

A Question of Loyalty

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Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, played directly into California's long history of hostility toward minorities, especially Asians, and created a war hysteria that brought down on Japanese Americans the full force of that legacy. Organizations such as the California Joint Immigration Committee, successor to the old Asiatic Exclusion League, and the Native Sons of the Golden West loudly questioned the loyalty of all persons of Japanese ancestry and demanded their removal from the state, a proposal endorsed by politicians and public alike. The resulting incarceration of Japanese Americans such as the Wakatsuki and Uchida families marked a turning point in the relations of Caucasians and Asians in California.



Tall and lean, Ko Wakatsuki stood proudly at the helm of his trawler, the *Nereid*, while his two older sons, William and Woodrow, readied it to join the fishing fleet heading out of the Los Angeles area's San Pedro harbor. It was a beautiful December day, and on shore his wife, Riku, and two of his daughters joined a handful of other women to watch the familiar procession of white boats gather, turn seaward, and begin to sail into the distance.

Wakatsuki had reason to be satisfied. A good wife and ten children, some of them married and starting families of their own, looked to him as the head of the family, a classic Japanese patriarch. At 54 he had been in the United States for 35 years, and was the proud owner of two fishing boats, one a \$25,000 trawler. In spite of the fact that, as an

Issei, he could not become a citizen or own land, he was pleased that his Nisei children were citizens and possessed more opportunities than his generation.

On shore, the women lingered, watching the boats even after they could no longer see the men on board. Then, strangely, the white specks on the horizon began to grow larger, and the women realized that the boats were returning. But why? they asked. The sky was cloudless. Had there been an accident? Suddenly a man ran down from the nearby cannery, waving his arms and shouting, "The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor!" The women looked at each other in puzzlement, calling to him as he rushed by, "What is Pearl Harbor?" But he passed before they got an answer.

Until this time Ko and Riku Wakatsuki had lived with their younger children at Ocean Park near Los Angeles, but now they moved to Terminal Island in San Pedro harbor to be with their older children and the Japanese community there. Fear and confusion reigned, especially for the Issei, as their country of residence plunged into war with their homeland. They were now enemy aliens, and the anti-Japanese hysteria on the west coast filled them with anxiety. Two weeks later the FBI came for Ko Wakatsuki, as they came for most Japanese with commercial fishing licenses, and took him away. His family did not see him again for almost a year, and two months passed before they even learned where he had been taken—Fort Lincoln, North Dakota, an all-male internment camp for enemy aliens. Meanwhile, the family had moved again. The U.S. Navy, with a major base on Terminal Island and reacting to rumors of sabotage and espionage, gave the Japanese American families on the island 48 hours to leave. Drawn together by the two older boys, Bill and Woody, the Wakatsukis were soon huddled in rented housing in Los Angeles, wondering what would happen next.

On the same December day that Ko Wakatsuki's boat strangely returned to shore, the gentlemanly Dwight Takasai Uchida took his wife and two grown daughters to the Japanese Independent Congregational Church in Oakland, as he did every Sunday. Uchida, too, could take pride in his life in America. After working his way through Doshisha University in Kyoto, where he was converted to Christianity and given the name Dwight, he had come to America in 1906 at age 22. Precise, punctual, and efficient, he became successful in business and in 1917 obtained a position in the San Francisco branch of Mitsui & Co., one of Japan's largest export-import firms. That same year he married Iku Umegaki, a fellow graduate of Doshisha University, in a union arranged by faculty members who had known

them both. Now, at age 57, he had retired from his position as assistant manager at Mitsui. One daughter, Keiko (Kay), had graduated from Mills College, and the other, Yoshiko (Yo), was a senior at the UC Berkeley. Ordinarily, church services were followed by the entertainment of friends for dinner at the Uchidas' Berkeley home, but this Sunday was an exception. The family had just sat down to a simple lunch when suddenly the radio blared forth the terrible news. Pearl Harbor had been bombed by Japan! Distressed and frightened, the family nevertheless dismissed the bombing as the work of fanatics, and Yo went off to the campus to study for finals. There, her friends all agreed it was incredible that Japan would attack the United States.

That very afternoon, however, the FBI came for Dwight Uchida—as they had come for Ko Wakatsuki and many other Japanese American community leaders—and took him away for questioning. It was a week before his wife and daughters knew where he had been taken, and nearly six months before he was allowed to rejoin them. The three women were left to assume duties and responsibilities they had never dreamed they could or should have, at a time when rumors and war hysteria filled them with apprehension.

Probably no group in America watched the deterioration of relations between the United States and Japan with more apprehension than Japanese Americans, who were hardly more than 1 percent of California's population. When war came, they were powerless and vulnerable. Since their arrival in California in the 1890s, they had been subjected to the same hostility and discrimination that the Chinese had suffered before them. They were denied the right to become naturalized citizens, to own land, or to control property through corporations. Social indignities were heaped upon them. Attempts were made to force their children into segregated schools, and restrictive covenants denied them housing of their choice. They were denied service in commercial establishments, forced into segregated facilities in public places, and had to endure harassment and physical abuse. All the while they were the focus of a persistent campaign in the California press warning of the "yellow peril," an irrational fantasy of Oriental conquest of western America.

