Migrating Fictions

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IN THE 1930S, Anglo-Americans from the U.S. interior were moving to the West Coast and joined the migrant farmers already there, including those of Japanese descent, who by 1940 were producing about “40 percent of the California vegetable acreage.”¹ The people of Japanese descent on the West Coast, however, were about to be sent into that same U.S. interior for the duration of World War II—but for them, the recently renamed Promised Land would regain its earlier title of desert. This movement was not induced, as in the previous examples of the economic and environmental migrations of the Great Migration and the Dust Bowl, but instead was a fully forced, mandatory displacement of people of Japanese ancestry, whether citizens born in the United States or first-generation immigrants who could not become citizens no matter how long they lived here. This forced movement of over 110,000 people from their homes to concentration camps in the U.S. interior remains of constitutional relevance today and is not the isolated, resolved “mistake” champions of U.S. democratic capitalism would like it to be.² By setting the wartime incarceration of people of Japanese descent alongside the migrations already discussed, we can see through this overtly political and constitutional displacement how internal displacements throughout the early twentieth century

¹. Thompson, “The Agricultural Aspects of the Evacuation of Enemy Aliens.”
². Simpson, “Internment.”
continue to depend on concepts of citizenship and landownership as well as racializing discourses in determining who can move where.

As with the white settlers who moved to the Great American Desert under the yeoman myth, the transnational experience of Japanese immigrants also was shaped by a larger pioneering story of economic improvement through landownership and farming. As Eiichiro Azuma argues, “Under the spell of bilateral intellectual traditions justifying colonialism, Issei [i.e., first-generation Japanese in the United States] historians discursively hijacked the American frontier as their own without disturbing its rhetorical foundations of conquest.” Such storytelling “led to an elaborate scheme of progressive history, tracing the trajectory of Japanese Americans from migrant laborers to sharecropper and from tenant farmers to idealized land-owning farmers,” which would ultimately result in their reimagining themselves into “mainstream Americans.”

Their quest for landownership, however, was not viewed by that mainstream America as a shared adoption of the yeoman myth but rather as a conquest of white territory. In other words, as Japanese agricultural landownership grew, so too did anti-Japanese sentiment. Japanese immigrants, like their new government, created romanticized narratives that idealized landownership, but as time passed they watched that land be taken away from them, first through laws such as the Alien Land Law and later through World War II incarceration.

In the prewar period, legal decisions extending up to the Supreme Court displayed that the logic interrelating citizenship, landownership, and loyalty to the country was not an issue exclusive to black-and-white power dynamics. In *Terrace v. Thompson* (1923), the Court upheld the Alien Land Law, a California law that denied Japanese immigrants the right to own land. The Court’s decision held: “It is obvious that one who is not a citizen and cannot become one lacks an interest in, and the power to effectually work for the welfare of, the State, and, so lacking, the State may rightfully deny him the right to own and lease real estate within its boundaries.” Here the Court uses the fact of noncitizenship to justify the withholding of ownership rights; it also links that justification to the idea that noncitizens without land cannot be loyal to the state, thereby buttressing earlier laws forbidding access to citizenship. This circular logic maintains the elite power structure that keeps Japanese immigrants in a precarious position in relationship to the state.

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4. Ibid., 93–94.


Several of these same concepts are evident in the governmental, public justifications for the later incarceration during World War II. For example, the U.S. Army’s propaganda film *Japanese Relocation* (1943) attempts to explain the act of incarcerating people of Japanese descent—two-thirds of them U.S. citizens—as though it were a thoughtful, orderly maneuver that was undesirable but necessary. The narrative logic positions the government with an unspecified “we” making these choices: “We are protecting ourselves without violating the principles of Christian decency,” the narrator states, calling into question for whom the United States is a place of refuge and indirectly emphasizing that American exceptionality is tied to an exclusionary Christian ethos. Significantly, the propaganda utilizes frontier ideals as well, and yet there is no discussion of landownership as the “evacuees”—as they paternalistically labeled the incarcerees whom, via this term, they claimed to be protecting—irrigated, tilled, and harvested the U.S. interior until “the raw lands of the desert turn green.” This statement supposedly points to a hopeful future, similar to the promises to homestead farmers in the interior that “rain follows the power,” but instead seems to be a reminder of the interminable length of this incarceration, since turning a desert into this supposedly green paradise is akin to saying that their stay in the camps will last “until hell freezes over.”

By looking at this history and its literary representation in Julie Otsuka’s *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002), I argue that this wartime displacement reveals how a preexisting governmentality equating citizenship and landownership that disenfranchised people of Japanese descent was transformed into a claim to authority during a wartime state of exception and emergency. With this claim, the government disempowered and moved people based on ethnicity directly without regard for their rights, turning residents and citizens into stateless bodies without any obligation to protect them. The violence of this imposed movement and of the hyper-controlling rules then extended beyond the space and time of the camp to become an internalized biopolitics among the incarcerees and their descendants. Giorgio Agamben’s explanation of the state of exception via the space of the concentration camp helps to elucidate this issue; while the camp seems to represent a space where the law is suspended outside of normal jurisdiction, this violent application of power actually undergirds modern notions of sovereignty and law in their regular functioning, so that the camp’s “spatiotemporal” nature escapes its boundaries, “overflowing outside them” and “coincid[ing] with the normal order.”

exceptional moments themselves are always already part of the quotidian existence of people of color, revealing that the camp does not reduce individuals of Japanese descent to an undifferentiated bare life but to a racialized bare life through the perception of foreignness. By extending Agamben’s and Weheliye’s notions of the way that biopolitical power shapes everyday life, I argue that the imposed displacement during World War II became a self-imposed governmentality after the war when the people of Japanese descent left the concentration camps and attempted to return to normal rules. In other words, the imposed physical limitations of the camp became their own internalized restrictions on themselves no matter where they were placed.

It is important to note that these imposed governmental limitations were implemented in part along gender lines. That is, when the government assumed patriarchal power, it caused the breakdown of male-centered families, diminishing the men and granting women only illusory power. Eventually this patriarchal imposition caused people of Japanese descent of both genders to lose their sense of place and self in a process I call “disorientation.” The historical and fictional incarcerees attempted to resist in a variety of ways. I employ Edward Soja’s concept of Thirdspace (i.e., the combination of real and imagined spaces to create new possibilities) and Homi Bhabha’s concept of third space (i.e., a place of positive hybridity) to show how Otsuka’s novel presents a “Thirdspace” that does not lead to social justice for the characters but that challenges the racializing discourse that the government imposes on the displaced.9

When the Emperor Was Divine tells the story of a family of Japanese descent that endures a forced migration from their home in Berkeley, California, in a convoluted path both to and from U.S. concentration camps during World War II.10 Readers follow the unnamed mother, sister, and brother to

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9. See Soja, Thirdspace and Bhabha, “Third Space.”

10. The nomenclature for the camps has been discussed at length, and I recognize that there is no unproblematic name for these places. Roger Daniels explains this issue in Prisoners without Trial, 46. He states that the government most commonly called the camps relocation centers as a palliative, but it has been stated that even Roosevelt himself called the camps “concentration camps” (46). Additionally, he comments that although camps did not become death camps like the German concentration camps, their goal was to concentrate particular people in these locations, so I will often use this label as well as “incarceration” over the term “internment,” which has been demonstrated to be an anachronistic term as well as inaccurate, since Daniels has stated that it was not used during World War II as a totalizing label, since it refers only to “a legal process [. . .] to be applied to nationals of a country with which the United States was at war,” (Daniels, “Words Do Matter,” 183). For further discussion about the use of these terms, see Hirabayashi, “Incarceration.” Additionally see National JACL Power of Words II Committee’s Power of Words Handbook, which lists the group’s views on terminology and some implications related to terminology.
the so-called Topaz Relocation Center in Utah and hear indirectly about the father’s imprisonment as an enemy alien. Told from the shifting perspectives of different family members, this minimalist novel subtly revisits the psychological and cultural effects of a racist government policy on a group of people.

The government emptied people of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast, with many losing their land and possessions, as it tried to deplete the people themselves so that they would have no effect on the Anglo-American United States. The removal was an attempt to change the people themselves. As Michel Foucault has noted, “penal imprisonment, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, covered both the deprivation of liberty and the technical transformation of individuals.” Mae Ngai adds to this concept of transformation through imprisonment by describing additional stages to this process for people of Japanese descent during World War II: “Internment was a crisis of citizenship, in which citizenship was first nullified on grounds of race and then reconstructed by means of internment, forced cultural assimilation, and ethnic dispersal.” Otsuka’s novel is significant, as I show, because it indicates how this transformation occurs through the space of the camp itself, as well as through the movement and government policies that literally and figuratively “evacuate” people, emptying them of their self-worth, individuality, and any connection not only to Japanese culture but to the United States as well. The very namelessness of the characters, in contrast to the individualized, concretized narratives of Hurston and Babb, points to the underlying challenge to identity and citizenship faced by people of Japanese descent. This targeted “emptying” of Japanese immigrants and citizens has continued consequences for Japanese Americans negotiating the legal and political aspects of their heritage.

A LEGAL HISTORY OF IMMIGRATION AND INCARCERATION

The idea that Japanese immigrants were not assimilable motivated much immigration law; the racist policies behind these laws became more visible during the war. Although seemingly justified by a state of emergency, the unconstitutional actions of federal government and the public support of the West Coast farmers showed a continuity with previous policies that were motivated by racism and greed. Critical race theory shows that U.S. laws regulated the immigration and rights of this group long before World War II. The Naturalization Act of 1870 opened up the possibility of naturalization

to “those of African descent” in addition to “free white persons,” but, by not addressing Asian immigrants, the act led to Supreme Court cases that judged the categorization of Asian immigrants through the black/white binary. For instance, the Supreme Court ruling on *Ozawa v. United States* confirmed that Japanese immigrants could never gain U.S. citizenship because they were neither white nor of African descent, creating a negative legal space from which their statelessness could be constructed. Other laws also supported this prohibition against Japanese immigrants’ access to full rights. In 1913, with the passage of the Alien Land Law in California, Japanese immigrants, in addition to being prohibited from owning land, were labeled “aliens ineligible to citizenship,” with only their children, the Nisei, able to gain the rights of citizenship through their birth in the United States; the first-generation Issei were marked as alien.13 Additionally, the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 halted immigration for Asians by prohibiting U.S. entry to those who were “ineligible to citizenship.”14 As critical race theorist Angelo Ancheta affirms,

rather than being centered on color, which divides racially between the superior and the inferior, anti-Asian subordination is centered on citizenship, which divides racially between American and foreigner. Asian Americans are thus perceived racially as foreign outsiders who lack the rights of true “Americans.”15

This perception of Asian immigrants and their descendants as perpetual foreigners presents a legalized nativism—“intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e., ‘un-American’) connections”—whether or not there are any grounds for that perception.16 Additionally, this freezing of Asian immigration, as David Palumbo-Liu has convincingly argued, refocused U.S. policies from regulating the Japanese immigrants attempting to come into the country to regulating those who were already in the country.17

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13. Because the Issei were not allowed citizenship, I use phrases like “people of Japanese descent” or “people of Japanese ancestry” to attempt to include both the second generation and beyond who were able to gain citizenship (Japanese Americans) and those who were not. It was not until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (the McCarran-Walter Act) that first-generation Japanese immigrants were able to become naturalized citizens.


