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Defying the dragon : stories of three generations of Japanese American struggle against racism on the Monterey Peninsula

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Defying the Dragon:

**Stories of Three Generations of Japanese American Struggle
Against Racism
on the Monterey Peninsula**



Thomas P. White

Senior Capstone

Division of Humanities and Communication

Spring 2006

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Dragon, 11th century drawing by Muh-ki.
New York Public Library Digital Gallery.

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Senior Capstone

Creative Writing & Social Action

Professor Frances Payne Adler

Division of Humanities and Communication

Spring 2006

*This collection of stories is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Phyllis White.
I wish that she could read this for herself.*

Acknowledgements

This project was not created in a vacuum. Many people helped me along the way, and I would be remiss if I did not thank them.

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Introduction

Immigrants from Japan first arrived on the Monterey Peninsula in the year 1895. This first group arrived as laborers who cleared brush for the Pacific Improvement Company. A year later a group of Japanese fishermen came to the region, and every year thereafter more Japanese arrived and settled in the region. They are credited with creating the abalone fishing industry, and with helping to refine agricultural business in the Salinas Valley and surrounding areas.

The history of the triumphs and struggles of those pioneering Japanese settlers to the region, as well as the subsequent generations that have remained here, have been well documented and recorded. The roadblocks along their path to assimilation into American society created by racism and the loss of their civil liberties have also been talked about at great length. The academic discussion is generally focused on the reaction of the community, not of the individual.

The individual is the focus of this collection, which began with a general thesis:

Attempts by immigrant groups of non-white ethnicities and skin colors to assimilate into American culture are hindered by both the removal of civil liberties by the government, as well as bigotry and racism from the citizenry. The Japanese Americans experience exemplifies this.

From there ideas and questions began to grow. What does that feel like on a personal level? What sort of emotions develop when the culture you were born into rejects you because of how you look? How does it feel when attempts at assimilation are hindered because your parents immigrated here from another country? How does a person react when they awake one morning and realize they are perceived as looking like the enemy? Through research and personal reflection, stories began to form that addressed these questions and many more.

The three stories in this project show the Japanese American experience on an individual level. The characters in each tale struggle through three very important times in the history of that experience. The first story follows recent immigrant Kazuo as he arrives in California at the start of the 20th century to find prosperity, but instead finds racism and difficult working conditions. December 7th, 1941 is the date of the second story, when a 10-year old boy watches the world his parents built fall apart, when being Japanese means being the enemy. The final story of the project sees a woman remember the lessons and experiences of her parents and grandparents as the events of September 11th, 2001 unfold on her television screen. She then watches in horror as a new community of people become scapegoated in much the same way her own family and community were sixty years before.

Important to both the Japanese American experience, and the stories within this project is the concept of generations within the community. Each generation has a name which is important to telling their story. The Issei were the first generation of Japanese Americans, those who came across the Pacific Ocean to settle in America. The Nisei are their children, the second generation who were born American citizens. The Sansei are the third generation, the children of citizens who have assimilated in ways that their grandparents might never have dreamed. The fourth generation are the Yonsei, the fifth called Gosei. These last two are the youth of the community now, forging their own identities.

The three stories in this project are not directly connected. All three are about the struggles of the Japanese American experience, but the characters do not carry through the stories, neither do the plots of the stories. These tales are meant to be read as a part of a whole, but the stories can each stand on their own. While the situations that occur in the stories are real, the characters are not.

Creative Portfolio

A Letter Home From the Gold Mountain



Two slim Japanese gentlemen, by William T. Smedley, 1894.
New York Public Library Digital Gallery

*Letters in Japanese, especially to one's parents, tend to be formal and short.
Letters home from America rarely told the whole story.*

Some Japanese words appear in this tale. A glossary can be found at the end of the story for reference.

23 September, 1904

Heikei Father and Mother,

I apologize for neglecting to write for such a long time. Greetings from California. It has been more than three years since I arrived here. I have been keeping myself busy with work and learning to speak English. I have also moved several times since first arriving. I am now living in the city of Monterey, which is on the coast. If I squint, I pretend that I can see all the way past the great ocean to our home in Chiba.

It is cold and cramped. There are seven other men with Kazuo in the small cabin below the bleached wood deck of the small ship. The room is maybe fifteen-feet by twelve-feet in size, but it is hard to tell with all the crowding. There are two sets of bunks, each stacked three high, made of rough wood with a thin pad in each one. It is a bit like sleeping in a box, or maybe a coffin. In one corner is a half-full barrel of water, next to it an empty bucket that smells awful. The corner opposite holds the luggage and trunks of the room's occupants. One of the men sleeps on top of the luggage, while another shares a bunk with his brother. There are three other cabins just like this one on the ship, with more men sleeping in the cargo hold.