Like most other immigrant groups, the Issei developed their own economic niches and subculture. Applying the labor-intensive methods of their homeland, they eventually dominated important segments of California agriculture and played an important role in the state's advance in specialty crops. Perhaps half were employed in farming by 1920, while the rest organized small

businesses that catered largely to the “little Tokyos” emerging in urban centers. Thrifty and hard-working, they retained what ties they could with family in Japan and with Japanese tradition, through Japanese-language newspapers and social clubs. In America, the Issei created a social order in which age, sex, and generation determined status, in which relationships and conduct were governed by precise rules, and in which group solidarity took precedence over the individual.

Most of their children, the Nisei, came of age in the 1920s and '30s and, like most children of immigrants, developed a measure of social distance from their parents. Born and raised in the United States, they considered themselves American but faced discrimination and barriers to full citizenship and acceptance. For example, after Kay Uchida graduated from Mills College with a major in child development, she could find work only as a glorified nursemaid and had to take her meals in her employers' kitchen. The Nisei struggled to find a place in mainstream American social and economic life, creating a unique bicultural identity that, at least in the prewar years, did not equate loyalty to the U.S. with severing ties to Japan.

Life in America proved even more difficult for a subgroup of the Nisei, the Kibei, who, while born in the United States and thus American citizens, had been sent to Japan as children to be educated. On returning to the United States, they had much less in common with their Americanized brothers and sisters, found the English language a barrier, and were more oriented to the customs and social arrangements of their parents.

The Wakatsukis joined a close-knit Japanese American community in Los Angeles when they moved from Terminal Island and watched panic grip the state as rumors of a Japanese invasion spread, fed by the amazing successes of Japan's military and naval forces in the Pacific. Within six months Japan overran French Indochina, Singapore, the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines, the major Pacific island chains, and American bases at Wake and Guam. By the middle of 1942, its forces threatened India and Australia. In California, cities were blacked out at night, civil-defense forces were organized, and plans to repel an invasion were hastily prepared.

Attention quickly turned to Japanese Americans concentrated on the West Coast. Anti-Asian views of the Japanese as sly, devious, unassimilable, and dangerous were again aired in the press and radio. Charges were made that Japanese-American fishermen such as Ko Wakatsuki were fueling Japanese submarines at sea. Public opinion was further inflamed by newspaper columnists and radio commentators who proposed that Japanese

Americans be removed from California and even that Nisei be stripped of their citizenship. Japanese Americans kept to themselves as word spread that they might be forced to leave their homes and even their state.

As the weeks passed, the situation worsened. Important political figures, including Los Angeles mayor Fletcher Bowron and state attorney general Earl Warren, began to join the anti-Asian forces in calling for removal of all persons of Japanese ancestry from the “war zone.” It was impossible to tell the loyal from the disloyal, they said, so all should go. Then in February 1942 came the news that President Roosevelt had signed Executive Order 9066 authorizing the army to remove any person, alien or citizen, from military areas if required by military necessity. Some sort of removal appeared imminent, and how to react to it became a matter of serious debate among the Japanese Americans. Most concluded that only a cooperative attitude would prove their loyalty.

With their father gone, the elder Wakatsuki children devoted their efforts to holding the family together and finding housing in the same district so they would not be separated. Other than that, they could only say to one another *shikata ga nai* (“it cannot be helped,” “it must be done”), a Japanese phrase of resignation to enduring something difficult but unavoidable.

In Berkeley, the Uchida women tried to go on living normally like other Americans, while letters from Dwight, now imprisoned in an army internment camp in Missoula, Montana, begged for news and grew more and more anxious about reports of a mass evacuation. They could not give him information they did not have, but they began to prepare for a forced move, packing up books and household goods. Already, an 8:00 PM to 6:00 AM curfew and a five-mile travel limit had been imposed on all Japanese Americans, while their radios, binoculars, cameras, and firearms had been designated contraband to be turned in to local police. The Uchida daughters' box cameras remained in the Berkeley police station for the rest of the war.

Early in March, General John L. DeWitt, commander of the Western Defense Command, began to exercise the authority delegated to him under Executive Order 9066 with a proclamation establishing Military Area No. 1 as all of California, the western half of Oregon and Washington, and southern Arizona. This area was prohibited to enemy aliens and any person of Japanese ancestry. DeWitt's proclamation actually encouraged the Japanese to move out of Military Area No. 1 voluntarily,

Copy of WCCA Exclusion Order, 1942.

WESTERN DEFENSE COMMAND AND FOURTH ARMY WARTIME CIVIL CONTROL ADMINISTRATION

Presidio of San Francisco, California

May 3, 1942

INSTRUCTIONS TO ALL PERSONS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY

Living in the Following Area:

All of the County of San Mateo, State of California.

Pursuant to the provisions of Civilian Exclusion Order No. 35, this Headquarters, dated May 3, 1942, all persons of Japanese ancestry, both alien and non-alien, will be evacuated from the above area by 12 o'clock noon, P. W. T., Saturday, May 9, 1942.