After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, this “patriotic racism” became a “formal governmental policy,” marking a distinction between Japanese immigrants and other Asian immigrant groups. The new specificity denotes a change in the racial formation process, what sociologist Howard Winant calls the “socially constructed status of the concept of race” based on a historical context. New restrictions were soon posted stating where and when people of Japanese descent could go (making no distinction between citizens and noncitizens). At the start of these regulations, immigrants of Japanese descent were grouped together with Italian and German immigrants under the rubric of “alien enemies,” but the enforcement of regulations against these other “enemy” groups was more limited; after all, the argument went, did we want to stop Joe DiMaggio’s father from being able to go about his life as usual? The political power of the East Coast Italians and Germans, the celebrity of DiMaggio, and racial views determined who was a threat. Eventually, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, imposing wartime demarcations on civilian spaces, with his secretary of war able to mark the West Coast as entirely made up of military areas “from which any or all persons may be excluded.” This change meant that who the “enemy” was became even more specific and spatialized.

The position of people of Japanese descent as enemy, however, was not so much a military concern, but one determined by economic and racist motivations, as shown by the inconsistent application of the executive order and by the rhetoric of some of the proponents of the removal. On the one hand, although the largest population of people of Japanese ancestry (150,000) was located in the territory of Hawaii, the site of the Pearl Harbor attack, this area was not depopulated because the loss of the workforce would have devastated the local economy. (Importantly, though, more than 1,000 were still imprisoned.) On the other hand, on the West Coast, with some Japanese Americans running farms and local businesses, their economic power was a threat to whites. In particular, the U.S. Department of Agriculture crop-report statistics detail that Japanese farmers during 1941 grew one quarter of...
the fresh berries and vegetables from California, including 90 percent of the strawberry crop and 75 percent of the onions, spinach, and cucumbers.\textsuperscript{22} The Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association even admitted the desire to profit by throwing their competitors off their land when they sent their managing secretary to Washington to petition Congress to remove all people of Japanese descent from the West Coast:

\begin{quote}
We’re charged with wanting to get rid of the Japs for selfish reasons. [...] We do. It’s a question of whether the white man lives on the Pacific Coast or the brown men. [...] If all the Japs were removed tomorrow, we’d never miss them in two weeks, because the white farmers can take over and produce everything the Jap grows. And we do not want them back when the war ends, either.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

Greed and racism came together in a way that allowed a resurgence of the idea that individuals seen as un-American did not have a right to landownership, and while the law had already withheld that right from Japanese immigrants, incarceration would take that right away from even Japanese American citizens who had to sell quickly or not gain any money at all for their land and their labor. As even the U.S. Army’s propaganda film admitted, “quick disposal of property often involved financial sacrifice for the evacuees.”

The government, too, had its own economic desires tied to the ongoing development of farmable land, planning that the interior land near the concentration camps would “become, through the efforts of the internees, economically self-sustaining” even though it was nonarable.\textsuperscript{24} This liberal capitalistic vision, recalling the ideology of farming and the yeoman myth that led to the Dust Bowl, was rendered all the more disjunctive to reality since, “in many cases, such as at Topaz, where the majority of the internees were urbanites, the internees were found to have ‘no previous experience in agriculture’ at all.”\textsuperscript{25} The people of Japanese descent in the camps were on nonproductive land, often did not have the necessary farming skills, and were not able to own

\begin{footnotes}
\item[22] Frank J. Taylor, “The People Nobody Wants,” 64.
\item[23] Ibid., 66.
\item[24] Lye, America’s Asia, 161.
\item[25] Ibid., 171 quoting Ernest Reed, “Termination Report,” 22. Otsuka’s own grandparents fit this categorization. As she explained to me, “They did not do agricultural work. My grandfather was a businessman so he was the general manager of a Japanese export/import company in San Francisco. Life was fairly comfortable for them before the war but not afterward” (in an interview with the author, August 14, 2016).
\end{footnotes}
the land or the true value of their labor in any case, as they were transformed into prison workers able to be hired at greatly diminished pay.26

Although the government may have been in denial about the possibilities for this interior land, government officials did acknowledge the hardship of financial loss for people of Japanese descent and their own discomfort over “evacuating” American citizens; they also revealed their knowledge of the unconstitutionality of their actions at the time. A diary entry by Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson about the incarceration order indicates his awareness of its implications for the American system of government:

The second generation Japanese can only be evacuated either as part of a total evacuation, giving access to the areas only by permits, or by frankly trying to put them out on the ground that their racial characteristics are such that we cannot understand or trust even the citizen Japanese. This latter is the fact but I am afraid it will make a tremendous hole in our constitutional system to apply it.27

Stimson’s worries from the perspective of the executive branch about creating a hole or exception in the “constitutional system” were echoed by some in the judiciary. In Hirabayashi v. United States (1943), for instance, which challenged the curfew component of Executive Order 9066, Justice Frank Murphy, who initially dissented, wrote in his finalized concurring opinion, with the unanimous court, something that continued to read like dissent. He stated that the curfew creates “two classes of citizens for the purposes of a critical and perilous hour—to sanction discrimination between groups of United States citizens on the basis of ancestry.”28 These grudging acceptances of “military necessity” relied on an assumption either that in a time of war the government must combat its enemies through solidarity or that people of Japanese descent were disloyal to the United States.

This second point, however, was strongly undermined by the Munson Report, which, utilizing evidence from the Office of Naval Intelligence and the FBI, concluded in 1941 that “we do not believe that they would be at least any more disloyal than any other racial group in the United States with whom we went to war” and “the Japanese are loyal on the whole.”29 Thus, while multiple government officials questioned their own actions, they comforted themselves

26. As Sandra Taylor in Jewel of the Desert states, “Most earned $16 a month for a forty-four-hour week, at a time when other Americans made $150–$200 a month” (157).
28. Irons, Justice at War, 244. In note 68 he cites Murphy, draft dissent, box 132, Murphy Papers, UML and Hirabayashi v. United States.
through using the language of the state of emergency to justify their breaking of the rule of law. As Caroline Chung Simpson explains, though, these actions were a part of a longer history of controlling the power and rights of its populace:

Critics have depicted the Japanese American internment as part of an ongoing early twentieth-century policy of labor management through land reform and the dispossession of racialized populations. […] This emerging critique has established internment less as an isolated historical event or ideological crisis than as part of the very logic of U.S. democratic capitalism, which reproduces its inevitability in the regulation of categories of citizenship and alienage.30

That is, not only was the government aware of its racist policies, but also this displacement strongly demonstrated the ongoing trend of such actions to maintain the empowerment of the few that is often hidden under “exceptionality.”

In the months after the presidential order, civilian exclusion orders followed that were addressed “to all persons of Japanese ancestry” with accompanying maps, illustrating both visually and linguistically the systematic erasure that encircled the “offending” persons and excluded them from that space.31 These orders led to the mandatory mass removal of the entire Japanese and Japanese American population from the West Coast. These people, labeled as a threat, were tagged and shipped en masse to various concentration camps in desolate spots, from the deserts of Utah to the swamps of Arkansas, to separate them from the rest of the population. The sites of the camps were knowingly located on “desolate, nonproductive” land, mostly already owned by the federal government in locations such as portions of Native American reservations and forfeited property.32 In other words, the government attempted to

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31. One such example of the space-related specificity is from Civilian Exclusion Order No. 27, dated April 30, 1942:

All of that portion of the County of Alameda, State of California, within that boundary beginning at the point at which the southerly limits of the City of Berkeley meet San Francisco Bay; thence easterly and following the southerly limits of said city to College Avenue; thence southerly on College Avenue to Broadway; thence southerly on Broadway to the southerly limits of the City of Oakland; thence following the limits of said city westerly and northerly, and following the shoreline of San Francisco Bay to the point of beginning. (United States Commission, Personal Justice Denied, figure A)

quantify, categorize, and contain the people of Japanese descent on the West Coast by geographically delimiting, tagging, and then moving them to the wastelands of the interior. These spatializations tried to perform a metonymic substitution—exchanging, as it were, the Japanese American citizens’ valuable property and land on the West Coast for desert land and the regimented space of the concentration camp. While the journeys taken by individuals differed vastly, many remained in some type of camp until 1945, with the last relocation center, Tule Lake, not closing until March 20, 1946. This spatial control had long-term effects on how individuals regulated their own bodies and identities, since the government did not acknowledge the demoralizing and illegal construction of this substitution for decades. Those who were incarcerated were never tried for their alleged crimes—most were not even told what their crime was—even though the entitlement to a trial is a constitutional right; redress was not made for these actions until 1988. By being treated as stateless displaced persons, the people of Japanese descent highlight one of the central concerns of this book, namely how to theorize rights with movement in a manner beyond white capitalist logic.

**INCARCERATION NARRATIVES**

This governmental approach has a literary parallel. While the initial impetus of complete “evacuation” of Asian American literature by the Anglo-American mainstream has been replaced by a “multicultural” acceptance, some Asian American literature is still sold through its focus on the individual’s need to change before being accepted and feeling acceptable. Palumbo-Liu has noted this trend of marketing Asian American literature as “the literature of an assimilated group now at peace after a ‘phase’ of adjustment.” The adjustment is an inward assimilation that “is necessary for the suture of the ethnic subject into an optimal position within the dominant culture,” or what he labels a “model minority discourse.” By embracing this discourse, the reader

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37. Chris Vials has noted how Palumbo-Liu’s account accords with other work by recent scholars: “In their own respective ways, David Palumbo-Liu, Robert G. Lee, Christina Klein, Elaine Kim, and more recently Colleen Lye have seen these decades as a bridge between the prevailing pre–World War II view of Asians/Asian Americans as the Yellow Peril
experiences a sense of resolution that neatly wraps up the problem and blends Japanese American characters into whitewashed “Americans.”

Incarceration narratives in particular attempt to escape this model minority discourse because their subject matter addresses such imposed alterations of self. As Lisa Lowe has pointed out when looking at some incarceration narratives, they “refuse, in different manners, to develop, reconcile, and resolve.” In contrast, scholars Fu-Jen Chen and Su-Lin Yu argue that many of these narratives are written with a linear structure, enabling readers to conclude that there were few long-term repercussions to those who were incarcerated merely because the narrative is linear with a sense of “finality about ‘returning’ and ‘being free.’” Admittedly, the first memoir about the camps, Miné Okubo’s *Citizen 13660* (1946), possesses a strict linearity and quick resolution: it ends with Okubo’s release and her statement, “I was now free. [ . . . ] My thoughts shifted from the past to the future,” as though separating those times were that simple. It is reasonable, however, that a narrative published immediately after the experience could not give a long view on the subject, and even the narrative’s existence belies that she could so easily turn her thoughts from the past. Narratives written with any distance from World War II reveal even more fully that the incarceration experience continues to haunt the story and its subjects. For instance, Yoshiko Uchida’s chronicle *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family* (1982), while following a narrative structure similar to Okubo’s account that ends with the narrator’s departure from the concentration camp, adds an epilogue that discusses the history beyond the camps for readers of the next generation, giving the longue-durée view. Also, in Jeanne Wakasaki Houston’s memoir about her experiences at one of the concentration camps, *Farewell to Manzanar* (1973), the story extends beyond the time at Manzanar and even includes nonlinear segments, such as a proleptic chapter, delaying the expected release from the camp and again showing how its effects continue after their expected end date. Therefore, while a basic linear structure may allow for a simpler reading, how these texts break up those narrative expectations shows in varying ways that the story cannot be neatly contained.

and the reigning postwar discourse of Asian Americans as ‘model minorities’” (*Realism for the Masses*, 114).