The seas are rough, and Kazuo is the only one who does not get sick. There are a pair of locked brass portholes that look out at the pulsing seas. Kazuo has spent most of the voyage laying in his bunk watching the water move past the ship. Staring out the small round piece of glass is his only escape from the confines of the tiny compartment. Little changes outside as the ship plows through the deep blue waters of the Pacific, but it is enough for him.

The voyage was supposed to last about twenty days. Five days into the voyage, and he already wants to squeeze out of the porthole and swim the rest of the way to California. Kazuo focused on the future instead of the present, to let his dreams carry him the rest of the way across the ocean. The siren's song of life on the Gold Mountain, where he will be an accomplished business man with his fair share of the wealth in California's soil. Kazuo closes his eyes and feels the ship push against an endless onslaught of swells and waves.

I first arrived in the city of San Francisco after three weeks on the sea. The voyage was rough and cold, but any ill feeling I had was quelled when the ship entered the calm waters of the San Francisco Bay and I took my first breath of California air. The city is very large and crowded with a wide variety of people.

The fifty-eight men aboard the ship wait in a single-file line outside a small white building. A thick fog covers most of the surrounding land, which the men are told is a place called Angel Island. So happy to finally be out of that cramped room, Kazuo is shivering from the cold. He waits near the back of the slow moving line.

The men are told they must wait for an examination, to make sure that they do not carry disease. Rumor had run rampant on the ship about what they were being checked for. One by one, the men in the front of the line went into a small, sterile room, and the door shut behind them. Ten-minutes later they would emerge, cheeks red with embarrassment, and eyes cast down to the floor in front of their feet.

"They check for worms," the short man in front of Kazuo says. He had never seen this man before, he must have been in a different compartment of the ship. "My

brother came here two years ago,” the man continues, “and told me of this examination in a letter.”

“Why does everyone look so embarrassed by it?” Kazuo asks. The line moves up by another head, putting only ten bodies between the office door and the two talking men.

“My brother said they check in a way that would shame any Japanese,” the man answers. The conversation stops there, and Kazuo spends the rest of the wait staring at the floor between his own feet.

With the help of a local Buddhist temple, I was able to find a nice place to live and stable work in the city. I also began taking English lessons there. Twelve Japanese would meet in a classroom three evenings a week to learn the language. Our instructor was a *hakujin* woman named Miss Harbury. She was nice, and told me that my pronunciation is quite good. The lessons were a treat after a hard day of working in the homes of rich *hakujin*.

“Boy, I need help.” The woman refuses to refer to him in any other way. She knew Kazuo’s name, but never used it. She always calls him Boy, and he always comes running when called.

Kazuo had been standing on a ladder in her husband’s study, dusting shelves of books that had never been read. When she called from the parlor, he rolled his eyes and sighed heavily. The feather duster was left on the top of the ladder, and he walked swiftly down the hall as he wiped his hands on the black apron he wore.

“Yes, Madam,” his English is still poor, but he had said that phrase enough times for it to sound perfect.

“Draw me a bath,” the woman says to him, never looking up from the quilt she is sewing. Her graying hair is bunched together in a tight bun on the top of her head, her aging fingers slowly work a threaded needle through the patches of fabric on her lap. She is the third woman Kazuo has worked for this week, and he can not remember her name. “Then scrub the kitchen floor. Understand?”

“Yes.” He did not really understand. Most of her words fly past his ears, but he catches the important ones – bath, scrub, kitchen. The same things all these hakujin ask him to do.

His hands are worn raw by the chores the women ask him to do. Every night he is tired, but grateful to have any work at all. Businesses have no interest in hiring Japanese, especially those who know little English. Instead Kazuo works as a “houseboy,” sent out on jobs by the head of the Buddhist church. In exchange for work he has a place to sleep, a bed and small room he shares with another Japanese man. He also earns \$2 a week, and free English lessons at night.

This is not the success he imagined waiting for him in California. Instead of wealth and land, he has hands that are sore and red, and sweat on his brow instead of the finest hat.

Fortune is not easy to find in such a crowded city. I heard of chances to work in a town called Watsonville, south of San Francisco. It is a rural and dry town, completely different than San Francisco. Several Japanese had gone there to harvest apples and sugar beets. I was sure that prosperity awaited me there, so I left the city for the fields.

The summer heat felt oppressive to Kazuo. He had gotten used to the chilly fog of San Francisco -- Watsonville is far drier and warmer. The city is behind him now.

