University of North Carolina at Asheville
Journal of Undergraduate Research
Asheville, North Carolina
May 2013

仕方がない (It Cannot Be Helped): Racial Stratification in Jerome and Rohwer, Arkansas During World War II

Amanda Glenn-Bradley
History
The University of North Carolina at Asheville
One University Heights
Asheville, North Carolina 28804 USA

Faculty Advisors: Dr. Sarah Judson and Dr. Dan Pierce

Abstract

Between March 1942 and 1945 the War Relocation Authority (WRA) forced over one hundred and twenty thousand Japanese Americans into internment camps hastily constructed across the country. Small communities outside of the rural towns of McGehee and Denson, Arkansas located in the historically racially charged Delta housed two of these internment camps: WRA Internment Camps Jerome and Rohwer. At these two internment camps Japanese-Americans from the far West entered into Jim Crow era Arkansas and into a hotbed of established racial stratification. There is a distinct lack of academic research on these two particular internment camps, especially concerning the impact of racial stratification on the experience of the internees and their perceptions of the local populace. This research project intends to further investigate the racial tensions between whites, African-Americans, and Japanese-American internees by exploring the racially-charged modern history of the region, analyzing specific instances of violence and prejudice against the Japanese-Americans as case studies, and identify and explain the mentality of the internees. Primary source documents obtained during a research trip to the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, including numerous newspaper editorials from local newspapers and the Rohwer camp newspaper, WRA commission documents, and internee interviews are utilized to illustrate the history of the region and the resultant tension.

1. Body of Paper

"We have a saying; it's 仕方がない [*shikataganai*], that means it can't be helped. And also this other word, 我慢 [*gaman*], you know, which means 'okay, you'll bear with it.' And, so, primarily that's what we did. Well, we had no choice."[1]
- Sam Mibu

"仕方がない" or *shikataganai* and "我慢" or *gaman* are two Japanese phrases used by the *Issei*, *Nisei*, and *Kibei* captives of the Japanese-American internment.[2] Japanese American citizens across the nation relied on their sense of 我慢 to push through the trials of World War II. Pearl Harbor pushed the United States into World War II and fueled an already pervasive anti-Japanese mentality across the nation. Between March 1942 and 1945 the War Relocation Authority (WRA) forced over one hundred and twenty thousand Japanese Americans into internment camps hastily constructed across the country.[3] Small communities outside of the rural towns of McGehee and Denson, Arkansas located in the historically racially charged Delta housed two of these internment camps: WRA Internment Camps Jerome and Rohwer. At these two internment camps Japanese-Americans from the far West entered into Jim Crow era Arkansas and into a hotbed of established racial stratification.

Japanese Americans fell into a unique category in Arkansas; they were "not colored" yet they were "not white", so they did not fall into the established racial binary. The white supremacist mentality that ran rampant among the citizens of rural Arkansas caused open hostility towards the Japanese Americans at the beginning of the internment experience. The local population felt that the internees received preferential treatment through access to goods and services. Internees were treated a combination of outright hostility and fear by the locals, which culminated in four documented instances of violence against internees at both camps. Out of these instances of violence the only case prosecuted was allegedly committed by an African American, indicative of both the pervasive impact of white-on-African-American segregation and the liminal nature of Japanese ethnicity. The established racial hierarchy in Delta shaped the way that the local population treated and perceived the Japanese-American internees and conversely impacted the way that the Japanese-American internees perceived the local population.

While historians have covered the Japanese American experience, not much has been written on the camps in Jerome and Rohwer during World War II, let alone the racial violence and tension therein. A large amount of scholarly research has been done on the conditions of internment of Japanese-Americans yet much of the published work is concentrated on the WRA Relocation Centers that were located in the western half of the United States, such as Tule Lake, Manazar, and Topaz. The camps in Arkansas are usually relegated to brief mentions in sections on the camp locations and the transportation processes.

Roger Daniels, one of the foremost experts on the immigrant experience in the early twentieth century and one of the experts interviewed for the University of Arkansas at Little Rock's documentary project *Time of Fear*, mentioned the camps at Jerome and Rohwer briefly in his books *Concentration Camps North America: Japanese in the United States and Canada During World War II* and *The Decision to Relocate the Japanese Americans*. In *Concentration Camps North America*, Daniels barely acknowledged the two camps with a mention of how the land used to establish the camps was intended for low-cost farmland for impoverished families.[4] *The Decision to Relocate the Japanese Americans* does not mention either of the camps by name and only mentions Arkansas as a location of unnamed camps.[5]

Dillon Myer, Director of the WRA from mid-1942 until its abandonment in 1946, also wrote prolifically on the internment experience in his book *Uprooted Americans: Japanese Americans and the War Relocation Authority*.[6] Most of the information Myer covered in his book concerned the upheaval at camps such as Tule Lake, Manazar, and Topaz. Jerome and Rohwer were relegated to brief mentions in statistical charts.[7] Audrie Girdner and Anne Loftis went into more detail in their book *The Great Betrayal: the Evacuation of the Japanese-Americans During World War II*. They outlined the establishment of the two camps but did little to detail life at the camps.[8] Girdner and Loftis, like Daniels and Myer, derived most of their scholarly evidence from the far western camps like Topaz and Tule Lake.