41. Additionally, Okubo’s piece, through its use of medium, resists resolution through narrative dissonance. Okubo tells the facts plainly, accompanied by illustrations like a children’s book, yet the content remains very adult.
The inability to resolve the texts is structurally demonstrated in fictional work about the concentration camps as well. Early writers such as Hisaye Yamamoto in her short story “The Legend of Miss Sasagawara” (1950) and John Okada in his novel No-No Boy (1957) frame their narratives with an observer who remembers the characters, thus breaking up a straightforward presentation. In “The Legend,” the narrator is an incarceree who relates Mari Sasagawara’s story, but she reflects on the story many years afterward as a graduate student who survived the camp but has not erased the experience from her mind, revealing that, as the author herself states, “It is an episode in our collective life which wounded us more painfully than we realize,” staying with them all their lives.42 Similarly, in No-No Boy the story is framed by a Japanese American soldier who is thinking about the novel’s protagonist, “his friend who didn’t volunteer for the army because his father had been picked up in the second screening and was in a different camp from the one he and his mother and two sisters were in.”43 The reflections of the unnamed soldier show that his spatial distance from the concentration camps is not an erasure of what happened there. Both stories align with the nonfiction retellings and show that narratives about the incarceration disrupt the simple progression of these stories through time and space, leaving characters of Japanese descent, whether incarcerated or not, dwelling on these events long after their conclusion.

The works discussed thus far were composed by those who lived through the experience of the concentration camps, but now the narratives of the next generation (most often the Sansei—the third generation) are appearing, such as Otsuka’s novel.44 With these additions to the canon, we should consider how the new authors draw upon or depart from earlier texts. Otsuka is certainly indebted to those who came before her in content and approach (and she credits many of these sources at the end of her novel, including some of those listed above), but with crucial distinctions.45 Structurally, Otsuka follows Houston’s lead by including what happens to the characters after their return

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42. Yamamoto, Seventeen Syllables, 69.
43. Okada, No-No Boy, xi.
44. This focus does not intend to occlude, of course, that others outside of this heritage are also writing novels about the Japanese American concentration camps. Recent popular novels such as Jamie Ford’s Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet (2009), Susan Choi’s American Woman (2003), and David Guterson’s Snow Falling on Cedars (1994) show interest in this history and narrative from multiple perspectives.
45. In addition to “A Note on Sources” at the end of her novel, she also mentions in interviews the large amount of research that she did:

I spent months and months reading oral history collections, secondary source books about the internment, and old newspapers from the 1940s. I had to know how things happened, and when, and how things looked, and what kind of plants grew where, and what the dimensions of the barracks were, and what a dust storm felt like—all these things I had to know more for myself really, than for the book,
from the camps, and many of the details that she relates are based on her close reading of earlier works. However, what separates her work is that each chapter is narrated by a different character so that time and space are experienced distinctly depending on the perspective. Her motivations for writing also differ from those who came before her. Otsuka’s purpose is not to relate her own per-

so that I felt I could tell the story confidently. (Kawano, “A Conversation with Julie Otsuka,” n.p.)

46. Like Min Hyoung Song states in *The Children of 1965*, who is also interested in this generation of writers, I agree that Otsuka “clears space for occupying a present that cannot simply look to the past as a possible source of healing or as something long past, unrelated to current struggles or aspirations for the future” (219), but I will also show the specific ways that Otsuka uses time and space to reflect the psychological impact of the camps.
sonal experience, nor is she writing to advance the political goal of reparations for those who had been in the camps, since that goal had already come to pass.47 Instead, Otsuka’s novel raises generational questions about the ramifications of incarceration and the continued threat of state-sponsored racism.

Although Otsuka’s mother, uncle, and grandmother had been incarcerated, she was born years after their release, but she has more than once circumspectly addressed the implicit reasoning behind her writing *When the Emperor Was Divine*.48 As she describes it, she began her research around the same time that her mother began to experience dementia and seemed to be using her work to try to connect to her mother and her past when she saw her mother slipping away. The separation Otsuka felt from her mother’s experiences during her incarceration was enhanced because of the irrevocable nature of the illness, but it was a disjunction she had borne throughout her life. During her childhood she had heard stories about “camp” but did not fully comprehend their meaning, and even upon her discovery of a Dorothea Lange photograph of her mother, uncle, and grandmother on the day they had arrived at the Tanforan Racetrack, the obscuring angle of her mother stands for her own uncertain position in relationship to this historical yet intimate moment (see figure 1).49 In the photo her grandmother is the central figure and her uncle is the eight-year-old boy in the foreground who is standing in front of a ten-year-old girl who is barely visible—Otsuka’s mother. The man pictured is not a relative since her grandfather, like the father in the novel, had been arrested four months earlier, but his presence and the photo’s awkward framing show the confusion of displacement. The novel’s existence thus underscores the fact that the next generation continues to be affected by the

47. *When the Emperor Was Divine* was published after the U.S. commission report that conceded the government’s wrongdoing and after the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 was signed by Ronald Reagan, giving $20,000 to each living camp survivor. The reason for the monetary redress, a symbolic token, was unequivocally stated in the final findings of the United States Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians report, *Personal Justice Denied*, made public on February 24, 1983:

> In sum, Executive Order 9066 was not justified by military necessity, and the decisions that followed from it—exclusion, detention, the ending of detention, and the ending of exclusion—were not founded upon military considerations. The broad historical causes that shaped these decisions were race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership. (459)

Both the words and the reparations by the U.S. government acknowledge that the concentration camps were wrong.

48. The details from Otsuka, “Julie Otsuka on Her Family’s Wartime Internment In Topaz, Utah” were also part of the Gluckauf-Haahr Annual Lecture in Literature I heard her give at Yeshiva University on April 17, 2013.

49. Otsuka, “Julie Otsuka on Her Family’s Wartime Internment In Topaz, Utah.”
trauma their parents and grandparents experienced; they experience “post-memory,” Marianne Hirsch’s term for an “experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated.” Therefore, this generation may feel themselves in a “spatial and temporal exile,” not the exile of their parents in the U.S. concentration camps, but the exile from the camps, the site of the trauma.

Even now Otsuka is uncertain if she is done with this material, stating in an interview with me how elements from When the Emperor Was Divine returned in her next novel, Buddha in the Attic:

I thought when I finished Emperor, “Well, I’m done with World War II and the camps.” I never thought I’d go back to it, but the little piece of unfinished business for me [. . . came back in Buddha’s] last chapter. That was what I was wondering about when I finished Emperor: “What about their neighbors? What did they feel?”

Additionally, Otsuka has written the short story “Diem Perdidi,” which is connected to the concentration camps through a character similar to her own mother, who is dealing with dementia as well as strong memories of her past. In our interview, Otsuka viewed this story as her most “personal” “merger” of the camps with her own family’s history, indicating that the material is not growing more distant for her over time, but rather is an ongoing working through of this history and its relationship to her family.

Part of the next generation’s writing then becomes an attempt to understand what they can never fully grasp and yet still feel, showing that there

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50. Hirsch, Family Frames, 22. Rea Tajiri, the Sansei director and narrator of History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige (1991), states her own sense of generational displacement in a voiceover:

I had known all along that the stories I had heard were not true, and parts had been left out. I remember having this feeling growing up that I was haunted by something, that I was living within a family full of ghosts. There was this place that they knew about. I had never been there, yet I had a memory for it. I could remember a time of great sadness before I was born. We had been moved, uprooted. We had lived with a lot of pain. I had no idea where these memories came from, yet I knew the place.


52. Ibid.
has not been an easy resolution to the story and the history.\textsuperscript{53} While the Nisei have not been completely silent on the subject since a substantial earlier canon exists, the next generation continues to write about the concentration camps, showing that people of Japanese descent are still sorting through the forced movements that affected their community and themselves.\textsuperscript{54}

Significant identity issues resulted from the forced displacement of Japanese people in the United States, because, as I show, the cultural identities of people are inextricably tied to migration and space. Discussing other Japanese American incarceration texts, Lowe has noted that “Japanese Americans were forced to internalize the negation of Japanese culture and to assimilate to Anglo-American majority culture.”\textsuperscript{55} While she does not speak as much about the geographic elements of this cultural shift, she does point to the self-negation involved in this process. By adding the spatial element, I examine this shifting of place and self in relationship to movement. In the specific instance of the 1940s U.S. concentration camps, the governmentality is what I term “disorientation” because it resulted in the migrants’ loss of a sense of place and self through a complex pattern of movement and alienation from space.\textsuperscript{56}

The government’s policy attempts to “dis-orient” by compelling the incarcerees to turn away from the East—here, it is not the compass direction but any Japanese cultural connections—and to instead adopt an imagined communal binary view of “us vs. them,” American versus Japanese.\textsuperscript{57} When the Emperor Was Divine shows how this practice of disorientation disassociated physiognomy, cultural practices and objects, and cultural/national identities from one another at a particular point in U.S. racial history, resulting in an alteration of

\textsuperscript{53} Chu, “Science Fiction and Postmemory Han,” 97. Otsuka, for instance, was partly trying to expand the one-sided story she discovered in a box of letters her grandfather had written to her grandmother while he was incarcerated (Kawano, “A Conversation with Julie Otsuka,” n.p.).

\textsuperscript{54} Some Nisei have actually returned to the topic now that the next generation is writing. For instance, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston’s 2003 fictional epic about three generations of women and the camps is an example of such a revitalization. Houston had coauthored the renowned Farewell to Manzanar in 1973 and The Legend of Fire Horse Woman is her first novel. At the same time, Sansei author Perry Miyake’s 21st Century Manzanar (2002) tells the story of a dystopian near future where Japanese Americans are again incarcerated (ReVac) when the United States engages in an “economic war” with Japan. For this next generation, both the past and the future remain haunted by the camps.

\textsuperscript{55} Lowe, Immigrant Acts, 49.

\textsuperscript{56} Using the base of “oriental” is of course loaded since this term has a history of racist usage as a means to dehumanize people from Asia. For a discussion of this topic, see Edward Said’s classic, Orientalism. I call upon this term precisely to point to the racist implications of the actions toward Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans during incarceration.

\textsuperscript{57} This idea of disorientation can be tied to Palumbo-Liu’s literary perception about the model minority discourse, but here the government and not the literary agent or audience is the one forcing the discourse.
identity with effects into the present day for those who were incarcerated and their descendants. As this chapter illustrates, the alteration of self based on movement, community, and government shows that external oppression and the imposition of statelessness can easily slip into internal oppression when the environment is so unforgiving that the individual cannot maintain a separation between the oppressors’ tactics and his or her own internal thoughts. When characters lose their sense of place, they also lose their sense of self, resulting in self-hatred or disappearance, which weaken both the individual and the community in which he or she resides.