Kazuo had met Seiji at the Buddhist temple back in the city. He was looking for workers for a sugar beet farm he had just leased in Watsonville. The man's skin was dark from long days working in the fields. Though the hours were long, Seiji said the pay could be as much as \$2 a day, depending on the size of the harvest. Tired of scrubbing floors, Kazuo was eager to go. So he threw his meager possessions into Seiji's wagon, said goodbye to his friends at the boarding house, and headed south.

Seiji's wagon pulled into town in the late afternoon after two days of bumpy travel. Kazuo sat up next to the Seiji in the driver's seat as they drove past the brick buildings of downtown and out into the pastures and fields further south.

That night he found himself sleeping on a tatami mat in a small wood shack on the south side of the Pajaro river. Dozens of similar shacks sit packed close together, and most residents of this small shanty town only speak Chinese. The night air fills with the noise of a gambling parlor a few yards away.

"I could not rent a room in town, so I have to live here in this Chinatown," Seiji had told Kazuo when they arrived. "The hakujin here do not take kindly to Japanese in town, so this was the only place I could live. With your help I will build a house on the land though, just you wait. Then we will live like prosperous men."

A week later they build a wooden shack similar to the one near the river in Chinatown, but this one is on the leased farm land. It was quiet at night, which Kazuo liked. He had forgotten how silent the night could be.

The work in the fields was not easy, but the rewards were many. A group of Japanese formed a *Nihon machi* on the outskirts of the town. All the amenities of home in Japan could be found there, including an *o furo*.

The buildings were just across the river from the Chinatown Kazuo and Seiji had slept in five months before. The rental agreements had been signed with Andrew Porter, the man who owned most of the land in Watsonville. The Japanese who signed the leases worked for him in the fields, and had been negotiating the terms for almost a year. Now there are clusters of Japanese in the southern end of the town, along Brennan Street, Lake Avenue, and south Main Street.

After his work in the fields is finished, Kazuo often makes his way to the growing Nihon machi to help construct the o furo. After a few weeks it is complete, a deep tub made of redwood. A layer of stones underneath the tub warmed by smoldering coals heats the water to a temperature hotter than the summer sun. A small shack was built behind Mr. Yamashida's vegetable store, since it was the only building with room behind it.

Kazuo feels reborn as he sinks into the hot water for the first time. The soft wood of the tub beats any of the cold iron shells that he had bathed in since he had come to California, and is definitely better than the rag and barrel of water in he had to use while crossing the Pacific. It is the best bath he has had since leaving Japan a year ago.

Two small oil lamps inside the shack flicker as they try and fight back the darkness of the warm spring evening. Inside the steam filled room, Kazuo closes his eyes, and for a few moments forgets where he is. The sore muscles and tense thoughts of his time in California melt away, and he feels like he is back in Chiba again. For the first time since he left there, Kazuo misses home.

Learning more English there was difficult, though I did find a *hakujin* man named Mr. Price who was willing to help me. In exchange for his lessons I would help him put stock away at his

hardware store. Most of the time, Japanese were not treated well by many of the people of the town. Some *hakujin* men became angry at us simply because we were Japanese.

A bottle smashes through the window of the noodle restaurant, then scatters large pieces of glass across the wooden floor and under tables. Cool night air seeps in through the jagged hole left in the glass. Several Japanese inside knock their bowls over as they jump up in surprise. A steaming wet pile of Kazuo's noodles slither across the table and fall to the floor like a pile of steaming serpents as his heart pounds.

A tall, unshaven hakujin with light brown hair walks in through the front door. He looks around the restaurant, eyes cutting down any Japanese who looks up at him. Filthy hands balled into fists jut out from the ratty sleeves of his flannel shirt. Outside several unseen men laughed angrily, voices in the dark on the dirt road outside.

“What kind of yellow food you makin’ in here?” The angry man’s nostrils flare as he takes in two deep breaths, then spits on the floor and continues, “it stinks something awful in here.” The slow and slurred words sounded like a serpent’s hiss. His dark eyes are full of venom.

“Please, sir, we want no trouble,” the owner Nobuo says in his fractured English as he comes running out from the back of the restaurant. His hands held high trying to ward this leering monster away.

“Then why didn’t you stay on your side of the Pajaro?” He sneers at Nobuo and pokes him in the chest with a calloused finger, “you Japs and Chinks got no place in town here, remember that.” The beast spits in Nobuo’s face, then quickly turns around and heads back towards the front door. On his way out, he flips a table over and shouts “This ain’t your town!”

The band of men hiding outside in the dark start to yell when the man comes outside, their words distorted by the whiskey and rotgut they had been drinking since early afternoon. They all roar a cheer together in unison as something hits the roof of the restaurant with a dull thud. As the group outside runs off into the night, Kazuo feels his heart slow with the return of the summer evening quiet. Everyone in the restaurant begins to help Nobuo clean up the mess, then they notice the smoke.

