from Hawaii to California, working in agriculture. Thanks to their cultural values, they worked closely together within their ethnic group. The family was important in helping the *Issei* economically, but the children in school were also important because they helped in the assimilation process. While the Japanese-Americans kept community activities that still had traditional Japanese construction yet also had American aspects.<sup>10</sup> Even so, they still suffered from discrimination.<sup>11</sup>

Many Japanese-Americans were just as horrified and ready to fight Japan as any Euro-American after Pearl Harbor. Afraid that Japanese heirlooms might indicate loyalty to Japan, “[many] *Issei* hastily destroyed [them].” Japanese-Americans found themselves under multiple restrictions and subject to removal due to the new military zone General DeWitt<sup>12</sup> had enacted along the West Coast and part of Arizona in March of 1942.<sup>13</sup> By spring, the government decided to forcibly remove the Japanese-Americans, since they had not moved on their own.<sup>14</sup> Often with little time and loss of many belongings, these Japanese-Americans packed and were sent off to the assembly centers, temporary holding places that were crowded, dirty, and “hastily constructed,” before being sent to the relocation centers. These were in isolated areas throughout the West (although there was one in Arkansas) and also had terrible conditions, including

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<sup>10</sup> Important to the rest of the paper and mentioned throughout: “The ‘relativistic’ ethic, which historically has helped the Japanese adapt to changing conditions in Japan, also made it possible for the immigrants to adapt to a unique set of exigencies in the New World and yet maintain the integrity of the group. This part of Japanese culture permitted the emerging Japanese American communities to join American cultural content with Japanese organizational forms” (O’Brien and Fugita, *Japanese American Experience*, 36).

<sup>11</sup> O’Brien and Fugita, *Japanese American Experience*, 10-12, 14, 19, 21, 27-29, 33, 36, 38-39.

<sup>12</sup> Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt was “the military commander responsible for executing Executive Order 9066 (Graves, *Japanese American Internment Camps*, 190).

<sup>13</sup> Executive Order 9066 began the process of zoning and removal (O’Brien and Fugita, *Japanese American Experience*, 60).

<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that those Japanese-Americans living in Hawaii were never subject to removal (Graves, *Japanese American Internment Camps*, 20).

extreme temperatures and dust storms. In spite of these conditions, internee families eventually made them home-like.<sup>15</sup> The “loyalty questionnaire” caused one of the biggest controversies at the camps among adult Japanese-Americans, asking if they would submit to the draft (for men) and if they would only be loyal to the United States.<sup>16</sup> For 6,700 of those who had supposedly proved themselves disloyal via the questionnaire, they were moved to the Tule Lake camp, the “segregation camp for repatriates, expatriates, and other ‘disloyals.’”<sup>17</sup> At the end of 1944, the Japanese-Americans could legally return to the West Coast. Some renounced their citizenship to the United States and were deported to Japan (“the vast majority of the renunciants eventually had their citizenship restored and returned to the U.S.”).<sup>18</sup> The West Coast and areas with familiar faces in “a significant Japanese American resettler colony” drew most Japanese Americans after the war, although some “settled in areas surrounding the camps.”<sup>19</sup> The experience was, of course, scarring in many ways, such as economically and psychically.<sup>20</sup> In the 1960s, former internees began seeking reparations, which they finally received under a program initiated in the 1980s.<sup>21</sup>

### **A Mixture of Cultures: Childhood in the Years Leading up to Internment**

The *Nisei* generation, which would have still included children at this point,<sup>22</sup> was gladly accepting Americanization in the years before internment, growing up with both Japanese and American influences. However, they were turning away from a strictly Japanese culture and

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<sup>15</sup> Page Smith, *Democracy on Trial: The Japanese American Evacuation and Relocation in World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 353, states that “[the] centers were youth- and child-oriented.”

<sup>16</sup> Grapes, *Japanese American Internment Camps*, 15-16, 19-23, 25.

<sup>17</sup> O’Brien and Fugita, *Japanese American Experience*, 72.

<sup>18</sup> O’Brien and Fugita, *Japanese American Experience*, 73-74.

<sup>19</sup> Greg Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy: Japanese Confinement in North America* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2009), 255-56.

<sup>20</sup> O’Brien and Fugita, *Japanese American Experience*, 74-76.

<sup>21</sup> O’Brien and Fugita, *Japanese American Experience*, 79, 81.

<sup>22</sup> “By the 1930s the *Nisei* generation, an overwhelming majority being children, predominated” (Pak, *Wherever I Go*, 33).

turning more towards an American culture, with these cultures sometimes even struggling against each other. Thus, they had influences from both cultures. American culture was growing stronger than the Japanese influence, however, thanks in part to parents and education.<sup>23</sup>

Japanese-American children during the 1930s, while beginning to move away from the culture of their parents, still lived in a mixed culture. Sue Kunitome Embrey remembers from her life pre-World War II,

Growing up in America and yet separated from the mainstream of American society, we lived a mixed life. Dressed in our kimono, we celebrated the New Year with its tradition of special Japanese food, shuttlecock games, and visits to other families, where we tasted their specialties. We also celebrated Christmas, Mother's Day, the Fourth of July with fireworks, and Armistice Day with parades downtown.<sup>24</sup>

Her story vividly illustrates that childhood as a Japanese-American was neither strictly Japanese nor completely Americanized—yet children did have a taste of American life: “The second generation . . . showed real signs of assimilation in dress, language, and other measures.”<sup>25</sup>

Despite the racism these second-generation children faced, aspects of their childhood included normal American activities, such as celebrating Christmas or playing baseball.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, Steven Fugita and David O'Brien's study *Japanese American Ethnicity* points out that the *Nisei*'s close relationships were primarily with their own kind, although they did have some

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<sup>23</sup> “English language usage and academic achievement did not entail the shedding of one culture and the adoption of another but a process marked by negotiation.” David Yoo, *Growing Up Nisei: Race, Generation, and Culture among Japanese Americans of California, 1924-49* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 30. While this is in the context of high school students (?), it is important to note that there was a shift, not a sudden change in which Japanese culture was dropped entirely.