Historians have detailed the undeniably tense racial history of the region through studies of events such as the Elaine Race Riot of 1919. Nan Elizabeth Woodruff wrote at length on the Delta region's history of violence in her book *American Congo: The African American Freedom Struggle in the Delta*. She highlights the racial struggles of the early twentieth century in cotton-rich Arkansas by comparing it to the African Congo under the rule of Belgium's King Leopold. The patriarchal plantation system in Arkansas only differed slightly, as Woodruff asserted, in that "Planters [the white plantation owners] may not have posted the heads of their laborers atop spikes in front of their dwellings as did Leopold's soldiers in the Congo, but they did rape, burn, and torture them."[9]

The scholarly research undertaken by individuals by and large focused on the conditions within the camps in Jerome and Rohwer rather than the interaction of internees with the outside communities. Not much has been published thus far on the aforementioned racial aggression that resulted from the internment in southwestern Arkansas. Most of the secondary material covers only the Japanese-American experience of internment, not the established racial stratification and liminal space the Japanese-Americans occupied.

The documentary *Time of Fear*, produced in 2005 by the University of Arkansas at Little Rock for PBS, provided a concise history of the internment experience. While the racial tension between the whites and Japanese-American internees is referred to by the narrator and interviews, the only African-American local citizen interviewed for this project was Richard Smith.[10] The film also never mentioned the four instances of violence against the internees and instead focused on the precursors to the internment through the eyes of the Japanese-Americans and the reactions of locals to the introduction of the internees into their community.

John Howard attempted to surmise the Japanese-American experience at Jerome and Rohwer in his book *Concentration Camps on the Home Front: Japanese Americans in the House of Jim Crow* published in 2008. Significant detail and research was lent to the overall experience of the Japanese-American internees, but the racial stratification surrounding the camps is relegated to a page-and-a-half mention in the fourth chapter entitled "Race, War, Dances".[11] Even though the title of Howard's work expressly referenced Jim Crow, he focused instead on the role of Edward Finch and queer theory as applied to the internment experience. Jason Ward, a doctoral student at

Yale when he wrote the article, "'No Jap Crow': Japanese Americans Encounter the World War II South" surmised in his footnotes that studies on the Japanese-American internment experience contained little information about the two Arkansas camps.[12] During his research he never explored the depth of the white supremacist mentality in Arkansas and instead glossed over it. He did, however, offer the hypothesis that the reason that Nebo Mack Person was tried and convicted so quickly was due to his skin color rather than the nature of his crime.[13]

Russell Bearden briefly touched on the resultant racial tensions in his articles "The False Rumor of Tuesday: Arkansas's Internment of Japanese-Americans" and "Life Inside Arkansas's Japanese-American Relocation Centers" but does nothing to identify or resolve the cause of the tensions. In "The False Rumor of Tuesday", Bearden attempts to downplay the white supremacist mentality present at the camps by stating:

> There were incidents of both compassion and hostility directed toward the Japanese during their years of internment. Many marriage ceremonies were performed in local homes, and religious services were conducted regularly at the centers. On the other hand, a few isolated acts of violence, which resulted in human injury, were perpetrated against several of the Japanese internees.[14]

He went on to mention two out of the four documented cases of violence against internees and implied that they were "resolved to satisfaction."[15] In "Life Inside Arkansas's Japanese-American Relocation Centers", Bearden painted an idyllic scene of the internees and their white counterparts in the camps working side by side without any mention of the established white supremacist mentality. Even though close relationships and friendships were discouraged by the government, "casual 'goodbye's,''see-you-later's,'and 'take-it-eas'ys,' would be exchanged and the 'hakujins'(Caucasians) would retire to their isolated barracks and the camp 'evacuees' would drift back to their tarpapered homes."[16]

William Cary Anderson outlined briefly the frustrations that mounted among the established populations around Jerome and Rohwer in "Early Reaction in Arkansas to the Relocation of Japanese in the State."[17] He mentioned the work restrictions, the state exclusionary clauses that ruled over the health and education of the internees, and three specific instances of violence against the internees but did not address the root of the "frustrations" or "anger" against the Japanese-Americans. He instead asserted that the locals were trying to "prevent a recurrence of the recent events involving natives and colonists."[18]

Past works on the Japanese-American internment focused almost exclusively on the internment experience rather than the impact of the internment on the surrounding communities. The resultant tension between the whites, African-Americans, and Japanese-American internees never rose to the forefront of historical research. This research project examined the racial tension that developed due to the introduction of Japanese-Americans into a society defined by a strict racial binary and analyzed the relationships between the racial communities.

The racial tension in the Arkansas Delta did not abate in the years leading up to World War II, but instead strengthened.[19] African-Americans fled the area in droves as they feared for their safety and security. The number of African Americans in Chicot, Drew, and Desha Counties fell from 42,105 in 1920 to 40,371 in 1940 whereas the population of African-Americans in Arkansas as a whole grew from 472, 220 in 1920 to 482,578 in 1940.[20] Articles in local newspapers such as the *Arkansas Gazette* based out of Little Rock ranged from reporting on an African-American being hunted by a posse and killed to calls for tolerance in the face of World War II.[21] In an article entitled "Tolerance for Negro Trainees Asked," O.W. Garvin, a Little Rock lawyer, is quoted as saying "'There is no room for racial hatred in our country at this time'" in regards to African-American soldiers moving to Camp Robinson and later declared that racial violence would aid the Axis powers.[22] The established racial binary in place that divided African-Americans and their white counterparts was a social institution that individuals cleaved to.