In order to explain the disorienting effects on Otsuka’s characters, I first discuss how the novel introduces the orientation of these characters before their movement. Then I demonstrate how the separate movements of the father to various prison camps and those of the mother and children to a concentration camp confuse these characters because of their oppressive surroundings. The characters attempt to resist through imagination, using dreams and magical thinking, but the Thirdspace that the novel creates only fully exists outside of the text on the level of reception, with the family remaining oppressed. The novel’s Thirdspace challenges the distinction between foreign immigrant and internal citizen via the bare, racialized life of the camp. That is, the mapping of physiognomy onto the citizen/foreign binary exposes the racist and inequitable policies at the heart of the government itself. Even when the family returns home, internalized disorientation continues to affect how they view themselves and their community, thus indicating that the migration narrative remains unresolved for Japanese Americans.

ORIENTATION AND PLURALISM BEFORE DISPLACEMENT

Before incarceration, _When the Emperor Was Divine_ presents an example of a Japanese American family successfully functioning in U.S. society. Even with the racism that predates World War II, the novel’s family has learned to navigate these issues, whether literally going to different places or interacting outside of the Japanese American community. At this point, they are able to feel comfortably situated in a pluralistic society, but this feeling will change as state-sponsored racism undermines their relationship to their spatialized world and their sense of self.

In the beginning of the novel, the mother is clearly oriented in her world and assumes without discussion her new role as head of the household. Although Pearl Harbor and her husband’s removal from their home had occurred months before the novel starts, she and her children still live in their
home, enabling them to maintain a sense of stability. She is grounded in space and time and has positive interactions with her neighbors while being able to incorporate Western and Eastern ideologies into her everyday life. Historically, some of this stability might have also come from the larger sense of a Japanese community, since the vast majority of U.S. residents with Japanese ancestry lived in the state, enabling a cultural support system. Within the novel, many of her movements take her through Japanese Town, as it was then called, so that a connection to an ethnic community was possible. Specifically, the book starts with the mother running errands, and she has no trouble traversing and understanding the space around her: “At the corner of Shattuck she took the streetcar downtown. She got off at Kittredge and went into J. F. Hink’s department store” (6). She easily moves between modes of transportation, sometimes walking, sometimes riding the streetcar. She systematically understands how her current location connects to her desired destination. Additionally, she has an understanding of her place in time, based on her quick movement to start packing as soon as the evacuation notice appears and on her reading the news stories of the day: “The Burma Road had been severed and one of the Dionne quintuplets—Yvonne—was still recovering from an ear operation. Sugar rationing would begin on Tuesday” (4). These stories tell of the ramifications of World War II at home (food rationing) and abroad (Japan’s success on the Burma Road), but they also juxtapose trivial details by bringing to the forefront the mention of Yvonne Dionne, one of the first-known surviving quintuplets. The mother is able to handle the military, economic, and social aspects of her time and place. She has the time and the ability to comprehend both political and popular culture.

Moreover, the mother’s interactions with whites remain convivial. When she is at the hardware store, the owner Joe Lundy chats with her amiably, tries

58. Daniels, Politics of Prejudice, 1. Of course, this population in Hawaii was even larger, but it was still a territory.


60. This reference is also symbolically important since the Canadian government seized these children from their parents because they feared that their impoverished parents would exploit them. The government then kept them under surveillance until 1943, when they were nine years old; the government had quickly become the exploiters. Tourists could come to visit them while they played outside within a wire-fenced confine. These children, although celebrities, were themselves imprisoned like the mother in the text would soon find herself and her family.

61. Later in the text, the reader learns that neighbors did not say goodbye when the mother and her children were finally required to leave. Even so, the mother, because she still has a grounded sense of self, is able to explain away their lack of support by saying, “They’re afraid” (115).
to stop her from paying, gives her a treat “for the children” (6), and compliments her attire. At the same time, this scene reflects the changing atmosphere, since Joe’s actions further reveal his sense of collective guilt, as he tries to wipe away an invisible stain on his cash register in order to avoid discussing her family’s impending incarceration. In spite of this underlying tension, she maintains a solid, healthy sense of space, time, and self and relates to others with ease, even as those interactions become racially tinged.

Eastern and Western cultures intermingle in the mother’s daily routine. As she stands in her kitchen, she listens to the radio:

> Enrico Caruso was singing “La donna è mobile” again. His voice was full and sweet. She opened the icebox and took out a plate of rice balls stuffed with pickled plums. She ate them slowly as she listened to the tenor sing. The plums were dark and sour. They were just the way she liked them. (9)

She happily eats a Japanese snack while listening to Italian opera and enjoys them both with no sense of inner conflict. Of course, in this case not only is she enjoying transnational cultures, but she is also enjoying two items from perceived U.S. enemies. Additionally, we see that her home contains material objects that come from both cultures, from a bonzai tree (7) and ivory chopsticks from her mother in Kagoshima (8) to a wind-up Victrola and Westminster chime clock (7). The mother has embraced a pluralistic existence where various cultural elements sit side by side. She is comfortable in her own skin and in the world that surrounds her.

Although the mother’s actions are told as they happen, accounts of the father focus on memories of him from before the war, since he is already imprisoned when the novel begins. In them, he too seems happily connected to his community and his children, singing songs and making time for his family. Like his wife, he combines Western and Eastern cultures. On the one hand, his food of choice is American: “The thing that he loved most about America, he once confided to the boy, was the glazed jelly donut” (63). On the other hand, the boy also remembers his using a distinctly Asian implement to do some yard work: he watched his father “plucking the caterpillars one by one off the snow pea plants with his long wooden chopsticks” (68). Without internal conflict, both parents have comfortable relationships with their environments and themselves.

The children similarly start off in a much more grounded place than where they end up. Before the camps, they are able to maintain close interracial relationships on the school grounds and at other children’s homes. “Your house or mine?” (120), the children remember their classmates calling out to them.
Although they were born and raised in the United States, they too combine Eastern and Western ideas in their lives. As Sandra Taylor notes about the historical children of Japanese immigrants, “the Nisei were truly Japanese Americans, growing up with one foot in each culture,” but she also mentions children who were not invited to Caucasian children’s houses after school; this prewar acceptance was not universal.62 The children, both in the book and historically, were integrated at school, but the record shows that for some segregation took over after school hours while for others integration continued after school but with elements of racism still experienced.63 In the novel, the children do have a foot in each culture, since after school, the pop culture references that fill the characters’ world are all Western, from the boy’s desire to hear Speaking of Sports on the radio (14) to his sister’s fondness for Dorothy Lamour and “Don’t Fence Me In” (13), but when they are at home they both drink “barley water” (14, 16). The children’s blending of cultures works more on the public versus private level of generational assimilation, but the entire family fits into their community while not being afraid to enjoy personal likes and dislikes that may fall outside of U.S. cultural norms. The family has a “stone lantern covered with moss in the garden, and the statue of the fat round Buddha with its head thrust back” resting in the yard alongside a “red Schwinn” and the ubiquitous “white picket fence” of the American Dream (68). Further, they maintain positive relationships with people outside of their own race, such as the boy’s friendship with a girl with “long yellow hair” named Elizabeth Morgan Roosevelt (68). Even so, the book shows that these easy relationships should be questioned. After all, President Roosevelt betrays them when he signs Executive Order 9066, and later fences stand as obstacles to their dreams.

When the Emperor Was Divine does not romanticize the time period by saying that there was no racism toward Japanese Americans before World War II. The boy remembers that his father always “knew which restaurants would serve them lunch and which would not. He knew which barbers would cut their kind of hair” (62–63), pointing to the very real limits on spatial and social interactions. The boy also recalls his sister coming home from school with her new jump rope to report: “‘They let me turn the handle,’ she said, ‘but they wouldn’t let me jump’” (70), a historical detail that Otsuka probably gathered from her reading of Jewel of the Desert, a scholarly work on Japanese Americans in the World War II era, showing how her assiduously researched book presents factual particulars that connect the reader closely to the events

63. Ibid., 12, 43.
of the time.\textsuperscript{64} Racism is passed through the generations so that children speak it. These painful moments remind the reader that Pearl Harbor did not create anti-Asian racism in the United States, but with a firm sense of place and time, Otsuka’s characters before World War II were still able to be integrated into their community and to have a strong sense of self despite the racism they did experience. As the war progresses, however, that racism, accompanied by widespread state sponsorship that uproots these characters, alters the characters’ view of themselves.

The first chapter of the book ends with the characters’ current clarity of time and place shifting toward the uncertainty of the future. The night before the family leaves, the mother tells herself, and her daughter’s pet macaw, “I am right here, right now” (19), as if she is trying to remember this moment for the future, when the here and now might not be as grounded. The chapter’s final sentences speak to the changing perception of time and space as the forced removal begins:

In a few hours [the boy] and the girl and their mother would wake up and go to the Civil Control State at the First Congregational Church on Channing Way. Then they would pin their identification numbers to their collars and grab their suitcases and climb up onto the bus and go to wherever it was they had to go. (21–22)

Concrete directional and time markers at the start of this quotation give way to things that are new and strange: being identified by numbers attached to their clothes like luggage tags and going “wherever it was they had to go.” Beyond the necessity of the movement, they do not know their destination, and the circularity of the phrase that starts and ends on “go” further accentuates a sense of constant movement without an end or arrival.\textsuperscript{65} Historically, they are about to become part of a mass forced migration that extended along the West Coast as just one of hundreds of families in their specific “evacuation

\textsuperscript{64}. Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{65}. This repetition of the word “go” is a leitmotif that guides \textit{When the Emperor Was Divine}. The mother uses this word to refer to the family’s forced migration (9) and tells their pet macaw to “go” several times as she pushes him out into the night on his own forced migration; since pets are not allowed to be “relocated” (20), he becomes a domesticated pet without a home just like the family is separated from their home. At the camp, the men play the ancient Asian board game Go, which is about the conquest of territory. Then, once the family returns to the West Coast, the children comment, “We were free now, free to go wherever we wanted to go” (113), a slight alteration to show how \textit{want} has replaced \textit{need} based on their freedom. Finally, “go” is the last word of the book (144), turning any sense of an ending into an incomplete arrival. The characters remain in a constant state of movement that cyclically disorients them. They are kept on the go throughout the novel.
region” to be moved that day. This experience was repeated at the same scale in 108 separate areas, each moving an average of 1,000 individuals. The end to the chapter marks a shift that parallels the historical details. The characters are about to begin their physical dislocation, and this journey will be characterized by force and vagueness. From now on, the government tells them that their identity is only to be externally perceived; they will have little say about who they are.

DISLOCATION AND PATRIARCHY

This governmentally forced movement demonstrates the power of the United States over the places people occupy, a fact that bears out Foucault’s statement that “space is fundamental in any form of communal life, space is fundamental in any exercise of power.” In this case, for people of Japanese descent, the government “shattered their sense of community and replaced it with another one, a somewhat prisonlike existence where they lived under Caucasian domination.” In this new space, the military ruled and the inhabitants needed to submit to the sovereign authority of the government; the path of the journey itself further accentuates their disempowered position.