No Japanese person living in the above area will be permitted to change residence after 12 o'clock noon, P. W. T., Sunday, May 3, 1942, without obtaining special permission from the representative of the Commanding General, Northern California Sector, at the Civil Control Station located at:

Masonic Temple Building,
100 North Ellsworth Street,
San Mateo, California.

Such permits will only be granted for the purpose of uniting members of a family, or in cases of grave emergency.

The Civil Control Station is equipped to assist the Japanese population affected by this evacuation in the following ways:

1. Give advice and instructions on the evacuation.
2. Provide services with respect to the management, leasing, sale, storage or other disposition of most kinds of property, such as real estate, business and professional equipment, household goods, boats, automobiles and livestock.
3. Provide temporary residence elsewhere for all Japanese in family groups.
4. Transport persons and a limited amount of clothing and equipment to their new residence.

The Following Instructions Must Be Observed:

1. A responsible member of each family, preferably the head of the family, or the person in whose name most of the property is held, and each individual living alone, will report to the Civil Control Station to receive further instructions. This must be done between 8:00 A. M. and 5:00 P. M. on Monday, May 4, 1942, or between 8:00 A. M. and 5:00 P. M. on Tuesday, May 5, 1942.

2. Evacuees must carry with them on departure for the Assembly Center, the following property:

- (a) Bedding and linens (no mattress) for each member of the family;
- (b) Toilet articles for each member of the family;
- (c) Extra clothing for each member of the family;
- (d) Sufficient knives, forks, spoons, plates, bowls and cups for each member of the family;
- (e) Essential personal effects for each member of the family.

All items carried will be securely packaged, tied and plainly marked with the name of the owner and numbered in accordance with instructions obtained at the Civil Control Station. The size and number of packages is limited to that which can be carried by the individual or family group.

3. No pets of any kind will be permitted.

4. No personal items and no household goods will be shipped to the Assembly Center.

5. The United States Government through its agencies will provide for the storage, at the sole risk of the owner, of the more substantial household items, such as iceboxes, washing machines, pianos and other heavy furniture. Cooking utensils and other small items will be accepted for storage if crated, packed and plainly marked with the name and address of the owner. Only one name and address will be used by a given family.

6. Each family, and individual living alone, will be furnished transportation to the Assembly Center or will be authorized to travel by private automobile in a supervised group. All instructions pertaining to the movement will be obtained at the Civil Control Station.

Go to the Civil Control Station between the hours of 8:00 A. M. and 5:00 P. M., Monday, May 4, 1942, or between the hours of 8:00 A. M. and 5:00 P. M., Tuesday, May 5, 1942, to receive further instructions.

J. L. DeWITT
Lieutenant General, U. S. Army
Commanding

but few did so. Reports from those who attempted to move voluntarily told of migrants being clapped into jail and harassed by vigilante groups. Finally, effective March 29, DeWitt issued another proclamation prohibiting all Japanese Americans from leaving Military Area No. 1. Evacuation had been put in the hands of Colonel Karl Bendetsen, one of the early and most insistent advocates of removal, who was now appointed to head the Wartime Civilian Control Administration (WCCA) under DeWitt's command.

Bendetsen's plan was relatively simple. He divided the west coast into 108 "exclusion areas," each containing approximately 1,000 persons of Japanese ancestry, and established a civil control station for each area. The plan included a program to remove these persons, first to assembly centers and then to inland camps for detention. The assembly centers were racetracks, exhibition centers, and fairgrounds; some 20,000 persons were moved directly to two of the inland camps, euphemistically called "relocation centers," and administered by a new civilian agency, the War Relocation Authority (WRA). On March 30, 1942, three and a half months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the WCCA issued the first civilian exclusion order and the uprooting of Japanese Americans from their homes began.

For weeks the Uchidas had watched pressures mount for their forced removal, anxious over the hysteria and racism in the statements of the press, public officials, and the military. Now they helplessly packed their belongings and awaited the exclusion order for their area. Even then they were shocked when it came. On April 21 the newspapers announced: "Japs Given Evacuation Orders Here." Numbly, they read that Berkeley's 1,319 Japanese aliens and citizens would be evacuated to Tanforan racetrack, south of San Francisco, by May 1. Ten days' notice! Kay, as the oldest citizen, assumed the position of head of the family, reported to the local Civil Control Station for registration and returned with identification tags for all of their belongings. From then on the Uchidas were just family No. 13453. Frantically, they tried to pack and dispose of possessions accumulated over 15 years. Many years later Yo remembered their plight:

We surveyed with desperation the vast array of dishes, lacquerware, silverware, pots and pans, books, paintings, porcelain and pottery, furniture, linens, rugs, records, curtains, garden tools, cleaning equipment, and clothing that filled our house. . . . We sold things we should have kept and packed away foolish trifles we should have discarded . . . desperate as the deadline approached. Our only thought was to

get the house emptied in time, for we knew the Army would not wait.*

The piano, a few pieces of furniture, boxes of books, and some other possessions were stored with friends and neighbors, while larger pieces such as beds, mattresses, and rugs were put in commercial storage. The Uchidas had been told to bring only what they could carry, but also bedding, dishes, and eating utensils, so these were bundled into a large canvas bag into which they stuffed what would not fit into the two suitcases apiece they planned to carry. Then, after one last night in their now-barren house, the Uchidas reported with suitcases and an enormous, bulging bag to the Civil Control Station, where they were unnerved by the armed soldiers who guarded it. Depressed and angry, they boarded buses and were driven across the bay to the Tanforan racetrack, which had been hastily converted into an assembly center for Bay Area Japanese Americans. There, behind barbed-wire fences punctuated by tall guard towers, they were assigned to Barracks 18, Apartment 40, a hastily renovated horse stall in a long stable. Linoleum had been laid over the manure-soaked floorboards, but the smell remained. The partition between the stalls had been whitewashed, but it ended a foot or more below the roof, providing little privacy for the various families housed in the stable's 25 stalls. This 20-by-18-foot "apartment" became the Uchidas' new home for the next five months. As she stood in the long line for meals, Yoshiko Uchida was overwhelmed by feelings of degradation, humiliation, and longing for her Berkeley home.

Life in an army-run assembly center—there were 13 in California—was truly traumatic for the internees. The women found the lack of privacy in latrines and showers especially humiliating, and some took to covering their faces with newspapers when using the open facilities. The army, unequipped to provide living quarters for women and children, made little attempt to meet their needs. Laundry had to be done by hand, and hot water was gone by early morning. Some women arose at 3:00 or 4:00 AM to do their washing. Food was generally bad and skimpy (on the day of their arrival, the Uchidas were greeted with two sausages, a baked potato, and some unbuttered bread for dinner), leading to constant illness and physical complaints.

Above all, it was communal living, with only semiprivate sleeping quarters. There was no way or place to be

* All quotations concerning the Uchida family are taken from Yoshiko Uchida, *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982).

alone, no way to avoid others or escape the constant noise. For those with young children and teenagers, the close quarters, mess-hall eating, and lack of activity put severe strains on family ties. The barracks and stalls carried every conversation two or three families away. Discipline broke down under such conditions. Yet, for many, the family unit was crucial to survival. More than one resident remarked that only the stabilizing influence of the family enabled them to cope with life in the center.

For the Uchidas, living at Tanforan was at least brightened by the return of Dwight as head of the family; after five months in the army's Missoula, Montana, camp for "dangerous enemy aliens," Dwight was released on parole. After all, he had been retired from Mitsui & Co. for two years, had an impressive record of public service and was well recommended by many prominent Bay Area friends. With his return, the Uchida "home" once again became a social center for their many friends. Dwight spent long evenings recounting to them (and neighbors listening over the partition) his experiences in Missoula.

The internees had to create a whole new community behind the barbed wire at Tanforan, an experience being repeated at other centers in Washington, Oregon, and California. Food, medical, and postal services were established, an educational system organized, and recreation provided for. Within a few weeks local mess halls serving sections of the camp replaced the huge grandstand mess hall, evacuee chefs took over the cooking, and meals improved. Kay and Yo Uchida helped build a school system, Kay heading up a nursery-school program, where, for the first time, she could practice the profession she had trained for in college. Yo was soon teaching second grade (at a salary of \$16 a month). By the end of June, 40 percent of the internees were either teaching or attending school.

The need for recreation was obvious. The internees organized 110 softball teams, musical theater, art classes, music lessons, hobby-shop programs, Saturday night dances, and talent shows that attracted hundreds of participants. Many turned to gardening and transformed the center's appearance with vegetable and flower gardens and a small parklike area. Within the barracks, scrap lumber and materials obtained from catalogue sales converted the horse stalls into modest living quarters with window curtains, shelves, tables, and chairs.

The great effort the evacuees at Tanforan put into making their incarceration bearable, turning horse stalls and barracks into "homes," was tinged with irony; they all knew that they would eventually have to move again.

Finally, in late August the word came: they would be moved between September 15 and 20.

As September progressed the Uchidas began packing again. Dwight dismantled the scrap-lumber tables and chairs to make packing boxes and suitcases. Then, on September 16, the Uchidas and the other residents of their mess-hall unit were registered, counted, and marched between two rows of armed soldiers to a train pulled up at a racetrack siding. That night, with curtains drawn, their train left Tanforan—destination: the Topaz Relocation Center in Utah.

In Los Angeles, in the meantime, the Wakatsukis watched the initial sympathy of whites for their difficult situation erode, as FBI raids picked up more and more Issei men and rumors of Japanese American sabotage and espionage flared in the press. By March the evacuation was a certainty and the Wakatsukis were resigned to it. At least, the older children said, they would be under government protection and away from the growing hatred in the war zone. When the order came, the Wakatsukis met at the Los Angeles Buddhist Church designated as their pick-up point.