The establishment of the WRA and the internment camps proceeded rapidly after the entrance of the United States into World War II. President Franklin D. Roosevelt already deemed any individual over the age of fourteen with discernible ethnic ties to Japan as "alien enemies" in Presidential Proclamation 2525. [23] On February 17, 1942, he signed Executive Order 9066 into action which authorized the Secretary of War to designate specific geographic areas as "military areas" and those as "exclusion zones" of non-occupation. These zones determined that " all persons may be excluded [from inhabiting the zone], and with such respect to which, the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Sectary of War or the appropriate Military Commander may impose in his discretion." [24] Executive Order 9102 issued on March 18, 1942 established the War Relocation Authority to further facilitate the removal of Japanese-Americans from the aforementioned exclusion zones which covered California, western Oregon, western Washington, and southern Arizona.[25]

Almost 120,000 Japanese-Americans were sent to one of sixteen WRA Assembly Centers that dotted the exclusion zone and then dispersed to one of ten WRA Relocation Centers located outside of the exclusion zone.[26] The Delta

region of Arkansas housed two of the internment facilities, constructed on a combination of land previously seized by the federal government for back taxes and lands after the Floods of 1927 and 1930 and purchased from local farmers near the towns of McGehee and Dermott.[27] The Jerome site consisted of over 10,000 acres of under developed swampland situated between Drew and Chicot Counties and the camp at Rohwer consisted of land in nearby Desha County.[28] Originally, the government intended much of the acreage associated with the camps to be part of a low-income tenant-farming program as proposed by Herbert Hoover. The proximity to rail lines and the ease of acquisition since the land was already abandoned in default for taxes rendered the locations ideal to the WRA.[29]

The prevailing white supremacist mentality and hatred of the Japanese-American internees began early in the camps' establishment. Homer Adkins, the governor of Arkansas and a former Ku Klux Klan member, spoke out vehemently against the establishment of the camps. He proclaimed that if the Japanese-Americans were considered such a threat to national security on the West Coast, they would be as much of a threat in his home state.[30] He asserted in a February 27, 1942 letter to John H. Tolan, the chairman of the House Committee Investigating National Defense Migration, that "the only way I can visualize where we can use them [the Japanese-American internees] at all would be to fence them in concentration camps under wire fence and the guard of white soldiers."[31] Adkins was also a strong supporter of Arkansas' long-held and rigid system of segregation, given his affiliation with the Ku Klux Klan. The introduction of the Japanese-American internees could and would disrupt the systems of power already in place and Adkins sought to maintain the suitable status quo.

Adkins initially refused to have any Japanese-Americans interred in Arkansas. He acquiesced to the federal government under the promise of increased funding available to his state. Even though he gave into the demands of the federal government, Adkins' approval of the camps came with a plethora of restrictions against the incoming internees. This included legislation rapidly passed by the Arkansas House and Senate soon after the camps opened that prevented Japanese-Americans from attending college within the state or from owning land.[32] Adkins demanded that the only way that the internment would work was to "fence them [the Japanese-Americans] in under wire fence and guards" rather than to afford them any liberties.[33] Japanese-Americans could live in his state, but they fell short of belonging to Adkins' constituency in his mind.

After the WRA established that two of the camps would be located in Arkansas, local contractors were hired to construct the camps. Construction on the camps occurred rapidly as they resembled coal mining company towns in their hasty construction and tight quarters.[34] Internee housing consisted of long rows of A-frame barracks constructed of thin wood and tar paper arranged in numbered blocks. Each block contained fourteen 20 by 120 foot buildings roughly divided into six apartments each. Construction was not complete by the time the first internees began to arrive in late September 1942. Internees were forced to finish constructing their own living quarters with supplies left behind by contractors.[35]

In the fall of 1942, nearly sixteen thousand Japanese-Americans from the Fresno and Santa Monica assembly centers boarded trains for a four-day long ride across the country to Jerome.[36] By November of that same year, both camps neared maximum capacity as the last evacuees came into Rohwer.[37] What greeted the internees were flat fields, desolate from drought, and unfinished hovels made of tarpaper and sinking into marshy swamps. Jerome and Rohwer went from unincorporated communities of 142 and 112 each to the fifth and sixth largest cities in Arkansas when the camps reached maximum capacity.[38] Locals recounted stories of sitting on their front porch and watching the internees through binoculars not unlike animals in a cage. In *Time of Fear*, Frances Hopmann recalled "…we were just sitting on our front porch with our binoculars. There were just 'jillions' of them." [39]

Due to the established work restrictions in Arkansas, the administration encouraged adults within the camps to apply for jobs within the camp confines. They earned between $12 and $19 a month, less than an army private at the time.[40] The public opinion on the utilization of the Japanese-Americans as an inexpensive labor force was split. Some sources, including interviews with local whites, indicated that the local populace anticipated using the Japanese-Americans as a low-to-no-cost labor force to compensate for the local labor shortages in the cotton fields and factories. E. L. Compere, the Arkansas State Selective Service Director, assured locals that "there will be a provision for necessary workers on the farms, in the mines and for all essential efforts."[41] Governor Adkins, according to an interview with Dillon Myer, seemed "disturbed about a report that some of the Japanese in Arkansas might be released to compete with local labor" instead of staying behind barbed wire.[42] A story in the *Arkansas Gazette* reported that the local populace favored the Japanese remaining in the camps rather than being utilized as a labor force.[43] When news broke in December of 1941 that a request was filed to use Japanese-Americans as workers on the Norfork dam project in Mountain Home, Governor Adkins announced "implacable opposition" to the plan. He refused to lift the restrictions on labor, stating in a telegram that "In my opinion it would be inadvisable and unwise to assign Japanese to your project or to any other project other than the two Japanese relocation camps where they are constantly under military guard and under no consideration can I alter my position in this matter." [44]

Locals protested the introduction of Japanese-American internees into their communities despite the fact they were held behind barbed wire. The WRA called the reaction to Japanese-Americans moving into the area as "near hysteria" and the communities surrounding the internment camps had a "considerable amount of public uneasiness about these little understood people [the Japanese-Americans]."[45] Richard Smith, as interviewed for *Time of Fear*, suggested that "There was a lot of fear in both [the white and African-American] communities. People saw any Japanese person as being an enemy. We feared everything that was Japanese."[46] Letters to the editor of local newspapers decried the incoming 'Japs' as detrimental to the societal norms of their small towns and that Arkansas was being made into a "dumping ground" for enemies of the state.[47] One brief editorial in the August 25 edition of the Little Rock *Arkansas Gazette* argued that, "Maybe Gandhi could propitiate the Japs but a safer method of dealing with them is being employed by the Marines in the Solomon islands."[48]

Japanese-Americans were portrayed in many of these letters (as well as in mass media as a whole) as untrustworthy, manipulative, conniving individuals who all worked for the Emperor of Japan. Another letter to the editor that ran in the Little Rock *Arkansas Gazette* decried the acceptance of the internment camps, stating "Do you not wonder how any man can cover money enough to actually boast of his prosperity?" as camps increased business and locals reaped the benefits of an increased population.[49] These letters ran side-by-side with articles that called for extra rationing in the community and lauded the achievements of local soldiers in the fight against the "Japs" across the pond.