After the mother and children begin their physical journey, the details of the father’s journey already underway are more fully articulated. Unlike the rest of his family, the father is arrested and tried, although the details of his treatment remain vague. What is explained is that the father has already made several moves, including four states, since his arrest on December 7, 1941, even though for the first four days, the family had no idea where he was.

The father’s zigzagging forced migration functions to keep him unsettled and his family uncertain of and disoriented concerning his whereabouts. Taken in the middle of the night, still in his pajamas and slippers, he is not given the time to put on his shoes or his hat before they push him into the back of a police car (83). (Seven hundred Japanese resident aliens were arrested the day Pearl Harbor was attacked.) The government was rounding up the perceived heads of the Japanese American community. The publically stated reason was that these individuals would lead acts of sabotage and espionage (even though the Munson Report, written just prior to Pearl Harbor, showed “there is no Japanese ‘problem’ on the Coast”), but they were

66. Daniels, Concentration Camps, North America, 87.
68. Sandra C. Taylor, Jewel of the Desert, xviii.
69. Levine, A Fence away from Freedom, 231.
also rounding up the heads of Japanese American families. As the daughter notes, her father was in a camp where “only fathers lived” (61). Conflating fathers with men, and their perceived threat, underlined many actions by the United States. By removing these patriarchs, the government quickly forced their own governmental patriarchy onto fatherless and husbandless families. As Chuh explains, incarceration in general aimed at redirecting loyalty to the United States: “Internment speaks of knowledge produced by racism and patriotism, the promulgation of devotion to the father(land) that demands different demonstrations of loyalty from the nation’s would-be sons and daughters.” In history and in Otsuka’s novel, we can see how the father of the family is replaced with the fatherland. That is, the government appeared to believe that without the fathers, these families would be more easily maneuvered—a reversal of earlier immigration policies that kept wives from their husbands as a means to bring in workers from abroad while controlling the population of immigrants. Supposedly, without the “Japanese” fathers, these families would renounce what the United States viewed as the truly threatening father figure—the emperor. The United States wanted people to turn away from Hirohito and metonymically from Japan. As the novel’s title suggests,
the government wants the emperor to no longer be seen as divine and thus lose the power of a patriarch and, by extension, god.

Once in the camps, the family is further undermined. Because meals are not served family style but in group mess halls, many of the children eat together and quickly disassociate themselves from what was once the primary bond of family, a connection that is stressed in Japanese communities as the way that society coheres. The camp instead becomes the-father-that-sees-all from the watchtowers, Foucault's panopticon and the replacement “god,” with the family almost fully replaced by the military culture where people sleep in “barracks” and go to the bathroom in the “latrines." Otsuka's characters live in a military space as the enemy within. The armed guards on the towers stare at them with binoculars and searchlights just as they surveilled the enemy during their recent “tour of the Pacific” (52). The U.S. patriarchy can attack those who are living under its gaze, but for the incarcerated it stands as the only acceptable father figure.

Since the family’s actual father is mostly absent in the story except through flashback, his postcards, and his final return at the end of the novel, we do not hear directly about the effects of each movement on him. What we do see are the effects on his family. While they track his progress from afar, even with specific postcards marking his location by state, his family feels disconnected from where he is. The vacation tone of postcards clashes discordantly with the father’s prison experience. He is not visiting the pueblos, the riverbanks, or even “the world’s largest stack” shown on the postcards. He does not “wish you were here,” as many travelers write on such cards, as even his daughter cannot help but write on her postcards to friends on the outside (54). The language he uses is vague (where he is, the weather is “fine” [10]) and the landscape alien (in New Mexico he reports that there are no trees [34]). Partly, of course, this shorthand form of information is caused by the genre of postcard writing and by the father’s desire not to send his family any of his troubles, but his narrative is also limited by the censors that obliterate lines of his writing—many of his short notes include full lines of blacked-out language. At other points his lines have actually “been cut out with a razor blade” (59), marking the violence of such silencing of voice. Both the movement of the father from place to place and the limiting of his communication remove the family’s ability to clearly “place” him anymore.

The one time the mother is allowed to see him, she tells the children that he looks like a “hobo” (91) because he had not been allowed to change clothes position, he cannot hold onto these standard patriarchal figures for himself. It is not just the government that recognizes an established connection between power and patriarchy.

or shower, still in the pajamas and slippers he was wearing when he was taken away. The government forces this altered view of the father by not allowing him to take care of his body nor allowing him to remain in one place, turning the father into what Sherene Razack, referencing Samira Kawash, calls the “homeless body”: “Through its presence as a material body that occupies space, but as one that is consistently denied space through a series of violent evictions, the homeless body confirms what and who must be contained in order to secure society.”75 The government now controls the father’s body, and their rendering of that body creates a new view of him in the family’s eyes: a nomadic statelessness that is also tied to a lack of hygiene.

Later, the daughter reinforces this ambiguous placement of the father. Although she knows the names of all the places he has been, she still ends the list of named locations with “wherever it was he happened to be” (30), echoing the language at the end of novel’s first chapter that says that they will go “wherever it was they had to go” (22). As in that original statement, here her specifics begin to yield to vague generalities of the unknown. The separation of the father from his family and his constant movement isolate him and make it more difficult for his family to clearly identify him. By making the physical body impossible to locate in a specific place, the cultural body is undermined. Under the policies of the government, space and movement become weapons of disempowerment against identity and the family by displacing the father and positioning itself in his stead.

**DISLOCATION AND DISORIENTATION FOR THE REST OF THE FAMILY**

The space of the concentration camp, in history as well as in the novel, is the destination of a displacement that is designed to dehumanize and confuse. By treating residents and citizens as bare life, as animals that can be disposed of, the government imposes upon the incarcerated a warped sense of time, while the barbed-wire space of the camp in the desert reinforces the starkness of their constitutionally displaced existence.

In the novel, the mother and the two children, like the father, feel fully displaced because they are moved more than once. We learn, through information given out of linear order and adding to the disorientation, that they are first taken by bus to a temporary detention facility at the Tanforan Racetrack near San Francisco. From there they are moved by train to Utah, with the final leg of the journey by bus to the Topaz Relocation Center. None of these char-

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acters is merely relocated. Each is taken on a convoluted ride that promotes confusion through indirect paths and different means of transportation. This constant movement is part of the disorientation process. They can never be completely certain where they are going or when they will be moved next.

At the Tanforan Racetrack, their first stop, the mother and the children are housed in horse stalls. They have lost their home and are being treated in the same manner as an animal. The space itself is still marked for the purpose of holding horses instead of housing humans: the boy pulls some horse hair from the walls and looks to where the wooden door had been chewed by the former inhabitants. They sleep on mattresses stuffed with straw and even wash their faces in “long tin troughs” (30), so that not only does the space look like a horse stall, but they are also supposed to act like horses, a process of dehumanization. As David Sibley points out, “to animalize or de-humanize a minority group [. . .] legitimates persecution.”76 If people are not people but horses, they “logically” lose the rights and protections of humans under the law.

Next, the mother and children are moved to Utah. While the train to Utah has windows that allow the family to see the country they are traversing, each time they pass a town the soldiers who “guard” them tell them to pull down their shades. This separation between the external and internal space is supposed to protect them because so many people see them as enemies. On two separate occasions, however, a stone and then a brick are thrown through the window regardless of whether the shades are up or down (29, 43). These physical attacks highlight that the threat comes not just from the government—here represented by the soldiers who appear to be kind while carrying weapons—but also from the country at large that allows the government to take such actions against an entire group of people in the first place. The danger is from both inside and outside the train.

Looking at one attack, this moment is the first time in the text when a character is fully disoriented. The girl wakes up to the crashing glass:

She was sweating and her throat was dry and sore and she wanted a glass of cold milk but she could not remember where she was. At first she thought she was in her yellow bedroom in the white stucco house in Berkeley but she could not see the shadow of the elm tree on the yellow wall or even the yellow wall itself so she knew she was not there, she was back in the stalls at Tanforan. But at Tanforan there were gnats and fleas and the awful smell of the horses and the sound of the neighbors on either side fighting until late in the night. At Tanforan the partitions between the stalls did not reach all the way up to the ceiling and it was impossible to sleep. The girl had slept. Just

76. Sibley, Geographies of Exclusion, 10.
now she had slept. She had slept and dreamed about her father again so she knew she was not at Tanforan, either. (43–44; italics added)

An attack causes her not to know where she is, a type of confusion that has been historically noted at the camps: “Whenever the community was racked by a disturbing event the younger children became disoriented.”77 In the girl’s case, she wakes to being threatened, which makes no sense to her; therefore, her surroundings make no sense either. She works logically through her environment to try to ascertain her location using sight, sound, and smell. Her continued inability to uncover her current location turns her to the past and a positive memory of her father. She recedes from the current place and time because of its hostility and instead returns to a better place and time—one where her father was more dominant than the attacking community. Her disorientation on the way to the camp is only an early signal that these characters are being individually altered by their physical movement.

Once at Topaz, all of the major characters experience disorientation. This confusion is brought on by the destabilizing movement that makes them unable to resituate themselves, by their imprisonment, and by the hostility of the environment. As though their first stop at the racetrack was not bad enough, the concentration camp where these characters have been brought differs vastly from their West Coast home, which had moderate temperatures, easy access to the ocean, and an urban community. Space in this novel is not romanticized, as Chen and Yu state often occurs when literature discusses the Southwest as “something sublime, spiritual, or therapeutic, all founded on images of sun, desert, blue skies, dramatic canyon lands and mesas, [. . .] and other symbols of a different ethnicity.”78 Underlining this removal of the romantic, the boy comments on how his previous knowledge of the desert does not match the reality he experiences: “It was not like any desert he had read about in books. There were no palm trees here, no oases, no caravans of camels slowly winding across the dunes. There was only the wind and the dust and the hot burning sand” (53). The family members find themselves in a barren desert that not only lacks the basic elements of their former lives, but physically affects them as well. The glare off the sand is so bright that it blinds them temporarily (48), and the dust storms take their breath away, leaving them no means of avoiding the environment (64). Like the dust storms that I discussed in the previous chapter, these storms are of great importance, but because the circumstances are different, so too is the symbolism. The way that

77. Sandra C. Taylor, Jewel of the Desert, 126.
78. Fu-Jen Chen and Yu, “Reclaiming the Southwest,” 553.
the dust permeates their space shows that while they are being contained, their space is still being invaded, leaving them no sense of privacy:


It seeped under doors and around the edges of windows and through the cracks in the walls. (64)

The dust is invasive, but also violent. It “made your skin burn. It made your nose bleed. It made your eyes sting. It took your voice away” (64). The harsh environment parallels the harsh treatment of the incarcerated. Historically, people recalled: “The dust storms were the worst. Everyone would become white.”

This dust is not made from topsoil, so that the alkaline ground of the desert ironically speaks to the underlying desires of those who put them in the camp. Either they would be attacked and destroyed or they would become “white” through assimilation.