It was a scene they would long remember. Old people leaned in confusion on the young. Small children hung wide-eyed on their mothers' skirts, while their older brothers and sisters struggled with the mass of suitcases, duffel bags, and bulging bundles. Confused, bewildered, and frightened, they clung together in little family groups. For many besides the Wakatsukis, "Papa," the family head, had already departed, snatched from their midst for "questioning" only to disappear without notice. Here and there, lonely individuals appeared with no family to absorb and comfort them.

Behind them lay the shattered remains of their lives as free people. Furniture worth hundreds of dollars had been sold to second-hand dealers for five or ten dollars. Homes, farms, and businesses acquired through years of hard work and frugality had been sold for pennies on the dollar, or left in the care of friends. For the youngsters, there was the puzzling, unanswered question of why they had suddenly been pulled out of school—in many cases, just as they were about to graduate.

Under the watchful eyes of armed soldiers, the Wakatsukis registered, received identification tags to attach to their clothing, and were herded to trucks and buses where they heaped their belongings in great piles with matching numbered tags. When they boarded the bus the order was given to close the window curtains. As the buses rolled through the city and into the countryside late in the day, the curtains were drawn to reveal a harsh desert-like terrain, where windblown dust and sand

yellowed the sky and turned the sun red. The passengers found themselves approaching the camp that, for many, was to be their home for more than three years. At last the buses drove through a large gate in a high barbed-wire fence where soldiers watched from towers spaced at intervals around the compound. Rows of black tar-paper barracks came into view, and a number of waiting people gathered around looking for friends and relatives among the new arrivals. The passengers sat frozen in apprehensive silence as their vehicle eased to a stop. Finally, Jeanne, the youngest Wakatsuki, threw open a window, leaned out, and cried, "Hey, this whole bus is full of Wakatsukis!" and suddenly tension-relieving laughter rocked the bus.

They had arrived at Manzanar, in the high-desert Owens Valley east of the Sierra, one of the two camps that served as assembly centers before conversion to relocation centers. Here, in this isolated area subject to extreme temperatures of near 0°F in winter and more than 100°F in summer, the army was constructing row upon row of flimsy barracks—single-thickness pine plank walls covered with tar paper, with gaping cracks and knotholes in walls and floors through which the wind carried clouds of dust. Each building was divided into six units measuring 16 by 20 feet, with one bare light bulb hanging from above and one oil-stove for heat. Open ceilings were an invitation to lively young boys to climb into the rafters and spy on neighbors.

The Wakatsukis were assigned two of these units for the twelve in their immediate family. Woody and Bill and their wives, with Woody's baby, took one unit, which they partitioned with a blanket. Riku, her mother, and the five youngest children were crammed into the other. Eleanor, the recently married oldest daughter, and her husband were assigned another one-room unit with six strangers—another couple, like themselves recently married, and a third couple with two teenage boys.

With the camp still under construction, problems abounded. Lack of refrigeration spoiled food so frequently that the "Manzanar runs" became a condition of life. The latrines were shocking to a people whose cultural traditions placed so much emphasis on personal privacy. The wash basin was a long metal trough on a concrete slab, with hot and cold water spigots at intervals. In the same room, twelve toilets were arranged in two rows of six, back-to-back without partitions. At one end of the room was a bank of open showers. The women, in particular, were appalled at these facilities and devised countless schemes to affect a bit of privacy. One woman had a huge cardboard carton she set up around one of the toilet bowls when her turn came.

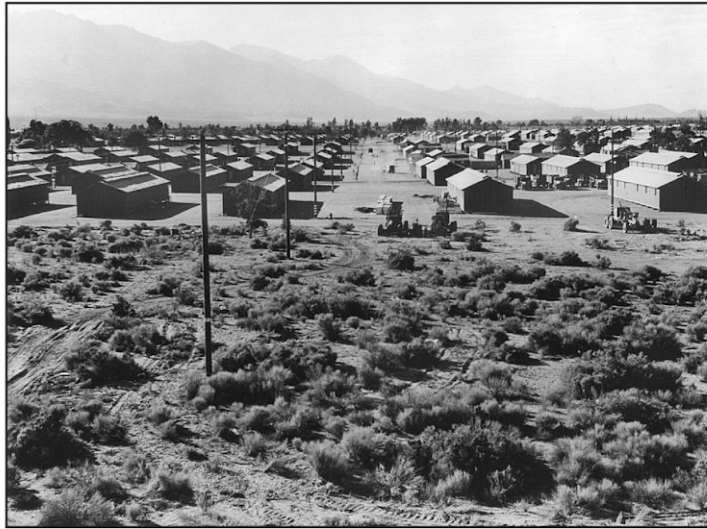
Even standing, her head barely appeared over the top. She was kind enough to lend it to Riku.

The cold wind off the Sierra rolled up clouds of sand and dust, which poured through the gaping cracks and knotholes in the barracks walls. The new arrivals woke up after their first night with hair and eyebrows covered with a fine powder as though dirty flour had been sifted over them while they slept. Woody's first priority was to set the younger boys to work nailing tin-can lids over the knotholes and stuffing the cracks with paper. Few were prepared for the cold. Riku had lived in eastern Washington and knew how cold the April winds could be, so the Wakatsukis had all arrived with warm overcoats but, like the other residents, they lacked sufficient cold-weather clothing. The army issued surplus World War I woolen clothing, almost all of it too big, and the evacuees shuffled about in their loose trousers, as Jeanne remembered, like "a band of Charlie Chaplins marooned in the California desert."