Some media outlets attempted to paint the camp establishment as widely accepted rather than decried. When the *McGehee Times* first announced the establishment of the camps in its June 4, 1942 newspaper, the headlining article quoted the reaction of local citizens as being largely positive despite the counter claims in editorials.[50] The *Times* reported that the "vast majority" of local residents "as believing that it [the establishment of the camps] could do no harm under the plans that have been utilized and that much good could be realized from the venture," from the increased spending in Desha County before and after the centers were established.[51] The same article surmised that the increased farming at the internment camps would benefit the locals through access to the produce grown by the camps.

The budget for food at the internment camps was small, less than the rations for a soldier. Internees were fed for forty five cents a day.[52] As they were accustomed to doing, the Japanese-Americans began to grow fruits and vegetables despite less-than-ideal growing conditions and raise livestock such as hogs and chickens to supplement their dining hall rations. Kimiko Nakashima, a *Nisei* internee at Jerome, recounted the agricultural expertise of the internees. "They [the internees] planted all the vegetable[s] we needed in the camp and it grew great. So they didn't have to purchase any vegetables, 'cause they grew it in camp. Well, there's a lot of farmers. They know how to grow things."[53] Internees ate in their cell blocks as their food was rationed by block and the quality of the food was greatly dependent on the caliber of the chef on the block.[54]

The established racial binary fueled accusations of preferential treatment. Citizens of the surrounding communities, used to barely scraping by and being the victims of agricultural famine, began to allege that the Japanese-Americans were receiving access to goods and services such as food and education. D.T. Henderson (listed in the *Gazette* as "DT"), editor of the *Chicot County Spectator* in nearby Lake Village, wrote a letter to the editor on how he supported the internment camp project at its inception but his support now waned over allegations of a lack of rationing at the facilities.[55] Locals perceived the "trainloads of food" coming in as a slight against them and preferential treatment for the internees. Wartime rationing was in effect and prices on groceries had nearly doubled in the six months since the war began.[56] Rumors spread through the community of the "slops" for the pigs containing things like whole hams, fruit, and white bread, all luxuries to which the local population, regardless of socioeconomic status, had little to no access to.[57] Frustrations in the community heightened to the point that Dillon Myer addressed the allegations in a radio interview in October 1942. He refuted the claims of higher quality food being dealt out to the Japanese by stating that "The people in the relocation center are subject to the same rationing restrictions as everyone else."[58]

Educational opportunities and access to medical care also proved to be points of contention for local population. Schools in the Delta were underfunded and commonly understaffed. Illiteracy ran rampant among the locals regardless of race. Students had to travel to the nearest larger town to attend school, and sometimes this travel was cost and time prohibitive.[59] White teachers were recruited across the state to come work in the internment camps for pay that was considerably above the state scale.[60] The salaries for the teachers at the centers versus in the public school system on average were $1620/$533 for elementary teachers, $2000/$859 for high school teachers, $3200/$1259 for elementary principals, and $3800/$1763 for high school principals.[61] When locals complained about the legitimacy of attracting highly qualified teachers to work with interred children, Dillon Myer, the director of the WRA, pointed to the "extraneous circumstances" these teachers would be working under such as the lack of supplies and being surrounded by the Japanese-Americans.[62] Arkansans still felt that they were being cheated out of

the best and brightest teachers in their state to the degree that the State Board of Education pushed for the WRA to refrain from hiring local teachers.[63]

Conditions at the schools within the internment camps were unpleasant to say the least. At the beginning, schools held classes in empty barrack blocks devoid of furniture and basic supplies. Sometimes teachers would have a desk and chair, sometimes only a chair. Students sat on the bare ground or stood for hours at a time during their lessons.[64] Cultural differences proved to be problematic for the Japanese-American students. Yuriko Hohri recounted the difference between the 白人 [*hakujin*, or Caucasian] teachers and the 日本人[*nihonjin*, or Japanese] as the *hakujin* teachers being crass (by using coarse language and dipping tobacco) and lazy versus the "bright and intelligent" *nihonjin* teachers.[65]

Tension and vitriolic responses characterized the initial interactions between the white population of the Delta and the Japanese-Americans. In segregated Arkansas, there was no place for Japanese-Americans. These individuals invaded the populace's quiet existence, seemed to have access to better resources and services, and even made a better salary than many of the locals.[66] Grace Sugita Hawley, a *Nisei* interred at Jerome, recounted her early experiences with the locals by saying "They [the locals] weren't very nice. That's when we began to feel the difference. They, I don't remember too many incidents, but I know they weren't very friendly."[67] Locals feared and loathed the Japanese internees. According to Frances Hopmann, a white local interviewed for *Time of Fear*, her mother warned Hopmann and her siblings to stay away from the camps due to the "untrustworthy Japs".[68]