<sup>24</sup> Sue Kunitomi Embrey, “From Manzanar to the Present: A Personal Journey,” in *Last Witnesses: Reflections on the Wartime Internment of Japanese Americans*, ed. Erica Harth (New York: Palgrave for St. Martin's Press, 2001), 169.

<sup>25</sup> Yoo, *Growing Up Nisei*, 24.

<sup>26</sup> Valerie Matsumoto, “Japanese Families and Japanese American Daughters in World War II Detention Camps,” in *Major Problems in the History of American Families and Children: Documents and Essays*, ed. Anya Jabour (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 350. Reprinted from Valerie Matsumoto, “Japanese American Women During World War II,” *Frontiers* 8 (1984): 6-14 or from Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois, eds., *Unequal Sisters: A Multi-Cultural Reader in U.S. Women's History* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 436-77. Reprinted in *Major Problems* by permission of the University of Nebraska Press, 1984 Frontiers Editorial Collective. It should be noted that this book is generalizing about *all* Nisei, which would certainly date back farther than about 1930.

outside influences from American culture.<sup>27</sup> Thus, childhood before internment, even stretching back beyond 1930, was not void of American influences or Japanese influences. As Fugita and O'Brien point out, "[The] strong sense of being a homogenous people has allowed the Japanese to 'borrow' elements from other cultures without losing a clear sense of their own identity."<sup>28</sup> In other words, it would not have been a major issue to allow American influences into the children's lives.

Toyo Suyemoto, an adult *Nisei* during internment, states of his parents: "Mother and Father made decisions about their children's upbringing that might involve customs foreign to them but that nevertheless helped instill Issei values."<sup>29</sup> While evidence of Americanization is evident in this statement, this quote emphasizes the fact that the parents were still trying to hand down their value system. In fact, "many Issei transmitted cultural values and concepts through . . . the 'paratactic mode,' which stressed learning through observation and experience."<sup>30</sup> The family played a role in passing down some "values . . . [that] had roots in Meiji-era Japanese village life."<sup>31</sup> American cultural influence was certainly strong among children before internment. Yet at the same time, there were still strong remnants of Japanese influences.<sup>32</sup> There was a certain order to how dinner with the family operated. Additionally,

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<sup>27</sup> Fugita and O'Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity*, 77.

<sup>28</sup> Fugita and O'Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity*, 93-94.

<sup>29</sup> Toyo Suyemoto, "Another Spring," in *Last Witnesses: Reflections on the Wartime Internment of Japanese Americans*, ed. Erica Harth (New York: Palgrave for St. Martin's Press, 2001), 31.

<sup>30</sup> S. Frank Miyamoto, *Social Solidarity among the Japanese in Seattle*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989), quoted in Yoon K. Pak, *Wherever I Go, I will Always Be a Loyal American: Schooling Seattle's Japanese Americans during World War II* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002), 33.

<sup>31</sup> Fugita and O'Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity*, 78.

<sup>32</sup> Pak attributes "the Japanese American community's high degree of the persistence before and after World War II" to several different sources: "cultural values, consistent with and complementary to the middle-class values emphasized in American society, which emphasized status achievement," "a high degree of family and community organization in America, and these organizations enforced value conformity and created conditions and means for status achievement," "the cohesiveness of family, extended family groups, quasi-familial relations (between neighbors and prefectural organizations), various community organizations, and the disposition to work together as a group all played a part," and "values...from living in Japan during the Meiji Era—one of them calling for a universal education system whereby the moral script of loyalty played a major role" (Pak, *Wherever I Go*, 33 and S.

other traditions associated with eating contributed to a particular way Japanese-American meals operated. Interestingly, American food often made up a meal along with Japanese food.<sup>33</sup> The father as the head of the family was also important. The highest authority in the home was the head male, according to Japanese tradition.<sup>34</sup> Children would have also been used to, as a general rule, a “more vertically structured and male-dominated [family] than comparable middle-class WASP families.”<sup>35</sup> Probably the most important of these aspects was that “[the] family was considered to be more important than its individual members.”<sup>36</sup> Family was (and still is) the center of many facets of life.<sup>37</sup> Thus, while childhood among young Japanese-Americans leading up to internment may have appeared American, there were still some aspects of their family life that were still Japanese.

With family life still quite Japanese, the children during this period also partially retained a Japanese influence through their social groups.

The Nisei might have bent over backward to be anti-Japanese in many respects, but he had not cut himself loose from the Japanese community, or even from the ethnic solidarity that bound him to all other Nisei and Issei. Thus he did not become so thoroughly Americanized that he might be ostracized by his fellow Nisei. He was

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Frank Miyamoto, “An Immigrant Community in America,” in *East across the Pacific: History and Sociology Studies of Japanese Immigration and Assimilation*, ed. H. Conroy and T.S. Miyakawa (Santa Barbara: Clio Press, 1972), 218, quoted in Pak, *Wherever I Go*, 33). Fugita and O’Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity*, 5 note, “Japanese [Americans] . . . perceive all members of their ethnic group—not just those in family, kin, or region—as ‘quasi kin.’ . . . The ability of Japanese Americans to maintain their ethnic community through voluntary associations means that their ethnicity does not depend solely on continuing more exclusive strong ties. This, in turn, has permitted Japanese Americans to become involved in many aspects of life in the mainstream community without having to sacrifice the majority of their ethnic ties.” This helps to explain why Japanese culture has been able to stay somewhat strong.

<sup>33</sup> Harry H. L. Kitano, *Japanese Americans: The Evolution of a Subculture* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1969), 70-71.

<sup>34</sup> Karen Lea Riley, *Schools behind Barbed Wire: The Untold Story of Wartime Internment and the Children of Arrested Enemy Aliens* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 91.

<sup>35</sup> Kitano, *Japanese Americans: The Evolution of a Culture*, 66. Kitano, writing in 1969, notes that this is continuing. It is the assumption of this author that this applies to before internment as well.

<sup>36</sup> Kitano, *Japanese Americans: The Evolution of a Culture*, 66.