The bleak desert climate surrounds them, yet the space accessible to them is even more strictly confined, from the small size of their rooms to the borders of the camp—the barbed-wire fences: “The rules about the fence were simple: You could not go over it, you could not go under it, you could not go around it, you could not go through it” (61). These rules show how clearly imprisoned the characters are by the boundaries of their physical world and the rules imposed on them. Otsuka herself spoke of the contradictions of the camp, “It’s a confined space, but it’s also, in a way, an enormous space because when you actually see it, it’s just endless. [. . .] If you were to try to escape there was no place you could go to.” Therefore, incarcerees could see the wide world beyond the camp but knew that they were required to stay within the contained spaces of their tiny barracks and the barbed-wire fences. Even the few times that they are allowed outside the camp they are reminded again of their place: “They said they’d been shot at. Spat on. Refused entrance to the local diner. The movie theater. The dry goods store. They said the signs in the windows were the same wherever they went: NO JAPS ALLOWED. Life was easier, they said, on this side of the fence” (66–67). They are being trained to stay within their confines both through physical and psychological means; they are being taught to know their place.

In keeping with the spatiotemporal nature of the camp, the constraints of the environment are also temporal. Min Hyoung Song notes that time in the

camps functioned in “estranging, non-Euclidean ways,” which he calls “desert time,” but the use of time does more than create an ambiance of boredom and emptiness; instead, it speaks to the process of emptying of self for the characters. The characters still remember “the bright green grass, the roses, the house on the wide street not far from the sea,” but now home is so distant that it seems “like a dream” and “another time” (93). Their view contrasts with the established sequencing at the camps. The government sets up a regimented, linear time while the characters gradually experience time as repetitive, stalled, and eventually dreamlike. At first, the characters hope that their incarceration, when it is over, will be just an “interruption” (114) in their lives, a limbo that they desire to escape. This hope and its subsequent defeat are tellingly represented in the novel by the symbol of a watch. For instance, time already begins to stall on the train to the camps, where a formerly wealthy man carries “a handsome gold watch that no longer told the correct time” (32). The hands on his watch might be still moving, like they are on the train, but that movement fails to correlate with actual experiences. Their lives are regulated by someone else even to the point of controlling when to raise and lower the shades on the train. They feel trapped in a repetition that they do not dictate and that does not move forward. The girl’s watch further illustrates the characters’ sense of time. This watch is not functioning, just like the other watch on the train, but in this instance time is consciously stopped, like the clocks in a house after a death. She “stopped winding it the day they stepped off the train” (65). Once she arrives in the camp time, she lives in a space of mourning.

Even though the girl stops her watch, she repeatedly looks at it, as though she gains new information from her analysis. While the characters, like the watch, are technically stuck, they attempt to recapture a productive sense of time by thinking about the past as something they can return to in the future. In this way, the watch, which belonged to the girl’s father and thus represents the family unit now lost, becomes a device of recollection and hope. When asked by her brother for the time, she carefully reads her unmoving watch and announces that it is six o’clock. To them, that time was another empty marker in days filled with regimented waiting: “For the mail. For the news. For the bells. For breakfast and lunch and dinner. For one day to be over and the next day to begin” (54). Even so, the brother wants to know what that hour means “at home,” and the sister replies, “I bet they’re having a good time” (66). There


82. Other instances of stalled time include the calendar that has fallen from the wall and the tin clock that was stopped literally by the environment, “its gears [. . .] clotted with dust” (103).
is hope in this response that they, too, can return home to a “good time.” The brother seizes this hope, and from then on, “when he thought of the world outside it was always six o’clock. A Wednesday or a Thursday. Dinnertime across America” (66). He visualizes the time his sister briefly describes, and it includes the entire family.

The other characters also embrace dinnertime as a time that recreates a complete sense of their family, but later in the story the characters start to confuse past, present, and future. The sister in a delirium states that the father is coming to rescue them, but then, looking at her stopped watch, says, “It’s six o’clock. [. . .] He should have been here by now” (98). She seems to be expecting her father, and because he has not arrived, we see her hope running out. The mother similarly confuses her memories and hopes with her present state:

“Sometimes,” said [the boy’s] mother, “I’ll look up at the clock and it’s half past five and I’m sure that [the father is] on his way home from the office. And then I’ll start to panic. ‘It’s late,’ I’ll think to myself. ‘I should have started the rice by now.’” (85)

Although the wish for a reunited family helps these characters to live for the future, as their anxiety rises at the camp, their sense of time is confused. They recede from the spatiotemporal reality, partly as a survival mechanism to avoid the horrors of their contemporary space and time, but this retreat into spaces of delirium and dream becomes a threat because they may not return from them. Their disorientation may become permanent, and we see signs in both of the parents that this may be the case. The mother states at the camp, “Sometimes I don’t know if I’m awake or asleep” (94), and even after the camp the father calls out to see the children because “otherwise he wouldn’t know if he was really awake” (133). Their dreams about different times and places give them a refuge from reality, but as this location between a dream world and their lived world becomes blurred, it is also a sign that they have lost their sense of reality and orientation.

The novel aligns the characters’ confusion about time with their confusion about their physical space and selves. Iris Young states that during Western exploration, “the ‘edge’ of civilization was marked by the presence of grotesque peoples” in stories and images; in When the Emperor Was Divine, the characters have been moved to the “edge” of civilization, to a desert wasteland, and start to see themselves as grotesque and culpable for their confinement.83 The characters are most susceptible to this disorientation, which leads to self-
negation in the hazy location at the edge of sleep, delirium, and daydreams. In this borderline space of the psyche, the characters state that they do not know when, where, and eventually, who they are. Specifically, the boy often wakes in the night, “crying out, ‘Where am I?’” (57); he fears that he has deserved this banishment to an unwelcoming and unfamiliar desert where “the wind blow[s] through the sagebrush” (57). The mother also misses her environmentally based ties to home and daydreams that one day she could “look out the window and see the sea” (94). Without that connection, she feels ill at ease, constantly jolted back to the moment of crisis when her husband was taken. She confuses the bell that announces mealtimes with the doorbell that brought the strangers to arrest her husband. She asks, “What is it?” and “Who’s there?” (93) each time she hears the bell. This military procedure for meals, resembling Pavlovian conditioning, repeatedly draws a reaction from the mother, but she hungers for her husband, not the food that is available to her. The mother and her children have been psychically uprooted at the same time that they have been physically uprooted; time and space are out of joint. Although they use their imagination, they are not in control of synthesizing the real and imagined elements of their spatialized world.

TURNING AWAY FROM THE EAST

The family is not just disoriented in their sense of their specific location and time, but they are also disoriented in the sense of being turned from the East. A U.S. ideology demonizing the East is progressively forced upon the characters in the novel and real people in the camps. This hatred, which does not distinguish between the Japanese enemy and the internal inhabitants, is turned inward by the fictional incarcerees and eventually results in loathing not only where they come from but who they are. Despite their acts of resistance, Otsuka’s characters come to “mirror” the racist thinking that the government employed in order to justify their incarceration and denial of citizenship rights in the first place. By showing the damaging potential to the characters, the novel’s presentation of this warped mirror reveals to the reader the failed logic of the governmental policies that alienate the country’s own subjects.

84. The mother becomes disoriented in other ways as well, such as through a sense of malaise when she loses interest in current events: “She had stopped keeping track of the days. She no longer read the paper or listened to the bulletins on the radio” (93). In contrast to her newspaper reading in the beginning of the novel, her current inability to try to stay acclimated shows how broken she has become.
The family quickly learns that they are threatened because of their physiognomy and their cultural connections to Asia. The day after the father is taken, the mother lit a bonfire in the yard and burned all of the letters from Kagoshima. She burned the family photographs and the three silk kimonos she had brought over with her nineteen years ago from Japan. She burned the records of Japanese opera. She ripped up the flag of the red rising sun. She smashed the tea set and the Imari dishes and the framed portrait of the boy’s uncle, who had once been a general in the Emperor’s army. She smashed the abacus and tossed it into the flames. “From now on,” she said, “we’re counting on our fingers.” (75)

The mother’s immediate response to the attack on her family is to destroy the material objects that connect them to Japan. This destruction of Eastern material objects was a response that was noted several times in the historical record. In some cases, such destruction may have been intended to show patriarchal loyalty to the United States, but in many instances it was because of the fear that “the FBI may come” and Japanese objects might “incriminate.” In a conversation I had with the author, she spoke of this moment as “an act of rage” and “self-harm” where “she’s destroying a part of herself at the same time that she is expressing rage towards the government.” But she importantly also noted, “It’s the safe thing to do. You know that too. You have to do that. There’s really no question about whether or not you should get rid of those objects. You just should because you don’t want to be found with anything on you.” Disavowal of self becomes a strangely distorted protection of self.

In the novel, the mother then goes on to alter the food she makes for the children, giving them peanut butter and jelly sandwiches instead of rice balls in order to show that the children are “American,” which is ironic since of course they are U.S. citizens. Finally, she tells the children to disavow their ethnicity. She says, “If anyone asks, you’re Chinese” (75). Even though it is not a full geographic dis-orientation, this alteration of identity is significant because China and Japan were political enemies (they had been at war since 1931) and were and are culturally distinct.

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85. For examples, see Sone, Nisei Daughter, 155; Levine, A Fence away from Freedom, 24; and Cheung, “Interview with Hisaye Yamamoto,” 80.
86. Levine, A Fence away from Freedom, 24; Sone, Nisei Daughter, 154.
88. Although the United States had a long history of disenfranchising Chinese immigrants as well as Japanese, during World War II the United States helped the Chinese to battle against the Japanese, viewing the region as a “second theatre” of attack on the Japanese enemy. There-
telling her children to claim the identity of her home country’s adversary because it is a feasible direction their physiognomy and U.S. culture will allow them to turn, even though, of course, antagonism toward Chinese Americans also existed. The mother asks her children to pretend to be Japan’s enemy as a means to avoid being seen as an enemy in the United States.

This attempt at passing as Chinese as a way to escape attack was counterbalanced by white America’s desire to demarcate the races. Historically, *LIFE* magazine reported that Asians in America were being beaten, and, therefore, the magazine’s December 22, 1941, issue published pictorial representations of a Chinese and a Japanese face that were itemized for comparison. The following is the stated reason for this decision: “To dispel some of this confusion *LIFE* here adduces a rule-of-thumb from the anthropometric conformations that distinguish friendly Chinese from enemy alien Japs.”89 The article does not oppose violence against citizens. Instead, *LIFE* wants to make sure that readers are attacking people of Japanese descent, who are categorically marked as “enemy aliens,” based on supposedly scientific phenotypical markers. Although the article does not acknowledge anti-Chinese sentiment, which certainly did exist in the United States at the time, it does stress the particular, popular focus on anti-Japanese sentiment. In the novel, the mother’s advice that the children disavow their Japanese identity constitutes an attempt at self-preservation in a country where even the major magazines are advocating violence against Japanese Americans. Destroying possessions, changing habits, and disavowing identity may be invoked as elements of self-preservation, but they are disorienting elements as well that force assimilation and cause internalized oppression.

Even though the mother burns the family’s belongings to attempt to keep them safe, she holds back some items. Later, as she packs up the house before the move, we see that she still has the wedding chopsticks that her mother sent her from Japan (8). While this is a small token, she has not completely obliterated her ties to Japan. Similar historical examples exist, such as Monica Sone’s statement that she saved a doll from her grandmother as a sign that she had “rebelled.”90 Defying the government’s orders, both women, historical and fictional, erase just enough of their cultural connections, they think, to keep themselves out of trouble.