The tension between the whites and the Japanese-American internees culminated with four instances of violence that occurred between November and December 1942. On November 7, an unnamed contractor working at Jerome guarding contractor supplies shot at three boys interred at the camp because they allegedly threw rocks at him. Robert Leflar, the WRA regional attorney for Jerome and Rohwer, insisted that the boys were not injured and they "…admitted their fault and the matter was apparently closed up without any needs for disciplinary action."[69] Approximately three days later Private Louis Furushiro, a *Nisei* member of the armed forces stationed at Camp Robinson, was singled out and shot at by local farmer W.M. Wood. Furushiro, a *Nisei* soldier training at Camp Robinson outside of Little Rock, stopped at a café in Dermott on his way to visit relatives in Jerome. Wood heard that there was a "Jap" in town, drove home, and brought a shotgun back to the café. Furushiro was hit several times in the face with birdshot.[70] A military inquiry was brought against Wood due to Furushiro's status as a soldier, but charges were never leveled against him. Passes were suspended for soldiers traveling to and from Camp Robinson and Jerome.[71]

Despite some measure of public outcry, violence continued against the Japanese-Americans. Four days after the Furushiro incident, another attack happened in McGehee when M.C. Brown, a local tenant farmer returning from a deer hunt, shot at three boys and a guard and wounded one of the boys. He believed that the boys escaped from Rohwer and guard aided their escape.[72] Brown marched them into town under the auspices of turning them over to authorities. Instead, he was put into jail (though later released) and the boys returned to camp. The charges of assault with intent to kill were later dropped as Henry Smith, the local district attorney, was a deer hunting friend of Brown's.[73]

The one incident that was prosecuted involved Nebo Mack Person, a fifty-seven year old African-American former soldier who worked as a contractor at Jerome. On Tuesday, December 4, he allegedly propositioned two *Nisei* internees named Asaye Waki and Sumiye Jitsumyo. He offered each of them $8 for sex, tore the coat off of Waki, and exposed himself to both.[74] Person faced trial and was convicted of indecent exposure and aggravated assault by Friday, December 7. He made a full confession, plead guilty in court, and was sentenced to a year in jail and a fine of $100.[75] WRA officials used the assault case against Person as a means to assure the Japanese-Americans of the dedication to their safety. Within weeks, there were no African-American employees at Jerome, but this change in personnel only appeared in a letter from Paul Taylor to the WRA offices in Washington.[76] Racial tension quickly faded from the forefront as the prevailing white supremacist mentality allowed the African-Americans to be labeled as the black beast-rapists and lesser beings. The WRA felt that a "hostile environment" could develop if the white men of the community were prosecuted for their role in the violent outbursts, but an African-American perpetrating a crime fell easily into the segregationist mindset that allowed for prosecution without repercussions.[77]

The Japanese-American internees fell into an unusual middle space in the dichotomy of segregation in the South. They were not white yet they were not colored. At first, the unusual space they occupied was not apparent due to the stringent rules that governed where internees could and could not go. Regulations eventually relaxed insofar as travelling to and from the small towns in the vicinity. When they were allowed into town under day passes to shop or merely get away from camp for a scant time the internees, unsure of their place in the segregated society, did not know where to sit in the bus and which facilities to use in town. The internees learned about segregation through these trips as Grace Sugita Hawley, a *Nisei* internee at Jerome, recounted:

> But we also didn't know where to go in the bus, because the colored in the rear, they always have a sign, "colored in the rear." And the bus driver, we don't know what to do, he looked at us and he says, "You stay in the front." Oh, so we found out we're not colored, so we stay in the front. So we get in the station and the restrooms are "colored" and "white." So we decided we'll go to the "white" section since the bus driver told us not to go in the back. But that's when we first learned about segregation. We never had that here. So it's kind of sad, you know, we had to learn all those things. Because we were in the South, too.[78]

Not all of the visits occurred under the supervision of the WRA. Children ducked beneath the fences lining the camps often. Jerome *Nisei* internee Takayo Tsubouchi Fischer later dramatized her first encounter with the local population in a performance piece based on actual events:

> This shack was really small, a small country grocery store. I don't know who shops there. I didn't see any other houses around. You know, it didn't seem that much larger than our old outhouse back home in Hardwick. *Neesan*, this store was worse than the barracks we live in.[79] … The [store] owner and his wife and two children, a boy and girl younger than me, they stared and stared at me and I was scared. I don't think they ever saw anyone who looks like me, an Oriental. Well, I stared, too. I don't think I ever saw *kurombo* before. I heard about *kurombo*, Negro people, but I never saw one or talked to one before. Funny. We just looked and looked at each other, and when they smiled at me, I smiled back. I felt bad because I had no money to spend, and I really wanted to buy something here. I thought the food and drink would taste better than here, than in the mess hall. *Neesan*, they were so nice. They gave me a penny candy and some soda. It was so delicious. Of course I thanked them. We didn't talk to each other, just stared and smiled. I didn't stay long. I said goodbye and hopped and skipped, walked, and then ran back towards camp… And even though the soldier had a gun and looked scary, he was nice and helpful. He even helped me crawl back through the barbed wire. I didn't want to get caught by those scary guards on the towers with their machine guns pointed at us. See, *Neesan*? It's okay. I'm safe and I had a really good time today walking outside of the barbed wire.[80]

Jason Ward aptly described the relationship between the whites, African-Americans, and Japanese-Americans: "Whites were custodians [of the internees] rather than equals, and African Americans were below them, a caste of untouchables."[81] Even though the Japanese-American internees were accustomed to the segregation in their hometowns on the West Coast, the segregation present in the South shocked many of them. Tosh Yasutake, a *Nisei* internee at Jerome, recounted riding a bus in MeGehee: "I remember thinking, and I got on the bus and I started walking back and I noticed all the blacks were sitting in the back. And I thought, 'Oh my god, I guess I'm down in the South, all right.'"[82]