<sup>37</sup> Kitano, *Japanese Americans: The Evolution of a Culture*, 67.



extremely sensitive to the censure of his community. What others in the community might think of him was extremely important.<sup>38</sup>

While this might refer to more than children, children may fall into this category. Some children, as previously mentioned, had white peers with whom they spent time. However, when it came to close community ties, the Nisei claimed other Japanese-Americans.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the children still had a strong grasp on Japanese culture, thanks to their community and family helping to retain that culture. They certainly had American aspects to their lives, yet they also had Japanese influences.<sup>40</sup> As would probably be expected, the *Nisei* still had a foot in their parents' culture—their ethnic culture.<sup>41</sup>

Despite this culturally mixed background, childhood before internment was sometimes difficult, with the struggle between the two cultures, embracing the Japanese at times and hiding it at other times. After seeing their white peers' "picture-book American homes," the *Nisei* children were ashamed of "their own shabby homes, their non-English speaking parents, and their Japanese family customs." Kitano also states: "It was a rare Nisei who did not feel ashamed and unhappy about his background during some period of his school years. This is probably true

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<sup>38</sup> Daisuke Kitagawa, *Issei and Nisei: The Internment Years* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1967), 28. Kitagawa describes in his preface that his study comes from his "personal experience within the context of the corporate experience of Japanese Americans as a whole in their forced internment years: 1942-44. The book . . . is a collective autobiography of the Japanese-American community as a whole" (Kitagawa, *Issei and Nisei*, vii). Thus, it is important to note that his information is not necessarily the most academic (although that does not make it any less true).

<sup>39</sup> Fugita and O'Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity*, 80. This included where they lived and their religious life. Attending a Christian church "represents a significant step toward assimilation into the mainstream of American society" (*Japanese American Ethnicity*, 89). See also Fugita and O'Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity*, 83, 90-92 and Yoo, *Growing Up*, 11.

<sup>40</sup> For more detail, see Benson Tong, "Race, Culture, and Citizenship among Japanese American Children and Adolescents during the Internment Era," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 23, no. 3 (2004): 9-10, SocINDEX with Full Text, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=14022462&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

<sup>41</sup> There was apparently a significant number of second-generation Japanese-Americans who spoke English. Fugita and O'Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity*, 80.

of all immigrant groups, and must certainly provide some impetus toward acculturation.”<sup>42</sup> Tong makes an important point about assimilation: “Through their interaction with teachers and peers, Japanese American girls and boys learned that being American was to enjoy certain freedoms denied to them at home. . . . Japanese American youngsters developed the impression that American social relations were egalitarian, nurturing, and affectionate whereas Japanese ones seemed hierarchical, distant, and impersonal.”<sup>43</sup> This also added to the assimilation process as they saw American ways as better than Japanese ways. And while the children might have appeared American, “an unspoken rule of separatism prevailed.”<sup>44</sup> They might have felt shame for their ethnicity, but they actually had to retreat into it somewhat because they were not allowed to be fully American: no matter how hard the *Nisei* tried to prove themselves to be American, American society refused to see it.<sup>45</sup> The children were thus stuck between being American and being Japanese.

While Japanese-American childhood before internment was mixed, a definite push to become more American was apparent. One of these pushes came from their parents (and community). The *Issei* parents (and community) viewed their children as Americans, and the parents were relieved that their children were assimilating by beginning “to go to school, play with the neighborhood children, and use the English language more and more.”<sup>46</sup> They wanted their children to be Americans.<sup>47</sup> They worked to “transmit cultural values to Nisei, syncretizing

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<sup>42</sup> Kitano, *Japanese Americans: The Evolution of a Culture*, 73-74. Class may play into this, but Kitano makes no indication that it does.

<sup>43</sup> Tong, “Race, Culture, and Citizenship,” 8-9.

<sup>44</sup> Tong, “Race, Culture, and Citizenship,” 9.

<sup>45</sup> Kitagawa, *Issei and Nisei*, 25. This may not have been as apparent until they were at an older age, as the book mentions rising problems when they got older. The book also states that “when the Nisei became self-consciously anti-Japanese, he paradoxically became more Japanese than he needed to be” (26), yet this may not apply to children or even be an accurate statement.

<sup>46</sup> Kitagawa, *Issei and Nisei*, 25, 23.

<sup>47</sup> Kitagawa, *Issei and Nisei*, 21.

the moral aspects of their Japanese and newly adopted ‘American’ cultures.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, the *Issei*, the parents of these children, were not holding back their children from assimilating.

Additionally, for some *Nisei* assimilation also included rejection of the use of a Japanese name except at home.<sup>49</sup> One set of parents told their child that they gave him an American name (his siblings also had American names) because “‘We wanted you folks to be Americans.’”<sup>50</sup> While not every Japanese-American child before internment may have had an American name, it could be that parents were generally giving their children American names to make them Americans.

Additionally, during this time leading up to the internment, schools played a large role in Americanizing children. Yoo notes, “Public schools were a key component of Americanization, the aim of which was to transform immigrants into patriotic, loyal, and intelligent citizens of the Republic.”<sup>51</sup> Embrey recalled of her childhood: “Through our public school education we absorbed all the values and principles that are embodied in the American Dream.”<sup>52</sup> While this is only one instance, she obviously was Americanizing, or at least was given the chance to. Tong notes, “Policy makers and educational professionals envisioned schools as vanguards of assimilation, but the politics of race undermined that aspiration.”<sup>53</sup>

While the regular schools were pushing Americanization, another institution—the Japanese language schools—tried to provide training in traditional Japanese culture.

Language schools offered *Issei* a measure of control in shaping the overall content of their children’s instruction and initially served families who intended to return to Japan.

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<sup>48</sup> Yoon K. Pak, *Wherever I Go, I will Always Be a Loyal American: Schooling Seattle's Japanese Americans during World War II* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002), 35.

<sup>49</sup> Joanne Oppenheim, *Dear Miss Breed: True Stories of the Japanese American Incarceration during World War II and a Librarian Who Made a Difference* (New York: Scholastic, 2006), 211.

<sup>50</sup> Oppenheim, *Dear Miss Breed*, 211.

<sup>51</sup> *Growing Up Nisei*, 22. It is not clear whether this statement refers to all public schools or just California public schools.