Even when the food improved, the mess-hall eating was resented, especially by the Issei. They saw the rapid disintegration of their families as children chose to eat with friends, often hopping from one mess hall to another in search of the best food. Family living was replaced by communal living and the barracks became mere sleeping quarters. In the daytime the camp population circulated in the open, seeming to Jeanne like "10,000 people on an endless promenade inside the square mile of barbed wire."

In September 1942, Ko Wakatsuki was paroled from Fort Lincoln and sent to Manzanar. His return was a shock to his family. Limping because his feet had been frostbitten in the -30°F weather of North Dakota, he seemed to have aged ten years. Morose and humiliated by his imprisonment and the imputation of disloyalty, he moved in with Riku and six others in her cubicle. He refused to leave the room and took to drink, making a kind of brandy in a little homemade still. Frequently in a rage, he was a man without a home, a job, or any control over his life—a powerlessness that all shared.

For months, anger and humiliation festered in the camp, dividing friends, families, and age groups. Because Japanese-language newspapers were prohibited, rumors filled the communications vacuum, particularly for the Issei. Yet the mess-hall bells rang day after day, calling meetings to demand better food or higher wages (the top pay for evacuee professionals was \$19 a month, while Caucasian personnel received \$150 to \$200 a month), to look into charges of corruption, to plan revolt, to urge common sense, to seek repatriation to Japan, or to prove their loyalty.



Manzanar Relocation Center was located east of the Sierra Nevada in the high desert region of the Owens Valley. Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Above all, the meetings focused on those Nisei in the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) who had been early arrivals and had obtained the best jobs in the camp's administration, or who had most loudly advocated the policy of cooperating with the evacuation as a way of "proving our loyalty," or who looked on the Issei as a declining class that should relinquish its leadership position to the next generation. Rumors flew through the camp that those who were most cooperative with the administration were *inu*, the Japanese word for "dog"—that is, informers or even traitors. Many Issei willingly believed this, as did many of the Kibei. The JACL, they believed, was destroying the group solidarity that had enabled the Japanese to survive so long in America, a view that even many Nisei came to accept as their detention continued. That fall the Issei and Kibei gradually regained power in the community, and the most prominent members of the JACL were isolated as *inu*. Passions boiled over on December 5, when Fred Tayama, Manzanar's representative to a JACL convention in Salt Lake City, was severely beaten. When a popular Kibei named Harry Ueno was jailed as a suspected assailant, the community rose to demand his release in what came to be called the "Manzanar Revolt." Thousands of evacuees marched to the administration area, while others attacked the hospital looking for Tayama and other *inu* to "finish the job" the assailant had started. In the ensuing melee, some guards opened

fire on the crowd. One young man was killed, and several were wounded; one died the next day. But order was finally restored.

The next great issue to strain the community was the loyalty oath controversy. In February 1943 the WRA sent around a questionnaire designed to speed up the clearance process for relocation of evacuees to eastern communities; everyone over the age of 17 was required to complete it. At the same time, the army was organizing an all-Nisei infantry group, the 442nd, and was seeking volunteers from the camps. It was thought that the questionnaire could serve both purposes, so it included two questions originally intended only for Nisei of draft age:

- 27.n Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?
- 28.n Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or to any other foreign government, power or organization?

Naively, administrators thought this would provide the means to weed out "disloyals," who would be sent to one center—Tule Lake, California.



Crowded Barracks at Manzanar

At Manzanar and other relocation centers, evacuees had to put up with a minimum of space and privacy. *Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.*

The camp was again thrown into an uproar. Question 28 was absurd for the Issei, who were prohibited by law from becoming American citizens. Renouncing their only citizenship would leave them stateless. For the Nisei, a “yes” answer could be said to imply that some form of allegiance to Japan had in fact existed. The question was eventually rewritten to read:

28.n Will you swear to abide by the laws of the United States and to take no action which would in any way interfere with the war effort of the United States?

Issei could more easily respond affirmatively to this revised question, but the two questions increased tensions between Issei and Nisei, as did the call for volunteers for the all-Nisei army unit. Ko and Woody Wakatsuki carried on a running argument for weeks, then reached a compromise—Woody would answer “yes, yes” but would not volunteer. Meanwhile, embittered elements in the community organized a movement to promote “no, no” answers and exerted pressure for a mass refusal to cooperate. This debate finally forced Ko Wakatsuki out of his self-imposed isolation. There had never been any doubt that he would answer “yes, yes” on the questionnaire. He was infuriated at the attempt to bully the whole block into a “no, no” vote. Cleaned up and sober, he attended the mess-hall meeting called by the protest organizers and spoke his mind. Murmurs of *inu* passed through the audience until one man actually spoke it aloud. Ko attacked and the two scuffled until they were finally pulled apart. That night Ko sat up late drinking tea and tearfully singing



Family in Mess Hall, Manzanar

Mess-hall meals made it difficult to maintain traditional family life. *Everett Collection Inc / Alamy Stock Photo.*

songs in Japanese, but he no longer remained shut up in the barracks. He had taken his stand.