The internee perception of and reaction to locals, specifically African-Americans, came largely from the societal definitions replete across popular culture as they experienced little contact with either population on the West Coast. Arkansas housed more African-Americans than most of the internees ever encountered before. The Negro population of the entire state of California as recorded in the 1940 census was 124,306 as opposed to 482,578 in Arkansas. Fresno County, where many of the internees previously lived in California, only boasted an African-American population of 2,812 amid an overall population of 178,565. The ratio of African-Americans to whites in Chicot, Desha, and Drew Counties was 40,371 African-Americans to 74,443 whites.[83] Art Ishida, a Nisei internee at Jerome recounted the population of the small towns surrounding the camps as nearly ninety percent African-American.[84]

The late Senator Daniel Inouye, a *Nisei* from Hawaii with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team based at Camp Shelby in Mississippi, remembered the colloquial name the mezzanine of a theatre went by in his home state; "nigger heaven." In an interview, he relented that "…I didn't think much about it. 'Let's go up to 'nigger heaven.' Then in Mississippi I realized why, because in movie houses there were mezzanines in just about every movie house and that's where the African-Americans were required to sit."[85] Even the word that Japanese-Americans used to refer to African-Americans, 黒ん坊 or *kurombo*, had distinct racial connotations akin to the white treatment of African-Americans. 黒ん坊 means literally "black boy". The second half of the character set, ん坊, carried a juvenile connotation linked directly to the way Southern whites referred to African-Americans. This term is now considered a racial slur akin to "Negro" or, worse yet, "nigger".[86]

Japanese-Americans understood the segregation against the African-American population of the Delta in conjunction with their own experiences. They recognized that the discrimination facing their own population was great, but that the discrimination by whites against African-Americans was even greater.[87] They recounted no issues

with the African-Americans in the area save for the attempted rape of the girls at Rohwer, yet none of the internee interviews utilized for this research mentioned it.[88] James Nakano, a *Nisei* interred at Jerome, became acutely aware of the subservient status of the African-Americans in the area when he gave food to one of the African-American contractors at the camp. He was interred against his will, yet he was feeding an African-American that was obviously less well-off than he was. "That kind of struck me, I think, more than anything else, saying here's this adult, and he has a funny-colored skin, and I have to give him food."[89] The Japanese-Americans grew to pity the African-Americans of Arkansas.

Most Japanese-Americans never saw an African-American until the trains pulled into the station outside of the camps. A deeply stratified racial dynamic greeted them as they drove behind barbed wire to their new homes. Their communities on the West Coast stayed largely homogenous before the outbreak of World War II. "It was a community within a community," remembered Jean Nakatani Yego.[90] The Japanese-Americans established their own banks, schools, churches, and stores and rarely ventured outside of the boundaries of their communities. Yego went on to describe the geography of her community within Chula Vista, California: "There was a section, from about K Street to Broadway and from maybe about 7th Street down to about 1st Street; that was our area."[91]

Not only were African-Americans a new concept to the internees, most of them had never encountered the societal division that greeted them in Arkansas. Rose Matsui Ochi, a *Nisei* interred at Rohwer, conceded that did not see the locals as ugly, but instead saw them as just economically-challenged.[92] She recounted her first Christmas at the camps, "I got these little, not even plastic, like little plastic little charms. And it was such a special, special gift from Santa Claus," donated by the locals.[93] African-Americans such as Richard Smith, a local man who lived most of his life in Jerome, at first feared the Japanese-Americans like their white counterparts, but they realized that "these were Americans just like us, and they were being really discriminated against due to the color of their skin and their ethnicity."[94]

The perception of the South by the internees was largely based on the national perception of the South as a hostile, lynching, backwoods desolate landscape of poverty and hatred. Speaking of coming to Camp Shelby to train as a member of the 442nd, Daniel Inouye mused that after all "the only thing we knew about Mississippi as young men was that Mississippi was a state where they lynch people, that they didn't like colored people, and we were colored."[95] He later described the way that locals treated the 442nd as remarkably friendly. Within the first month of their training, the unit received a letter from Governor Paul B. Johnson. Inouye divulged in an interview with Densho that the contents caused some consternation with the unit members. "It [the letter] went something like, 'Welcome to Mississippi. You will do your training here to prepare yourselves for service to our country. While you are here, you will be considered white.' When we heard that, I thought, 'Oh, my God. We're *haoles* now.'"[96] As mentioned prior, this treatment extended to the internees to some degree. They used white facilities rather than colored in towns and rode in the front of buses, but thanks to legislation helmed by Adkins, they suffered under the yoke of laws similar to Jim Crow.

Instead of returning the hostility directed towards them by a large contingent of the population, the Japanese-Americans grew to pity and empathize with the locals rather than fear them. The *Rohwer Outpost*, the eponymous internee newspaper, published articles calling for cooperation and compassion for the locals. In an editorial from the January 30, 1943 edition of the *Outpost* entitled "Southern Hospitality", the author lauded the cooperation between the internees and locals as opposed to the actions of internees in California. "We have left behind all of our Caucasian friends in the Golden Poppy State, but we have found new ones in and around this center. With the famed show of the 'old Southern hospitality' people in McGehee and Monticello [the county seat of Drew County] have accorded us hair treatment which is sincerely appreciated by all."[97] Both the *Outpost* and the *Communique* (later the *Tribune*) published countless articles calling for unwavering support of the internees for their Caucasian and African-American brethren both locally and overseas.[98]

Senator Inouye expressed the emotions of many Japanese-Americans when he recounted the events of Pearl Harbor: "When the news of December the 7th finally hit me and I realized what had happened, I sort of concluded that the end of the world was here as far as our future is concerned. Because after all, the men who piloted those planes looked like us, looked like me."[99] The bombing of Pearl Harbor thrust Japanese-Americans into the center of an anti-Japanese maelstrom in the United States. Over 120,000 citizens lost their homes, their possessions, and their freedoms, all because they were ethnically Japanese. For many, home became a tarpapered hovel in the swamps of Arkansas. Despite the vitriol directed towards them, the Japanese-American internees exuded a magnanimous attitude towards the locals of the Arkansas Delta. Their race exclusively defined the experience of Japanese-American internees at Jerome and Rohwer. They fell into a liminal role, moving between definitions of white and colored while maintaining a primary identity as being confined against their will. As many Japanese-Americans said "仕方がない"; their circumstances could not be helped, but their strength of will and perseverance carried the Japanese-Americans of Jerome and Rohwer through the internment experience of World War II.