While at the U.S. concentration camp, the boy takes on the new rules while also resisting them. When the boy’s mother tells him, “Never say the

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Emperor’s name out loud” (52), sometimes as he passed the guard tower he would whisper “Hirohito” over and over again. These moments of resistance are small acts of defiance by the mother and her son that show a shift in self-worth but not a total erasure of it, and they support Foucault’s claim that “there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional groupings.” While these small feats demonstrate the attempts of the characters to remain intact, they are also tied to magical thinking, which, like dreams, is the withdrawal from logical causation to the symbolic when faced with an uncontrollable time and place. Therefore, the boy’s belief in the power of repeated phrases illustrates both his attempts to control his environment and his inability to do so. Although the boy resists more often than the girl, much of his resistance is tied to irrational thinking.

Even when thinking positively about these acts, they are more than balanced by acts of acquiescence. For instance, the girl finds herself also repeating language, but the language she speaks is that of the oppressor. After the brick is thrown through the train window, she repeats to herself the words she had just heard from a soldier, “Shades down” (46). In this moment we see the act of internalization. She sees that there is a threat outside, and that a potential solution to that threat is merely to pull down the shades as the soldiers recommend. While this symbolic separation between the outside world and the internal one has larger and more dangerous ramifications, the girl only sees the immediate relief caused by compliance, and, more importantly, she has repeated a lesson previously demonstrated so that it has become ingrained. She has begun to believe the oppressor’s viewpoint, which contains hatred and fear of herself. She continues to accept the government’s view of space and cannot imagine her own Thirdspace as a resistive practice to their biopolitics.

We see this internalized oppression not just in the acceptance and repetition of the rules that the characters face but directly in their acceptance of others’ hatred. Early in the book, the girl’s racist exclusion from playing jump rope angers her (she even cuts up her rope), but in the camp, she takes out that anger on herself instead of on a rope. She states about her jump roping abilities and most likely herself, “I’m terrible. I don’t even deserve to hold the rope” (97). In her exile, the girl has lost her ability to resist racism. In this conversation she also says, “I’m not here” (98). That same night she falls into a delirium and asks questions such as “Where are we?” and “What country is


92. Other instances when the boy uses magical thinking include when he thinks that if he does not look at a lock of his father’s hair, “his father will be all right” (79) or that if his mother takes the key off her neck, their house “would fall down, or go up in flames, or simply disappear. The war would last forever. Our mother would cease to be” (108).
this anyway?” (98). She is spatially disoriented in such a way that emphasizes their manufactured statelessness. After losing her sense of place, she is unable to hang on to a positive sense of self. Although the specific catalyst for this event is not named, the girl struggles from the beginning of their incarceration as she internalizes, and then expresses such ideas as “Nobody will look at you [. . .] if your face is too dark” (58). Dislocation and racism combine to defeat her resistance to racist ideology.

The boy also has to deal with the confusion that surrounds him. At the camp, he learns to play war, where he shouts “Kill the Japs!” (54), showing his internalization of the Japanese as the enemy that he needs to destroy. Additionally, the clothes given to the incarcerees are U.S. Army surplus from World War I, and when the boy puts on the uniform and looks in the mirror, he “narrow[s] his eyes and [sticks] out his two front teeth” (87), speaking in imitation of a stereotypical Japanese voice where l’s and r’s are swapped: “I preclude arrgiance to the frag [. . . .] Solly. So so solly” (87). This painful reversal of identification shows the complexity of vilifying the enemy and then seeing the enemy as yourself. He both wants to kill the enemy and sees himself as that enemy wearing a bullet-ridden, military peacoat.

The mirror then acts as the place where his internal self and external perceptions collide, spatializing the collapse of the boy’s interiority. He looks into the glass and sees an image that resembles that of the enemy Japanese: the dark hair, the brown skin. Once he sees that image, he wants to heighten it into a stereotype by altering the shape of its eyes, teeth, and voice. The problem, of course, is that the image he mocks is his own. He is no longer shouting to kill the Japanese who are over there somewhere, because, in the case of the mirror, the over there is Foucault’s classic example of a utopia, a no-where, that merely reflects the physical self here. Therefore, his external perception of the enemy in the mirror collapses into his perception of himself. The spatial distance deceives him into an altered perception of himself in a "broken mirror" that is rooted in external racist perceptions he has heard. Whereas the boy remains trapped within this internalized racism, his position as an American citizen in the U.S. concentration camp being reflected to the reader opens the possibility of a Thirdspace in the narrative. The Thirdspace of the mirror reveals the racist stereotype and constitutional displacement imposed by the U.S. government by reflecting the distorted image of this monstrous creation. The performance of the pledge of allegiance points to a deserved citizenship right that is wrongly being withheld.

The use of the mirror reveals how the boy sees himself and his body through the eyes of the oppressors who stereotype his body. As Young states, “When the dominant culture defines some groups as different, as the Other, the members of these groups are imprisoned in their bodies. Dominant discourse defines them in terms of bodily characteristics and constructs those bodies as ugly, dirty, defiled, impure, contaminated or sick.” The boy and the girl, who is sometimes the source of information for the boy, recognize certain speech patterns, skin color, narrow eyes, bulging teeth, and dark, straight hair as markers of the enemy, and they are trained to see the ugliness in those stereotypical phenotypes and then in themselves. It begins with the repetition of racist statements like “For it was true, they all look alike” (49) when the boy sees the men in the camp. Although he sees his father in their bodies, he still separates himself from them. Eventually, though, the children become so repulsed by themselves that they pronounce, “We looked at ourselves in the mirror and did not like what we saw: black hair, yellow skin, slanted eyes. The cruel face of the enemy. […] We tried to avoid our own reflections whenever we could” (119–20). Through the characters’ experience leading up to and in the concentration camp, we see how they have fully incorporated the racism aimed at them in such a way as to disorient their identities. The hyper-controlling rules and exceptional space of the camp, where sovereign authority enacts its power on subjected bodies, become a mirror of larger U.S. cultural racism so that the characters are overwhelmed and cannot imagine themselves in an alternative fashion. On the level of the narrative, however, the Thirdspace of the novel is a place where such hybrid cultural identities are acknowledged and accepted as part of the United States and its principles. The mirror Thirdspace reflects the government’s fragmenting policies back on us and demands ethical action.

THE RETURN HOME

When the family finally returns home to Berkeley, they return with a changed sense of self because the space of the camp has overflowed its boundaries; no longer contained by a state of exception, it is now a self-imposed governmentality that exists everywhere, especially in their home. In the traditional narrative form of incarceration stories that Chen and Yu analyze, the return home resolves the tale, but, for this family, that return does not create a positive sense of closure. Instead, the characters realize that their dream that “the world would be ours again” (126) cannot exist as they imagined it. Their

94. Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference, 126.
dreams were delusions. Because of the disorientation that they have endured, their sense of place, self, and community has been altered, even though the place and the people outwardly appear very much the same as they did before the family’s incarceration. The return home fails to bring resolution; this homecoming shows only more clearly the racism that this family has endured because now they are outside the prison walls but the prison persists.

Historically, the War Relocation Authority did attempt to relocate everyone in a dispersed fashion in order to break up Japanese communities and prevent the reformation of farming communities that originally had led to Japanese prosperity and Caucasian anger. Still, many returned to their previous communities, just like the family in the novel, but that did not mean a return to the same experience of that environment and relationships.95 Even though “the town seemed much the same as before [and] Grove Street was still Grove, and Tyler Street still Tyler” (114), their home retains only its former shell. Many people had lived in their house while they were gone, and they had stolen most of the belongings and destroyed everything else. Even the yard had been ransacked, with the stone Buddha knocked over and the mother’s rosebush purloined. While they had dreamt that on their return their “phone would ring off the hook” (126), instead, silence greets them, and they observe that the community is no longer to be trusted. The children themselves eventually start to question their neighbors as they think they see their belongings elsewhere: “Wasn’t that our mother’s Electrolux Mrs. Leahy was pushing back and forth across her living room floor? Didn’t the Gilroys’ mohair sofa look awfully familiar?” (123). Their suspicions are neither confirmed nor denied, bringing the reader into this ongoing process of questioning the honesty and connection between neighbors. Distrust leads to a disconnection where even a neighbor who nods to the mother is ignored because who knows the possible intention of a nod? The family feels isolated from their neighbors because of the physical change to their home, their space.

They have also learned direct lessons from the government prior to their reentry—telling them how they are supposed to relate among themselves, their neighborhood, and their neighbors:

*Keep your head down and don’t cause any trouble,* we’d been told, weeks before, in a mess hall lecture on “How to Behave in the Outside World.” *Speak only English. Do not walk down the street in groups of more than three, or gather in restaurants in groups of more than five. Do not draw attention to yourselves in any way.* (122)

“We followed the rules” (122) is the children’s tactic, which they are taught by the government and their parents. They are told not to be individual and to turn away from being Japanese, through their language and associations. With these rules, the children beg for acceptance:

We would join their clubs, after school, if they let us. We would listen to their music. We would dress just like they did. We would change our names to sound more like theirs. And if our mother called out to us on the street by our real names we would turn away and pretend not to know her. (114)

Here, acceptance becomes directly tied to disavowal. They use the language from the mess hall lessons to negate themselves. Assimilation becomes a direct disorientation.

The mother advises her children that this type of assimilation is to their advantage, while she, too, disappears into her new role as a servant. When she first returns home, she attempts to reacclimate herself by reading the newspaper again, but the articles that seem to attract her attention are the popular culture news such as a celebrity’s marriage and the lack of stockings; that trivia is not paired with an investment in any larger issues. The mother also turns to it because it is “safe” knowledge, unlike possible fear-inducing headlines, which would take her back to the trauma and blind fear thrust upon her by the government. So she reads about the symbol of mindless amusement and white acculturation, Shirley Temple.96

Even with this small attempt to reconnect herself to the outside world, once she discovers that she cannot find employment at the places where she had formerly been a customer, she begins to recede into herself, eventually taking a job as a housecleaner. “You just smile and say yes ma’am and no ma’am and do as you’re told” (129). She takes on a role that is clearly marked as inferior and non-threatening. Historically, the job of the domestic would have allowed women returning from the camps to be both seen and not seen by their employer. As Ruth Frankenberg discusses, racialized domestics are often forgotten and remembered at will because, although they work within the home, they are not considered part of the domestic experience of the homeowner.97 This job was still available to those who had been incarcerated because of its demoralizing position of constant subservience and occasional erasure.98

96. Using Shirley Temple as a symbol of a desire to attain whiteness is an often used allusion from Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye to Mitsuke Yamada’s poem “American Son” in Desert Run.
98. The mother is now in the same position as Mrs. Ueno, her former housekeeper, who carries the mother’s water at the camp (56).
While the children try to hide themselves behind the rules they had been given, the mother tries to hide in her job. Still, they all continue to hope that things will return to normal, but interconnected changes in place, self, and community will not allow that type of homecoming. Two climactic scenes play out this disjunction. The first is the return home of the mother, girl, and boy. They tell the reader, “We were free now, free to go wherever we wanted to go, whenever we pleased. There were no more armed guards, no more searchlights, no more barbed-wire fences” (113). Yet, although the symbols and realities of imprisonment have been removed, they continue to act as though they are imprisoned. Specifically, they reconfigure the home space into the barracks space because they have become so acclimatized to their prison. The home has become their prison: “Without thinking, we had sought out the room whose dimensions—long and narrow, with two windows on one end and a door at the other—most closely resembled those of the room in the barracks in the desert where we had lived during the war” (111–12). At this point, to borrow Henri Lefebvre’s spatial terms, they “perceive” the space of their home as the “conceived space” of the camp. In other words, the abstract purpose of the concentration camp, to confine and sequester, has filtered into the way they experience the space around them. They have incorporated these elements of imprisonment in the spatial practices of their home. No longer are guards and barbed wire necessary because they have so internalized others’ fears that they constrain themselves. The characters have adopted the government’s view on their incarceration, so much so that they have reconfigured their real house into an imagined Thirdspace of imprisonment, whose implications remain a challenge to American policy and audiences rather than a site for social justice.