<sup>52</sup> Embrey, “Manzanar to the Present,” in *Last Witnesses*, 170. Embrey also mentions that her principal “wanted to strengthen our self-esteem and pride in our [Japanese] cultural heritage,” since they made up the vast majority of the student body as a segregated school (170).

<sup>53</sup> Tong, “Race, Culture, and Citizenship,” 8.

In addition, those settling in America saw language skills and the socialization process of the Japanese schools as important means of maintain ethnic ties and of equipping Nisei to operate more effectively within the immigrant community.<sup>54</sup>

These schools were, in fact, “important enculturating [institutions].”<sup>55</sup> These schools operated on an after-school and weekend basis,<sup>56</sup> so they were not a replacement to normal school. Although “[many] Japanese Americans presented the language schools as compatible with and complementary to Americanization. . . . Language teachers may have sincerely believed in some form of Americanization such as good citizenship, but they clearly stressed that the second generation were Americans of *Japanese* ancestry.”<sup>57</sup> The Japanese language schools in the 1920s changed to be more American,<sup>58</sup> due to criticism concerning loyalty, focusing on assimilation as an American. Additionally, younger *Nisei* were not as fond of them by the 1930s.<sup>59</sup> Ben Takeshita remembers that as a child he had to attend the school, yet felt American, with no connection to Japan.<sup>60</sup> The schools were certainly teaching the Japanese culture to some degree, but they were losing to Americanization. After war began, the schools all shut down (at least the ones in California and Hawaii).<sup>61</sup> Although the children might not have realized it, they had lost a source of knowledge about their ethnic background and Americanization could now more easily continue.

Leading up to the internment, Japanese-American children lived in a mixed culture of American culture and Japanese culture. There was a definite struggle for the children as they

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<sup>54</sup> Yoo, *Growing Up Nisei*, 18-19.

<sup>55</sup> Fugita and O’Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity*, 88.

<sup>56</sup> Yoo, *Growing Up Nisei*, 28.

<sup>57</sup> Yoo, *Growing Up Nisei*, 29. Emphasis original.

<sup>58</sup> Tong states: “schoolchildren now received instruction in American citizenship, and acceptance of the larger society was the ultimate goal” (Tong, “Race, Culture, and Citizenship,” 5).

<sup>59</sup> Tong, “Race, Culture, and Citizenship,” 5.

<sup>60</sup> Tateishi, *And Justice for All*, 242-43.

<sup>61</sup> Toyotomi Morimoto, *Japanese Americans and Cultural Continuity: Maintaining Language and Heritage* (New York: Garland Pub., 1997), 117.

tried to become more American, even as their traditional culture was kept somewhat alive.

Overall, however, the trend was moving towards an American culture.

### **Disruption and Confusion: Childhood During the Internment Era**

Among the Japanese-American community before internment, a trend towards Americanization developed while an influence of Japanese culture remained. During the World War II internment, Americanization persisted in a way that was sometimes contradicting and confusing. Meanwhile, Japanese culture did not entirely vanish, but it did suffer. Contrary to what might be expected, internment did not stop the growth of becoming more American children, but instead continued the assimilation process for childhood whether the children recognized it or not.

“[The] family life was not together, although we lived in the apartment together. We weren’t going as a group anywhere; we all had separate lives.”<sup>62</sup> Not only did family life suffer in the internment camps, but because of the importance of the family to the Japanese-Americans, Japanese culture suffered as well. Even before internment (and then during internment as well), some parents lost their children because they were imprisoned or taken away for questioning.<sup>63</sup> In the camps, one of the largest issues was mealtimes, because “large communal mess halls also encouraged family disunity as family members began to eat separately.”<sup>64</sup> For those children who were old enough to remember what they learned at home about how important family was to their culture, this cultural standard was eroding. For those who may not have remembered or

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<sup>62</sup> Heather C. Lindquist, *Children of Manzanar* (Berkeley, CA: Manzanar History Association, 2012), 34.

<sup>63</sup> Tong, “Race, Culture, and Citizenship,” 12.

<sup>64</sup> Matsumoto, “Japanese Families and Japanese American Daughters” in *Major Problems*, 352.

had not had this experience, they were unconsciously losing part of their culture.<sup>65</sup> Although an older child during internment, Akiko Kurose remembers that her family never spent time together and “there was a lack of . . . communication as well.”<sup>66</sup> Kurose also remembers that “the youngsters, the real youngsters, kind of fell apart without much structure and a lot of freedom.”<sup>67</sup> O’Brien and Fugita point out about the effect of the living conditions: “The barracks’ living arrangements made it difficult to socialize children in the traditional Japanese way.”<sup>68</sup> Matsumoto adds that “[family] unity deteriorated in the crude communal facilities and cramped barracks.”<sup>69</sup> Additionally, Tong makes an important note about family life: “Japanese American organizations disbanded in the wake of the incarceration. With pseudo-kinship ties weakened, the collective mentality that also undergirded the family was further loosened. Young Nisei spent more time with their generational peers than with their elders.”<sup>70</sup> Family life was suffering, and as a result, a major part of Japanese culture for the children was suffering.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Apparently, it had become so bad that Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston remembers that, thanks to some sociologists’ “recommendations, . . . edicts went out that families *must* start eating together again.” Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston, “A Resident of Manzanar Internment Camp Looks Back on Her Wartime and Postwar Experiences, 1940s,” in *Major Problems in the History of American Families and Children: Documents and Essays*, ed. Anya Jabour (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 335. From Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar: A True Story of Japanese American Experience During and After the World War II Internment* (New York: Bantam Books, 1973), 20-27.

<sup>66</sup> Akiko Kurose (Interview I Segment 21), interview by Matt Emery, Densho Archive, July 17, 1997, accessed March 14, 2015, [archive.densho.org/main.aspx](http://archive.densho.org/main.aspx), 1:48.

<sup>67</sup> Akiko Kurose Interview I Segment 21, 2:12.

<sup>68</sup> O’Brien and Fugita, *The Japanese-American Experience*, 62.

<sup>69</sup> Matsumoto, “Japanese Families and Japanese American Daughters” in *Major Problems*, 351.

<sup>70</sup> Tong, “Race, Culture, and Citizenship,” 17.