2. Acknowledgements

The author would like to express gratitude to: the staff of the periodicals room and Special Collections at the David W. Mullins Library of the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville for their support during my research trip to their campus; the circulation, reference, and administrative staff at the D. Hiden Ramsey Library of the University of North Carolina at Asheville for their logistical support during the past year of research; the faculty of the History Department at UNCA for their unwavering support and guidance, especially Dr. Dan Pierce for his constructive comments on my drafts and Dr. Sarah Judson for her direction, dedication, and support; the Undergraduate Research Program for funding and logistical support; and my friends and family, especially my husband, John Michael Bradley, for being my champion, research assistant, and best friend through this process. Without these people, this research would not have been possible.

3. References

1 Sam Mibu, interview in *Time of Fear,* NC Live video, 14:52, directed by Sue Williams et al. (Alexandria, VA: PBS, 2004), http://media.nclive.org/authvid.phtml?vid=189 (accessed February 20, 2013).

2 For the purposes of this paper, I will be referring to the Japanese-American population using the terms *issei* (Japanese born American citizens), *nisei* (American born Japanese-Americans, or the children of the *issei*), and *kibei* (Japanese educated Japanese-Americans that returned to reside in the United States) when possible.

3 U.S. Dept. of the Interior, *WRA: A Story of Human Conservation* (New York: AMS Press Inc., 1975), xiv. This number is quoted in multiple sources but this seems to be the original document that references it.

4 Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps North America: Japanese in the United States and Canada During World War II* (Malabar, FL: Krieger, 1993), 96.

5 Roger Daniels, *The Decision to Relocate the Japanese Americans*, Reprint ed. (Malabar, FL.: Krieger, 1990), 55.

6 Dillon S. Myer, *Uprooted Americans: Japanese Americans and the War Relocation Authority* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1971).

7 Myer, *Uprooted Americans*, 93.

8 Audrie Girdner and Anne Loftis, *The Great Betrayal: The Evacuation of the Japanese-Americans During World War II*, 2nd Printing ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1970).

9 Nan Elizabeth Woodruff, *American Congo: The African American Freedom Struggle in the Delta* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 5-6.

10 Richard Smith, interviewed in *Time of Fear*, 2:01.

11 John Howard, *Concentration Camps on the Home Front: Japanese Americans in the House of Jim Crow*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 132-133.

12 Jason Morgan Ward, "'No Jap Crow': Japanese Americans Encounter the World War II South," *Journal of Southern History* 73, no. 1 (02, 2007), 76.

13 Ward, 86.

14 Russell Bearden, "The False Rumor of Tuesday: Arkansas's Internment of Japanese-Americans," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (Winter, 1982), 338, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40038522.

15 Bearden, "The False Rumor of Tuesday", 339.

16 Russell Bearden, "Life Inside Arkansas's Japanese-American Relocation Centers," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (Summer, 1989), 193, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40030791.

17 William Cary Anderson, "Early Reaction in Arkansas to the Relocation of Japanese in the State." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (Autumn, 1964), 199-200, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40038054.

18 Anderson, 206.

19 For a concise history of the racial stratification and tension in this specific region, please refer to Nan Elizabeth Woodruff's book *American Congo: The African American Freedom Struggle in the Delta.*

20 University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, "Census Page Data," Historical Census Browser, http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html (accessed March 14, 2013). Hereafter, this source will be known as GSDC.

21 "Negro Hunted by Posse Shot to Death," *Arkansas [Little Rock] Gazette,* Little Rock, AR, August 31, 1942, 2. Hereafter, this newspaper will be known as *Gazette.*

22 “Tolerance for Negro Trainees Asked,” *Gazette*, August 25, 1942, 2.

23 Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Presidential Proclamation 2525: Alien Enemies--Japanese,” December 7,1941, http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/polsciwb/brianl/docs/1941PRESIDENTIALPROCLAMATIONaliensjapanese.pdf (Accessed February 20, 2012)

24 Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Executive Order 9066: Authorizing the Secretary of War to Prescribe Military Areas," March 18, 1942, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=61698 (Accessed February 20, 2012).

25 Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Executive Order 9102: Establishing the War Relocation Authority," March 18, 1942, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=162 (Accessed February 20, 2012).

26 Jeffery F. Burton et al., *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 79.

27 “Chicot County to Get Jap Colony,” *McGehee Times*, McGehee, AR, June 18, 1941. Hereafter, this newspaper will be known as *Times.*

28 John B. DeWitt, *Final Report, Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast*, 1942, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943), 262 and “Chicot County to Get Jap Colony,” *Times*, June 18, 1941, 1.

29 “Jap Colony Construction Starts July 15,” *Times*, June 18, 1941.

30 Anderson, 206.

31 Adkins as quoted in Smith, 345.

32 Anderson, 210.

33 U. S. House, 77th Congress, 2nd Session, Committee on National Defense Migration, *Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration*, House Report 1911 (Washington, 1942), 27-28, as quoted in Anderson, 201.