This self-vigilance, however, does not imply that outside threats have vanished for this family. Even though they reconfigured the home into a barracks, the community continues to harass them with late-night phone calls and by throwing a whiskey bottle through the window. This physical breaking of the barrier between private and public space forces the family to even further sequester themselves. Talking about the role of the home, Samira Kawash states:

Traditionally, the house has been taken to name the putative interiority of the domestic, the private, the feminine, and separates those forms of interi-
ority from their exterior counterparts. The house is itself the boundary figure, the containing wall that by its physical presence materializes and secures the separation between interior and exterior, private and public.102

Now, however, the separation has been broken down, with the dangerous “outside world” able to intrude on their private space. The symbolic boundary of their house has been broken just like the barrier to their own internal and external perceptions has been besieged.

The house has lost its connection to the symbolic American Dream even though the white picket fence still stands. As Amy Iwasaki Mass states, from her position as someone who had lived through the camps, “Our ideals about America were [. . .] shattered. We had believed the American dream of freedom in a democratic nation. We had been socialized to believe that by working hard and being good citizens we, too, could realize the American dream.”103 With this lost respect for this aspiration, the characters experience how the house loses its positive symbolism and the fence of dreams begins to take on the containing elements of prison walls.

The walls and fences keep them in and yet are penetrable to attack. With this knowledge, after the whiskey-bottle attack, the family moves upstairs to a room that does not have windows that face the street. Then the mother puts rice sacks on the windows “so no one could see in,” and at night she turns out all the inside lights “so no one would know we were home” (118). The mother reacts by enacting the advice of the soldiers on the train—“Shades down.” The division between the outside world and this family continues even though they have supposedly returned to the “outside world.” In addition to this repetition of the oppressor’s spatial solution to a racist “problem” invented by the U.S. government, the room to which they retreat had been vandalized before their return home. While we are not told the words that are scrawled on the walls, the text implies that these words are racial slurs because of their impact on the family: “For years we could not get those words out of our heads” (111). The family is trapped inside a space filled with racism. The house literalizes the racism that has now been internalized. The self-negating lesson of the train has been fully learned—they need to hide themselves and expect anti-Asian attacks.

These lessons are also learned by the father, who had been separated from his family throughout the novel, thereby building in the historically appropriate gendered separation that occurred for many adults, with the mother being sent off with the children to a camp while the father was imprisoned

elsewhere. This separation created additional distinctions between how men and women responded to the end of their incarceration. While the mother attempts to reclaim her family and her home by assuming the position of a servant, the father must deal with his return in a different manner because he cannot get a job anywhere. Additionally, he clearly has been physically harmed at the government camp (now walking with a cane and missing all his teeth). His response, then, is not even the temporary reacclimation that the mother makes; instead, his identity continues to disintegrate after his return. He, like the mother when she was in the camp, will not read the newspaper or listen to the radio, no longer plays with the children the way he had in the past, and keeps to himself. Although internally he rages, externally he has been silenced—“the handwriting in his notebook grew smaller and fainter and then disappeared from the page altogether” (137). Since the children had known him so long only through postcards, this disappearance of the written stands in for the disappearance of his identity in general. His sense of place and self has been dissolved.

As stated earlier, the gap between dream and reality has become confused for the father; he has become disoriented even in his dreams so that the internal and external spaces of perception cannot even be separated while he is asleep. In his recurring dream,

it was five minutes past curfew and he was trapped outside, in the world, on the wrong side of the fence. “I’ve got to get back,” he’d wake up shouting.

“You’re home now,” our mother would remind him. “It’s all right. You can stay.” (137)

His wife, misunderstanding his dream, tries to comfort him with the knowledge that he has returned home, but his incarceration has upended his personality: he is so fearful of punishment that he wants to return to his imprisonment. For the father, there is no return home; he remains in prison. Even in his thoughts at the end of the novel, we see that he remains trapped, asking his captors, “Now can I go?” (144). He wants to leave the confinement the government created for him, but that prison has long extended beyond the camp’s fences into the community’s space and into the characters’ own minds.

Nonetheless, the anger he demonstrates in his final soliloquy, “Who am I? You know who I am. Or you think you do” (142), shows that his submission is not total. He asks the same kinds of questions we’ve seen other characters ask when they are disoriented, but he also provides his own extensive answer. This final chapter, told from the first-person point of view of the father, has received wide-ranging responses because it is tonally distinct from the more
observational third-person perspectives of the rest of the novel. Here the father is talking without interruption, and as he speaks he refers to his captors as “you,” implicating the reader as one of those who think poorly of him. While critics such as Michiko Kakutani viewed this ending as “a shrill diatribe,” scholars Tina Chen and Rajini Srikanth have noted the potential of this accusation of the reader.\textsuperscript{104} Srikanth says that the last chapter “restores to the father the dignity of his personhood.”\textsuperscript{105} Chen states that this section sets up a place where “readerly empathy as unexamined site of feeling and response can be transmuted into an engaged, accountable critical sympathy that acknowledges alterity not through an impulse towards mastery but through an ethical component to reorienting the self in relation to Otherness.”\textsuperscript{106} In addition to this final chapter offering more of the father’s humanity and emotion resulting from his being granted a voice, this section also shows how he has and is resisting his disorientation.

I suggest that this final chapter, titled “Confession,” provides the novel’s most direct attempt at finding a Thirdspace through which incarcerated people of Japanese descent can confront U.S. racist policies and, by implication, the populace who tacitly supported them. It does so by locating the father’s final speech in the exceptional space of the interrogation room—a room that “was small and bare” and “had no windows” (140)—though this room has become unmoored from the bounds of space and time to become an indistinct address to all. That is, the fact that we are unable to locate the father’s litany of accusations as well as impossible confessions and threats in any real time within the story highlights the interminable nature of his interrogation and response to the questions of loyalty demanded by the U.S. government that continue to be posed internally long after his official release. As Otsuka herself told me, “I have no visual for where that scene would be set—to me that’s all aural, it’s all about the voice. It’s almost existing in the middle of nowhere.”\textsuperscript{107} Even for Otsuka, this space becomes a potential utopia—a “nowhere” of a potential Thirdspace beyond the current possibilities. In one respect, the father’s response, as with that of the rest of his family, shows the same disorienting confusion evident earlier in the novel. In another way, however, the father uses the bare space of the interrogation room to repeat the racist fears of his interrogators back to them, saying, “You were right. You were always right. It was me. I did it” (140), reflecting their absurdity and hollowness. The father’s mirroring of governmental policies recalls and extends his son’s performance.

\textsuperscript{104} Kakutani, “War’s Outcasts Dream of Small Pleasures.”
\textsuperscript{105} Srikanth, \textit{Constructing the Enemy}, 124.
\textsuperscript{106} Tina Chen, “Towards an Ethics of Knowledge,” 169.
\textsuperscript{107} Julie Otsuka in an interview with the author, August 14, 2016.
of Japanese stereotypes in front of the broken mirror, exposing the evacua-
tive logic and the ideological contradictions of U.S. constructions of citizen-
ship and loyalty. So when he says, “I’m the traitor in your own backyard” and
“Assign me a number” (143), he shows how people of Japanese descent have
been emptied of their identity through a forced “evacuation” movement and
how this violation of constitutional rights undermines the citizenship protec-
tions of all Americans. This challenge does not lead to direct action in the
world of the novel because the father has been broken by his incarceration and
because there is no escape through confession; in the end he asks for forgive-
ness for his imaginary crimes and betrayals, seeking only to be released. The
novel’s ending on his question “Now can I go?” thus demonstrates a yearning
for his release as well as a lack of complete escape from these suspicions and
internalized surveillance for his family and for future generations, who are
still asking the same thing.

The family returns to a home that remains the same structure it was four
years earlier, but because of their journey, their feeling about that space and
therefore how they feel about their community and themselves is fundamen-
tally changed. The country’s government has questioned their loyalty and,
hence, they now question the society’s loyalty to them. Although the fam-
ily does eventually move back into separate sleeping quarters, the damage is
done, and although the children might be able to partially recover from their
incarceration because of their young age while at the camp, the parents have
slipped into their new invisibility and now self-inflicted imprisonment.108

This chapter has demonstrated that the four-year journey that finally
returns the characters to their initial physical starting point is not a simple
circle, and it most certainly does not end with a “final synthesis which denies
the damage of the internment or which reconciles the Japanese American
subject divided by the ‘enemy/not enemy’ logic of the state.”109 Agreeing with
Lowe’s idea of this disjunction for the characters, I have added to it the idea
of disorientation and its effects on how they see the space around them, in
their community, and within themselves. With this knowledge, we can better
understand the continued ramifications of this displacement. As Mass details,
“the psychological impact of the forced evacuation and detention was deep
and devastating” because people felt betrayed by their country to the point

108. As Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston states about her own experience, “That hollow ache I
carried during the early months of internment had shrunk, over the years, to a tiny sliver of
suspicion about the very person I was. It had grown so small sometimes I’d forget it was there.
Months might pass before something would remind me” (Houston and Houston, Farewell to
Manzanar, 195–96).
where it affected not only their trust of their environment but also their own self-worth.\footnote{110} This wartime displacement has not ended on the last page of this book written by the child of an incarceree. Instead, it is “a continuing project of suspicion and survival” that lasts to this day for many Japanese Americans who underwent this trauma, and, as When the Emperor Was Divine shows, for their children as well.\footnote{111}

Governmentalities directly affect people and their relationship to the spaces around them even across generations. Otsuka’s characters, like their historical counterparts in the U.S. concentration camps, experience disorientation from the racist policies forced upon them as wartime necessities, and although in the novel they fight back with dreams and magical thinking, ultimately this disorientation points to limits of the logic of citizenship and naturalization that can lead to precarious peoples being rendered stateless foreigners. The family has been reunified, but who is in charge is left uncertain, because the specter of the government looms as the ongoing surveillant and dominant force. On the narrative level, though, through the use of the Third-space of the mirror and the interrogation room, a space has been constructed to reveal the flaws of the government. For the younger generations that did not live through the camps and are now writing these narratives, this novel shows how such an imaginative project engaged with narratives of past migrations provides potential for change in the present.

\footnote{110}{Mass, “Psychological Effects of the Camps on the Japanese Americans,” 160.}
\footnote{111}{Lowe, Immigrant Acts, 49.}