<sup>71</sup> Japanese culture suffered in other ways. Frank Kitamoto remembers: “[When] I think back on that time . . . I think the general attitude at that time, was destroy most things that are Japanese, because we don’t want the FBI to come and get us and take us away. So a lot of my cultural background was probably taken away or hidden. And the implication from that is that it’s not a good deal to be Japanese. And I think, a [*sic*] lot of that happened because of concentration [*sic*] camp period” (Frank Kitamoto (Segment 22), interview by Lori Hoshino, Densho Archive, April 13, 1998, accessed March 14, 2015. [archive.densho.org/main.aspx](http://archive.densho.org/main.aspx), 00:50). Wenger points out the contradictions in all this: “Children came to school living in two Americas. One taught them of religious and political freedom while the other let them know that their ethnic heritage implied that there was treason in family history and traditions. They watched parents burn photos and treasure kimonos rather than have them taken away by the Federal Bureau of Investigation . . . Some were living in these two realities without really understanding where the division line was drawn” (Wenger, “History Matters,” 34).

Childhood for Japanese-Americans during internment was thus fraught with loss of an important aspect of their culture through the loss of family life. As Japanese culture lessened, American culture became stronger. Of course, the children were very often quite Americanized already. In the camps, being around so many of their own race was a first for many teenagers.<sup>72</sup> If true for teenagers, then it certainly would have been true for younger children. In fact, having almost all Japanese classmates was a new experience for the children.<sup>73</sup> Even though they were only second-generation Japanese-Americans, the young *Nisei* children had already become so assimilated that being with a large number of their people was unusual. While this may not have been the case for every child,<sup>74</sup> it was not an uncommon occurrence. The Japanese-American children were coming face-to-face with how Americanized they already were. Additionally, they actively tried to be American more than Japanese “in their wartime writings.”<sup>75</sup> No different than other American children during World War II, Japanese-American children “demonstrated their patriotism.”<sup>76</sup>

But despite trying to be American and hearing the message to be American, Americanization was not always smooth. “Because, you'd gone to school and you'd [been] brought up to be an American, so-called. And as Americans, you had certain rights, and certainly that was when they decided without any recourse that you as an American citizen had to go into these camps. That was kind of hard to cope with,” remembers Kunio Otani, revealing

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<sup>72</sup> Hui Wu, “Writing and Teaching behind Barbed Wire: An Exiled Composition Class in a Japanese-American Internment Camp,” *College Composition and Communication* 59, no. 2 (2007): 248, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/milligan.idm.oclc.org/stable/20456994>.

<sup>73</sup> Oppenheim, *Dear Miss Breed*, 127.

<sup>74</sup> Information in Fugita and O'Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity*, 9, implies that some children would have lived in “ethnic enclaves.”

<sup>75</sup> Tong, “Race, Culture, and Citizenship,” 27.

<sup>76</sup> Tong, “Race, Culture, and Citizenship,” 28.

confusion.<sup>77</sup> Yet the children often did not understand why they were being put into these internment camps.<sup>78</sup> Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston recalls, “The fact that America had accused us, or excluded us, or imprisoned us, or whatever it might be called, did not change the kind of world we wanted.”<sup>79</sup> This did not negatively affect her assimilation process.

“I was too young, of course, to understand the real meaning of our imprisonment, and too young to feel the full impact of our situation. . . . As a child of the camps, I was protected from these truths, and in some ways, I suppose, my life was not too different from a lot of kids’ lives in America between the years 1942 and 1945.”<sup>80</sup> Children in the internment camps lived lives outside of school that were both Japanese and American. However, the American culture was stronger, and some were encouraging it in some areas. At the Crystal City camp, Japanese Scouts formed. They were like the Boy Scouts and Girls Scouts, but they promoted Japanese culture. In fact, the INS never established Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts at Crystal City, despite what it would have done for Americanization like it had done in the schools. Thus, the Japanese Scouts helped to fight against Americanization.<sup>81</sup> Of course this was a special case, since it was Crystal City, but it shows that Japanese culture was not given up entirely in the camps. In fact, Boy Scouts did exist at other camps.<sup>82</sup> If Scouts would have been a form of Americanization at Crystal City, then they probably would have been at the other camps as well. Thus, the Scouts did provide some Americanization during leisure time to the children.

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<sup>77</sup> Kunio Otani (Segment 12), interviewed by Alice Ito and Rebecca Walls, Densho Archive, May 31, 1998, accessed March 14, 2015, [archive.densho.org/main.aspx](http://archive.densho.org/main.aspx), 2:18.

<sup>78</sup> Tong, “Race, Culture, and Citizenship,” 13.

<sup>79</sup> Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston, “From the Outrageous to the Tolerable” in *Farewell to Manzanar* (chapter 12), in *Japanese American Internment Camps*, Bryan J. Grapes (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2001), 142 .

<sup>80</sup> John Y. Tateishi, “Memories from behind Barbed Wire,” in *Last Witnesses: Reflections on the Wartime Internment of Japanese Americans*, ed. Erica Harth (New York: Palgrave for St. Martin's Press, 2001), 133.

<sup>81</sup> Riley, *Schools Behind Barbed Wire*, 112. “[The] INS could do little about the existence of the...Japanese scouts” (158).

<sup>82</sup> Smith, *Democracy on Trial*, 352.



Children did play games both Japanese and American in the camps,<sup>83</sup> indicating a mixture of cultures. Japanese culture was not entirely suppressed. Robinson states, “WRA administrators . . . saw formation of such leisure activities among young Nisei as baseball teams, Boy Scout troops, Red Cross chapters, and swing bands to be tools for “Americanization.””<sup>84</sup> Tong points out, “The War Relocation Authority (WRA) encouraged children to engage in favorite American pastimes—football, basketball, and baseball—and to join organizations such as the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts.”<sup>85</sup> While the camps did not force the children to Americanize, they did encourage this activity. The children were leading culturally mixed, but more towards Americanized, lives, which is what the camps wanted.

As before, the schools continued to stress Americanization, perhaps even more so. Yet at the same time, contradictions to the schools’ attempt to Americanize should have worked against this goal. The WRA wanted to make the camps home-like for the children, despite the prison-like atmosphere, as part of their “campaign for relocation.”<sup>86</sup> For the children, then, at least the schools were something normal in the unfamiliarity and harshness of the camp. But by trying to act as normal schools back home,<sup>87</sup> they would have been Americanizing as well, presumably.