34 Burton et al., 151 and 246. Page 151 is a diagram of Jerome’s layout and page 246 is a diagram of Rohwer’s layout.

35 “Jap Colony Construction Starts July 15,” *Times*, June 18, 1941 and “10,000 Japs to be Moved into Desha County,” *Times*, June 4, 1942.

36 *Time of Fear*, 21:05.

37 Dillon Myer, interview transcript, Truman Presidential Museum and Library, “The War Relocation Authority and the Incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII,” http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/japanese_internment/docs.php (Accessed February 18, 2012).

38 *Time of Fear*, 23:20.

39 Frances Hopmann, as interviewed in *Time of Fear*, 23:06.

40 *WRA: A Story of Human Conservation*, 76-79.

41 “Labor to be Provided Compere Says,” *Gazette*, November 12, 1942.

42 Anderson, 201.

43 “Jap Colonists to be Used in War Industry,” *Gazette*, December 5, 1942.

44 Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project, “Denson Tribune (newspaper)”, Densho Encyclopedia, http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Denson_Tribune_(newspaper)/ (accessed March 13, 2013).

45 *WRA: A Story of Human Conservation*, 110.

46 Richard Smith, as interviewed in *Time of Fear*, 22:49.

47 Editorial, *Gazette*, August 25, Page 4, first column.

48 Editorial, *Gazette*, August 25, 1942, Page 4, second column.

49 Editorial, “Scores All Those Who Attempt to Profit From the War,” *Gazette*, August 26, 1942.

50 “Japs to be Moved Into County,” *Times*, June 4, 1942.

51 “Jap Projects Bring Large Payrolls Here,” *Times*, August 13, 1942.

52 Anderson, 201.

53 Kimiko Nakashima, Segment 17, as interviewed for Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project. “Densho Digital Archive.” http://www.densho.org (Accessed February 18, 2012). Hereafter, this source will be known as Densho.

54 Yooichi Wakamiya, Segment 15 and Ben Tonooka, Segment 20, Densho.

55 D.T. Henderson, letter to the editor, *Gazette*, November 11, 1942.

56 Prices from Safeway ads ran in the *Gazette* from August 14, 1942 and November 14, 1942 were compared. Prices rose an average of 75% on produce.

57 Frances Hopmann, as interviewed in *Time of Fear*, 28:30.
58 Dillon Myer, as quoted in *Time of Fear*, 28:56.
59 *Time of Fear*, 29:19.
60 "High Teacher Salaries at Jap Colony," *Gazette*, September 22, 1942.
61 "High Teacher Salaries at Jap Colony," *Gazette*, September 22, 1942 and Anderson, 200.
62 "High Teacher Salaries at Jap Colony," *Gazette*, September 22, 1942.
63 "Discuss Problem of Jap Education," *Times*, July 23, 1942.
64 Marian Shingu Sata, Segment 13, Densho.
65 Yuriko Hohri, Segment 14, Densho.
66 Kenji Maruko, Segment 19, Densho.
67 Grace Sugita Hawley, Segment 22, Densho.
68 Frances Hopmann, as interviewed in *Time of Fear*, 2:14.
69 Robert Leflar to Phillip M. Glick, November 14, 1942, Series 2, Folder 1, Robert A. Leflar Collection, (Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, University of Arkansas at Fayetteville). Hereafter, this collection will be known as Leflar UASC.
70 "Inquiry Into Attack on Soldier," *Gazette*, November 11, 1942.
71 "Inquiry Into Attack on Soldier," *Gazette*, November 11, 1942.
72 "Farmer Fires on Jap Near Rohwer," *Gazette*, November 14, 1942.
73 Leflar to Glick, November 23, 1942, Series 2, Folder 1, Leflar UASC.
74 Leflar to Glick, December 7, 1942, Series 2, Folder 2, Leflar UASC.
75 "Conviction in Assault Case," *Denson [Jerome] Communique*, WRA Jerome Relocation Center, December 8, 1942, accessed through Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project.
76 Howard, 133.
77 Anderson, 206.
78 Grace Sugita Hawley, Segment 11, Densho.
79 *Neesan* is a shortened version of おねえさん (*oneesan*), which means "older sister".
80 Takayo Tsubouchi Fischer, Segment 12, Densho.
81 Ward, 86.
82 Tosh Yasutake, Segment 16, Densho.
83 "Census Data Page," GSDC.
84 Art Ishida, Segment 14, Densho.
85 Daniel Inouye, Segment 9, Densho.
86 As a reference, the proper or socially acceptable modern term is 黒人 or *kokujin* (literally "black man/person").
87 Grace Sugita Hawley, Segment 11, and Eiko and Yoshiko Nishihara, Segment 19, Densho.
88 Art Ishida, Segment 14, Densho.
89 James Nakano, Segment 13, Densho.
90 Jean Nakatani Yego, as interviewed in *Time of Fear*, 9:50.
91 Jean Nakatani Yego, as interviewed in *Time of Fear*, 10:00.
92 Rose Matsui Ochi, Segment 5, Densho.
93 Rose Matsui Ochi, Segment 5, Densho.
94 Richard Smith, as interviewed in *Time of Fear*, 49:34.
95 Daniel Inouye, Segment 9, Densho.
96 Daniel Inouye, Segment 9, Densho. "*Haole"* is a Hawaiian colloquialism for "white person".
97 "Southern Hospitality," *Rohwer Outpost*, WRA Rohwer Relocation Center, January 30, 1943, accessed through Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project.
98 A prime example from each newspaper of this phenomenon is "Freedom's Leaders," *Rohwer Outpost*, March 14, 1943 and "Democracy Means More Today," *Denson Communique*, November 26, 1942.
99 Daniel Inoyue, Segment 4, Densho.