For all the conflict and pain it caused, by the spring of 1943 the loyalty questionnaire succeeded in speeding up the relocation process. Riku, who had taken a job as a camp dietician, got the family moved to new quarters that doubled their space. There, a new pattern of life evolved that lasted until the end of the war. Woody and Bill sheetrocked the walls and ceilings, laid linoleum on the floors and built furniture from scrap lumber, and the barracks became livable. Ko drank much less and pattered outside; he pruned and cared for the trees in an abandoned apple and pear orchard next to the camp, built and maintained a rock garden around the barracks entrance, painted watercolor landscapes, and hiked to the streams at the foot of the nearby mountains for wood to carve. His resigned manner (*shikata ga nai*) seemed to typify the dominant mood of camp life.

Manzanar essentially became another small American town in this period—the largest, in fact, between Reno and Los Angeles—with schools, churches, police and fire departments, Boy Scouts, softball leagues, and other usual community activities. The younger children were engrossed in schoolwork and recreational activities, while the older ones took jobs. That fall Woody was finally drafted, and the next spring Bill, his wife, and five more Wakatsuki children relocated to New Jersey, where they had found jobs in a frozen-food plant.

Ko and Riku, Riku’s mother, and the three youngest children were the only Wakatsukis remaining at Manzanar in 1945. By then the Supreme Court had ruled that

the government could not detain an “admittedly loyal citizen” indefinitely, and the WRA announced that it would close all camps except Tule Lake by the end of the year. Still the Wakatsukis, like so many others, remained. Where would they go? What would they do on the “outside”? Rumor had it that those returning to their former homes had been received with hostility. Even when the war ended in August 1945, a fearful paralysis still gripped thousands in the camp. Ko decided to wait until the government forced him out. With no home, no job, and no word of his boats, he had nothing to look forward to.

That summer the schools at Manzanar closed for good and farm operations shut down. The government announced that those who did not leave the camp voluntarily would be assigned dates and taken by bus to the destination of their choice. In October the Wakatsukis learned they were at last scheduled to leave. Ko, in one last gesture of defiance, went to the nearby town of Lone Pine and bought a car, determined to leave Manzanar in style. When the day to leave arrived, the Wakatsukis were able to drive away with dignity from what had been their prison home. Later that afternoon they arrived in Long Beach where they began the long road back in vacated defense-worker housing.

No record was left of Ko's boats. Moreover, the silver, furniture, and other possessions for which Riku had paid storage fees while the family was held at Manzanar

had “unaccountably” been stolen from the warehouse. Riku went back to work in the local cannery, while Ko went from one occupation to another, trying to make his own way independently. Finally, some six years after leaving Manzanar, he took up farming in the Santa Clara Valley near San José. For the rest of his life, he was the proud producer of premium strawberries.

While the Wakatsukis were struggling to survive at Manzanar, the old, crowded, and heavily guarded train carrying the Uchidas and 500 others from Tanforan to Topaz sped eastward. As the train departed they stole one last look out of the sides of the drawn curtains, “unutterably saddened” by this furtive peek at all that had meant home to them.

At Delta, Utah, they were transferred to buses for the final leg of their journey into the heart of the barren Sevier Desert, south of the Great Salt Lake. There the vegetation disappeared and “dry skeletal greasewood” replaced trees and grass. Finally Topaz appeared—“rows and rows of squat, tar-papered barracks sitting sullenly in the white chalky sand.” The one-mile-square camp contained 42 blocks of twelve barracks, each block with a mess hall, latrine, washroom, and laundry. Overnight the army had created a city of 8,000, the fifth-largest in Utah, in a desolate wasteland. Army bulldozers had turned the old lake bed into a mass of loose sand; each step sent up swirls



Topaz Relocation Center

The dust begins to roll across Topaz Relocation Center, located in one of the most isolated sections of the West. As in almost all War Relocation Authority photographs, the barbed-wire fences and guard towers do not appear. *Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.*

of dust. The Uchidas were greeted by friends who "looked like pieces of flour-dusted pastry" and escorted to their new home. Like the Wakatsukis at Manzanar, they were appalled by their new home: a room of 20 by 18 feet, with four metal army cots, no ceiling, a bare light bulb hanging from the rafters, and a stove not yet installed. Ribbons of powdery dust streamed in through knotholes in walls and floors. A quick inspection by Yo and Kay revealed toilets without seats, no hot water, and no electricity in the latrine or laundry room. In despair they unpacked, sickened by the realization that this was a concentration camp.

The next morning there was ice in the tea kettle they kept in their room, a reminder that at 4,600 feet in the desert of central Utah, extremes of weather were common. Severe dust storms periodically engulfed the camp, churning the sands and blasting it through every opening. Visibility might be no more than five to ten feet. When Yo was caught in a sudden storm after their arrival, her hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes were turned a chalky white. As winter deepened, temperatures approached 0°F, there were coal shortages, and hot water was available only from 7:00 to 9:00 PM daily. Yo and Kay caught a succession of colds, and upset stomachs and diarrhea afflicted the whole camp for weeks at a time. Not until mid-November were ceilings installed and sheetrock applied to barracks walls, at last making them habitable.