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<sup>83</sup> Smith, *Democracy on Trial*, 354. For a more detailed look at what they did at Poston, see George Eisen and David Kenneth Wiggins, *Ethnicity and Sport in North American History and Culture* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), [http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=152383&site=eds-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp\\_COVER](http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=152383&site=eds-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_COVER), 125.

<sup>84</sup> Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy*, 160.

<sup>85</sup> Tong, “Race, Culture, and Citizenship,” 16. At Tule Lake, “[after] its conversion to a segregation center in late 1943,” the WRA ended up spending money on Japanese activities because it “might reduce unrest and protest against camp conditions” (Eisen and Wiggins, *Ethnicity and Sport*, 127). This author also points out that “[not] everyone who was placed in Tule Lake, however, was labeled ‘disloyal.’ Some were family members of those who had been segregated; some had been residents of Tule Lake prior to the segregation and did not wish to move again” (127).

<sup>86</sup> Erica Harth, “Democracy for Beginners,” in *Last Witnesses: Reflections on the Wartime Internment of Japanese Americans*, ed. Erica Harth (New York: Palgrave for St. Martin's Press, 2001), 190.

<sup>87</sup> Erica Harth (the child of a WRA worker who attended the camp school) recalls that her schooling inside Manzanar—which was apparently experimental—was like normal schooling, yet it was different because no one would associate with them. In fact, parents could not agree on whether they “wanted the children to learn about their Japanese heritage” or have “their child . . . taught by the professionally trained Caucasians who, they believed, would give the pupils the best possible preparation for the society they would eventually have to confront” (Harth,

Indeed, “[as] in the world outside, the elementary and high schools were the principal agents of Americanization.”<sup>88</sup> Thus, a large part of becoming more American during childhood in internment was indeed coming from the schools.<sup>89</sup> In fact, it was “the primary goal of camp educators,” according to Erica Harth.<sup>90</sup> In Arkansas (if not in all the camps), the WRA pushed Americanization in schools because they did not want communities of Japanese-Americans threatening the country.<sup>91</sup> While choosing where to live was outside of a child’s realm of decision, it was still forced assimilation by telling them they should not live with their own people. This idea, ingrained in childhood, would have stayed with the children into adulthood. Additionally, activities were patriotic, in keeping with the WRA’s goal of Americanizing.<sup>92</sup> At Crystal City, the students strove to be as American as they could.<sup>93</sup> In fact, most likely for high schoolers, “the WRA also reinterpreted U.S. history in order to fulfill its educational agenda for evacuation.” This goal was “‘Education for Relocation.’”<sup>94</sup> The WRA wanted the schools to instill into the children a desire to relocate and be more American.<sup>95</sup> The teachers also received recommendations to have their students make art that was propaganda.<sup>96</sup> Whereas children before might have had some choice in choosing Americanization, now it was being shoved down

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“Democracy for Beginners” in *Last Witnesses*, 187-88, 196-97). She continues on in her brief memoir to describe schooling.

<sup>88</sup> Smith, *Democracy on Trial*, 360.

<sup>89</sup> Tong, “Race, Culture, and Citizenship,” 32, adds that “Americanization [was] exerted through the schools, government propaganda, and coethnic peers.”

<sup>90</sup> Harth, “Democracy for Beginners” in *Last Witnesses*, 191. It is also interesting to note that “‘Americanization’ [was] a word banned from the WRA’s lexicon” (191). They refused to acknowledge what they knew they were really doing.

<sup>91</sup> Wu, “Writing and Teaching,” 242-43.

<sup>92</sup> Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy*, 159.

<sup>93</sup> Riley, *Schools Behind Barbed Wire*, 158.

<sup>94</sup> Wu, “Writing and Teaching,” 244. “At the same time, camp teachers were encouraged to realize the WRA curricular goals and follow its design of literacy activities” (245).

<sup>95</sup> Gina Mumma Wenger, “History Matters: Children’s Art Education Inside the Japanese American Internment Camp,” *Studies in Art Education* 54, no. 1 (2012): 28, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=82585203&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

<sup>96</sup> Wenger, “History Matters,” 29-31.

their throats.<sup>97</sup> In the meantime, Americanization was pushed in another way: the WRA did not want Japanese-American children studying their own culture, including “[traditional] artmaking methods.”<sup>98</sup> By taking away, or discouraging, anything not American, they were pushing assimilation. In some ways, the children had no choice but to become more American.

Yet there was a contradiction:<sup>99</sup> The children knew they were incarcerated even as they prepared projects for school that pushed American ways.<sup>100</sup> “If you could only forget your own ‘difficulties,’ you would be receptive to learning about American values,” Erica Harth recalls.<sup>101</sup> However, Kunio Otani remembers that it was difficult being confined in camp when he had been raised as an American.<sup>102</sup> “The contradictions of the educational system continued from the prewar years into this critical era since it also sent the mixed message that Japanese American students were second-class citizens,” Tong states.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, “[perplexity] over mixed messages, multiple cultures, intergenerational experiences, and confinement created more questions than knowledge for students, parents, and teachers.”<sup>104</sup> Americanization was thus strong in the camps’ schools, yet it sometimes created confusion for the students.

Other contradictions of Americanization existed in the quality of the schools. “More than twenty-five thousand Nisei children attended ill-equipped schools in all ten relocation centers.”<sup>105</sup> “[Under] 10 percent of all the camps’ certified teachers were Japanese American. Two-thirds of the teaching staff consisted of (uncertified) evacuee assistant or ‘cadet’ teachers.

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<sup>97</sup> “Many of those I [the author] interviewed, who were not yet in high school, claimed to like their segregated schools” (Oppenheim, *Dear Miss Breed*, 127).

<sup>98</sup> Wenger, “History Matters,” 34.

<sup>99</sup> Wu, “Writing and Teaching,” 238. Wu mentions a “paradox,” but this might refer to a different situation than the contradictions described here.

<sup>100</sup> Wenger, “History Matters,” 28.

<sup>101</sup> Harth, “Democracy for Beginners” in *Last Witnesses*, 195.

<sup>102</sup> Kunio Otani Segment 12.

<sup>103</sup> Tong, “Race, Culture, and Citizenship,” 19.

<sup>104</sup> Wenger, “History Matters,” 31.

<sup>105</sup> Oppenheim, *Dear Miss Breed*, 127.

Many of them had had no previous teaching experience.”<sup>106</sup> Additionally, “Only Caucasian teachers would be ‘head teachers’ and often Japanese American ‘assistant teachers’ left as soon as they were able to relocate and search for better opportunities.”<sup>107</sup> Despite attempts to make the schools actual schools, poorly qualified Japanese-Americans ended up doing the majority of the teaching.<sup>108</sup> There were not always enough teachers either.<sup>109</sup> The children were seeing that the government only really trusted whites to teach the children. While this added to Americanization, it also worked against it. The children were once again seeing that they were not worth being true Americans. The conditions of the schools were another problem. Even after they had their own buildings, supplies outside of textbooks were sometimes short or non-existent.<sup>110</sup> Schools were less than an afterthought at the assembly centers, as what primitive schools developed did not require the children to attend.<sup>111</sup> Even the physical conditions of the schools went against Americanization because those in charge did not care enough to fix proper schools for the children.<sup>112</sup> While younger students “adapted more readily . . . to school life in the new environments,”<sup>113</sup> it was still an insult to them. Susan Omoto illustrates the lack of care: ““My crucial formative years were spent without exposure to social etiquette, cultural enrichment and social graces. We had no access to theaters, arts, concerts, museums, etc. Also, the academic quality of the camp schools was poor and the makeshift main library was relatively useless.””<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Harth, “Democracy for Beginners” in *Last Witnesses*, 195.

<sup>107</sup> Wenger, “History Matters,” 32.

<sup>108</sup> Robinson, *Tragedy of Democracy*, 159.

<sup>109</sup> Tong, “Race, Culture, and Citizenship,” 20. There was also a “lack of supplies and equipment” (20).

<sup>110</sup> Robinson, *Tragedy of Democracy*, 158-59. This information seems to apply to high school.

<sup>111</sup> Tong, “Race, Culture, and Citizenship,” 19. Riley, *Schools Behind Barbed Wire*, 127: “[At] Crystal City, most [children] found their classrooms to be reminiscent of those they left behind at relocation centers and in former communities, albeit in better condition.”

<sup>112</sup> It had not even been thought necessary at first to provide schooling! (Robinson, *Tragedy of Democracy*, 158). Despite all this, there were positive effects. See “Race, Culture, and Citizenship” 21-22 for general positive effects.

<sup>113</sup> Tong, “Race, Culture, and Citizenship,” 20.

<sup>114</sup> Susan Omoto, *Remembering: Voices of the Japanese American Internment of World War II* (United States of America: John Gordon Burke Publisher, Inc., 2006), 68. Yoshida states that he did eventually assimilate, many years later.

While the regular camp schools attempted and struggled to Americanize, Japanese heritage lingered through the establishment of their own schools in some camps. At Crystal City, Japanese community leaders established a Japanese school, based on schools in Japan.<sup>115</sup> While not exactly the same as the Japanese language schools, they had some of the same goals. Tule Lake Segregation Center, “a camp for ‘disloyals,’” did have Japanese language schools. They became more popular than the regular schools, but were “officially condoned” and contained Japanese culture. One of the schools even “tried to imitate as closely as possible the Kokumin Gakko, the national elementary school system of Japan in the 1930s.”<sup>116</sup> These schools were thus stronger where the internees were more Japanese. They used the schools to keep up the Japanese culture. The school at Crystal City wanted to make the children good citizens with a strong Japanese heritage.<sup>117</sup> Normal subjects and Japanese cultural subjects, as well as language instruction, consisted of the studies in which children at this school would have engaged.<sup>118</sup> In fact, the core of the curriculum at these schools was the Japanese language.<sup>119</sup> Ben Takeshita remembers of his instruction at Tule Lake, “[To] this day I feel I know a lot about Japan because of that education, because it was very rigid and we had to learn.”<sup>120</sup> Thus, these schools did a lot to instill Japanese values into the children. Therefore, some children were able to retain part of their heritage, although they were the children at the more “loyal” camps.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Riley, *Schools Behind Barbed Wire*, 93. “Younger students seemed to adjust well to this new schooling environment” (102).

<sup>116</sup> Morimoto, *Japanese Americans and Cultural Continuity*, 117-18.

<sup>117</sup> Riley, *Schools Behind Barbed Wire*, 111. In an interesting side note about the Japanese school’s sports, “these school sports focused on indoctrinating young children...To the Japanese educator, sports cultivated the Japanese spirit” (102).

<sup>118</sup> Riley, *Schools Behind Barbed Wire*, 101, 94.

<sup>119</sup> Riley, *Schools Behind Barbed Wire*, 104.

<sup>120</sup> Tateishi, *And Justice for All*, 246.

<sup>121</sup> Unfortunately, the vast majority of children did not learn Japanese well in the schools (Riley, *Schools Behind Barbed Wire*, 102).

Internment was certainly not an ideal way to spend one's childhood. One might even think that childhood assimilation would make a reversal due to imprisonment. However, despite internment and sometime thanks to internment, childhood continued to look more American for Japanese-Americans during this time. Japanese cultural influences in childhood were not entirely gone, but the American cultural influences certainly did not lose any ground. This trend would continue in the years to come.

### **Continuation: Childhood in the Immediate Years after Internment**

Childhood after internment was a readjustment back to normal life for those who had spent time in the camps. Those who were children during this time would eventually grow up to more fully Americanize, with their children being even more Americanized as well. Some Japanese elements remained, as Americanization did not completely consume the Japanese-Americans, but the community changed instead, even as it Americanized.