One day Yo Uchida visited the barracks of a Caucasian teacher who, with her husband and child, lived in the administration compound. They occupied one-half of a barracks (three evacuee families were assigned to an equal amount of space), and had carpeted floors, a fully equipped kitchen, separate bedrooms, and a living room. Yo returned to the cubicle she shared with the rest of her family "filled with envy, longing, and resentment."

Despite their despondency, the Uchidas, following Dwight's example, devoted themselves to public service. Kay became involved in planning a nursery-school system for the camp, while Yo got a job teaching in one of the two elementary schools. Classes at first were held in unfinished, completely bare barracks: no supplies, no equipment, no blackboards, no heat. The teachers noted angrily that work went ahead on the barbed wire fence and guard towers around the camp. Because of the cold, class time was shifted to the afternoon, when the sun provided some warmth, but dust storms were more frequent later in the day and disrupted classes. When the head of the elementary schools reprimanded Yo and the other teachers for dismissing classes during one particularly bad storm, he touched off a near mass resignation. Because of his arrogant and insensitive attitude toward the internees,

he was replaced. Finally, a succession of dust storms, rain squalls, and snow, with temperatures under 10°F, forced a closing of the schools in mid-November. They reopened only after sheetrock walls, ceilings, stoves, and a minimum of basic equipment had been installed.

Meanwhile, Dwight and Iku once again made their home a gathering place for their friends and spent countless hours befriending and counseling old and young alike, in an effort to counteract the deterioration of family ties that camp life engendered. Because of his background, Dwight soon became involved in the camp's business affairs. From the beginning, he was chairman of the board of directors of the Consumers Cooperative and president of the Cooperative Congress, which operated such services as the canteen, barber shop, radio repair shop, movie houses, and dry-goods store. Within a few months he was also on the camp's judicial commission and arbitration committee, and had been asked to run for city manager.

At Christmas, many evacuees were touched to receive gifts from strangers all over the United States in response to an appeal from the American Friends (Quaker) Service Committee. Still, Yo and Kay were miserable in the bleak concentration camp and by the end of December were determined to relocate. Many of their friends had relocated or gone to schools somewhere in the East. Yo eagerly followed the efforts of educators to get colleges and universities across the country to accept students from the camps, despite the army and navy's frequent refusal to continue training or research programs at institutions enrolling Japanese Americans.

Growing controversy within the camp created additional anxiety in the Uchida family. Malcontents began to harass Dwight about the operation of the cooperative. In addition, he often attended meetings of Issei and Nisei until late at night, trying to conciliate and arbitrate the differences of contending factions. In February 1943 the loyalty questionnaire triggered even greater anger and bitterness. A pro-Japan faction arose, made up primarily of tough, arrogant Kibei and Issei who began to intimidate those trying to be cooperative. The head of the art school was beaten one night, and on another occasion a church minister was assaulted by masked men wielding lead pipes. Dwight was accosted by two men from the pro-Japan faction and denounced as "obsequious" to the white administrative staff. The anger in the camp was kept boiling when a soldier shot and killed a 63-year-old man near the fence surrounding the camp. The guard claimed the old man had tried to crawl under the fence and get away, but the evidence indicated otherwise.

Relief for the Uchidas came in the summer of 1943. In May, Kay got word that she had been appointed as



Internees at Fence

Over 700,000 Californians served in the armed forces in World War II and made the difficult adjustment to peacetime after 1945. Among them were thousands of young Japanese Americans whose families spent the war in American concentration camps. Here internees watch Nisei volunteers depart from Topaz Relocation Center for Army service. Army personnel seldom acknowledged the contradiction of soliciting volunteers and drafting Japanese Americans for military service from behind barbed wire. *Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.*

an assistant in a nursery school run by Mount Holyoke College and could spend the summer at a Quaker study center in Pennsylvania. Shortly thereafter, Yo received a full graduate scholarship to Smith College and an opportunity to spend the summer with friends in Connecticut before school began. By the end of May, both daughters were on their way east.

Not long after Yo and Kay departed, a stink bomb was thrown into the Uchidas' room, and the threat led the camp administration to arrange the relocation of Dwight and Iku to Salt Lake City. By the summer of 1943, the Uchidas were once again on the "outside." They eventually joined their daughters in New York where Dwight, having lost all his Mitsui retirement benefits,

began working as a packer in the shipping department of a church organization. When he returned to California after the war, Dwight found work in a dry-cleaning business owned by a friend. Once a prominent business executive, he remained there until his second retirement, still the generous, community-spirited person he had always been.

Like the great majority of Japanese Americans incarcerated during World War II in the most desolate regions of the country, the Wakatsukis and Uchidas lived through their ordeal of personal loss and the humiliation of having their loyalty questioned with determination and dignity. This was their contribution to the war effort, and to all Americans.