Americanization and traditional Japanese culture took a different turn for children after internment. Americanization continued, but still had its problems. Japanese culture also continued, although it adapted to the continuing Americanization. The *Nisei* encountered both welcome and hostility as they spread out across the United States, "some to schools and others to seek employment."<sup>122</sup> In fact,

[the] children too were fearful of returning to the schools they had once attended. Thankfully, for them, there were many caring teachers and students who came forward to welcome the Japanese American children and accept them as friends. Sadly, however, other Japanese American children were not so fortunate. Their teachers, seemingly without concern, reinforced the feelings of inferiority and worthlessness that most Japanese American children had already begun to feel about themselves.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Yoshiko Uchida, "Putting the Pieces Back Together" in *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese American Family*, in *Japanese American Internment Camps*, Bryan J. Grapes (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2001), 171.

<sup>123</sup> "We the People...": *The Return Home* (Number 6 in the series), produced by The California Museum, Sacramento California and Creating Images, Nevada City California (n.d., The California Museum, 2012), DVD, 5:36-6:07.

Attendance during internment at Japanese language school had put Ben Takeshita behind, and he felt so ashamed that he went to another school after internment.<sup>124</sup> The shame would have certainly worked towards Americanization. Those who had been in the camps now had to face the fear of American schools. Yet at the same time, they probably wanted even more so to prove themselves to be Americans. Although he was in high school and no longer in childhood, Ben Takeshita is an example of this: he made sure to prove himself American in the activities in which he chose to participate (such as choir) or not participate (such as Buddhist church).<sup>125</sup> Therefore, Americanization had a bit of a rocky return from the camps.

Yet childhood in the years following internment now began to include the *Sansei*, or third generation.<sup>126</sup> While they were even more Americanized, they did not totally reject their background. One Japanese-American noticed that “the Sansei were completely American,” unlike the Chinese-Americans, who were still isolated in their culture. Additionally, he noticed that “the Sansei...had ‘a better attitude toward the old Japanese customs than the Nisei do.’”<sup>127</sup> Although this probably refers to the *Sansei* as adults, they would have been children after the internment.<sup>128</sup> Assimilation must have continued for them to be completely Americanized, as, more than likely, they did not live completely Japanese lives and then turn around and become completely assimilated. Additionally, their parents were already Americanizing, so it would make sense that, as children, they would be as well. They had found a happy medium: Whereas their parents had seen a struggle between the two cultures (although they did coexist peacefully enough at times) and had even seen a struggle with Americanization itself, the *Sansei* had become Americanized, but still acknowledged their ethnic background. In fact, “[the] story of the

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<sup>124</sup> Tateishi, *And Justice for All*, 248.

<sup>125</sup> Tateishi, *And Justice for All*, 249.

<sup>126</sup> See footnote 6.

<sup>127</sup> Smith, *Democracy on Trial*, 443.

<sup>128</sup> Fugita and O’Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity*, 81.

Sansei generation was in many ways the story of an ethnic minority becoming ever more like other Americans, while not losing entirely its distinctive ethnic identity.”<sup>129</sup> The *Sansei* grew up in a completely different world than their parents, outside of the more typical ethnic community with larger opportunities,<sup>130</sup> thus showing signs of Americanization, whether they wanted it or not. However, “even the third generation Sansei retain certain core Japanese traits.”<sup>131</sup> Additionally, Japanese language schools eventually sprang up again.<sup>132</sup> However, *Sansei* attendance at the Japanese language schools fell dramatically.<sup>133</sup> Also, while “[as] children, Sansei are less likely than the Nisei to have lived in neighborhoods with high concentrations of other Japanese Americans and to have attended a Japanese language school or a Buddhist church. . . . the Sansei are overwhelmingly likely to have attended a predominantly Japanese American church as a child (if they attended any church at all).”<sup>134</sup> Levels of involvement in “Japanese American social institutions” among the *Sansei* dropped to recreational status “at best.”<sup>135</sup> Thus, while some culture was retained, it was losing out to (although not completely lost to—recall the value of adaptability to save the group) a more American life.

Childhood was further Americanized when the traditional Japanese jobs, “agricultural and small shopkeeper,” changed, thus changing “the traditional structure of the Japanese-American family.”<sup>136</sup> Because family is central to childhood and especially the Japanese-American community, this would have made the children more American and less Japanese.

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<sup>129</sup> Paul R. Spickard, *Japanese Americans: The Formation and Transformations of an Ethnic Group* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 151.

<sup>130</sup> Fugita and O’Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity*, 81.

<sup>131</sup> Fugita and O’Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity*, 82.

<sup>132</sup> Morimoto, *Japanese Americans and Cultural Continuity*, 118-19.

<sup>133</sup> Fugita and O’Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity*, 88, Table 5:5. “Nevertheless, if these Sansei were compared with third generation European ethnics, the frequency of their exposure to a formal language school would be considered quite high” (88).

<sup>134</sup> Fugita and O’Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity*, 93.

<sup>135</sup> Spickard, *Japanese Americans*, 145. This probably means adults.

<sup>136</sup> O’Brien and Fugita, *Japanese American Experience*, 97.



Fugita and O'Brien note that Japanese-Americans after the war chose to live in "predominantly middle-class Caucasian neighborhoods" instead of the "isolated ethnic enclaves and rural settings" they had once lived in before the war. "Despite the present geographical dispersal and high rate of structural assimilation of Japanese Americans, however, they have retained a high level of involvement in, and psychological identification with, their ethnic community."<sup>137</sup> However, "[the] prewar Issei secular institutions, such as the Japanese associations, never regained prominence."<sup>138</sup> Thus, children growing up after internment would have experienced a more American and less Japanese home, although one not completely one or the other.

Childhood around the time of internment for Japanese-Americans was marked by a mixture of both Americanization and their own Japanese culture. As time went on, however, American culture continued to be more of a presence in childhood than Japanese culture, even with the experience of the internment camps continuing this trend. In fact, childhood is really where assimilation begins and is strongest. With immigration issues currently a hot topic, there is one lesson from this: Children should be able to choose to keep parts of their own culture if they want, not forced to give up their culture for a new culture. Nations dealing with immigration issues must overcome their fears of race, look beyond the differences, and welcome new peoples into their nations.

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<sup>137</sup> Fugita and O'Brien, *Japanese American Ethnicity*, 9.

<sup>138</sup> Spickard, *Japanese Americans*, 133.

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