Light from the one simple chandelier over the tables dims like a shadow across the sun as black smoke spreads across the ceiling. As panic fills the room, Kazuo urges everyone to leave the building, eventually pushing Nobuo out. Bright flames dance and well on the roof of the small restaurant. Several of the restaurant's patrons run in different directions seeking water and help to fight the blaze.

Lowering his head, Nobuo stares at his feet, looking defeated. "I just wanted to serve food from home," he says. The light from the flames flicker across the tear stains on the man's cheeks.

"You did, and it was the best I have had here," Kazuo smiles. "Do not worry, we will help you build a new restaurant, a better one. We help each other here."

After almost a year in Watsonville, I began to miss the cool ocean air of our home in Chiba. I decided to join the Japanese who had moved to the coast, and I settled in a city called Monterey. The weather and the waters here are colder than back home. I have found work as a fisherman, helping catch the salmon that grow so large. Many of us have settled near the coast, and I am able to see the ocean from my window.

It rained on Kazuo most of the morning, and he felt soaked right through. The small skiff he purchased several months ago bobbed up and down on the swells that

moved across the cold blue waters of the Monterey Bay. This morning he caught ten large salmon in his nets, a good haul. He decided to sail back to shore and head up to the market. It was still raining, but the walk from the wharf to the canneries warmed his damp bones.

The white porcelain of the counter had been chipped in several places, letting the smooth metal underneath rust a bit in the salty air. A small pool of blood thinned and slowly drained off after the fishmonger poured water across its surface. Kazuo hefted the large salmon onto the counter. Blood and oil flow out of their gill slits as he pulls out the rope that held his catch together.

Kazuo looks at the man behind the counter and smiles, "Good morning."

"Twenty cents per fish," the gruff man in the leather apron says to Kazuo without looking him in the eye. He barely looks at the fish. "That's two dollars," he said and places two large silver coins on the wet counter. He then moves the fish, one by one, into a large wooden box.

"But, you paid forty cents a fish to Monk," Kazuo's brow is knit in frustration while the coins still sat on the counter. The man in line before him was an Azorean fisherman Kazuo knew from the docks. Monk's fish were no larger than his own.

"Better fish," the merchant replies. "I'm giving you a deal here. Take the money."

Kazuo grabs the coins and angrily marches back into the rain. It is enough to live on for the week, but not what the fish are worth. Other Japanese had run into the same problem. They caught the most salmon of all fishermen here in Monterey, but were paid

the least. Some thought of not catching any more in protest until they were paid fair prices.

Kazuo trudged up the muddy road back to his one-room hut on the hill behind the canneries. He spends the rest of the afternoon trying to dry out next to the dirty black stove in the corner. Every hour he throws small pieces of wood and coal in to keep the fire hot. He looks out the window, past the stacks of the canneries belching out black smoke, towards fishing boats in the harbor. Maybe tomorrow it will not rain.

Work here in Monterey goes very well for me. Soon I hope to buy a bigger boat and perhaps hire some men to help me fish. More Japanese arrive here every week, and they are always looking for work. I would like to help them. If all goes well, perhaps I will own a fleet of fishing boats. It is not unheard of here.

I hope that all is well with the Taniguchi family in Chiba. Please give my regards to everyone. May your harvest and catch be as bountiful as mine has been here in California.

Keigu,

Kazuo Taniguchi

Glossary

<i>Heikei</i>	A formal greeting for letters
<i>hakujin</i>	Caucasian
<i>Nihon machi</i>	Japanese section of a town, Japantown
<i>o furo</i>	A bath house, with a large soaking tub for both cleanliness and relaxation.
<i>Keigu</i>	A formal closing for letters
<i>tatami</i>	Mats made of woven straw with black fabric edges. Traditionally used as flooring to cover dirt or rough wood floors.

Sakura



Sakura blossoms, 2006. From the website “ogawanaoki takes.”

*The blossoms of the ornamental cherry tree, or sakura, are a common symbol in Japan.
These blossoms represent the ephemeral and transitory nature of life.*

I was ten years old when the world ended. It was a chilly Sunday morning in December. Bombs had fallen on a far away place I never heard of, and everything I knew at home fell apart.

“Yasujiro, come inside!” my mother hurriedly called out to me from the front steps of our house on Webster Street. I knew something bad had happened because she used my full name. Most of the time my parents and my friends called me Johnny. Yasujiro usually meant I was in trouble.

I had been playing across the front yards of the neighborhood with my friends. Most local children were at church, so it was four of us Japanese kids out there that morning. One by one, the rest of the guys were called in by their full names as well.

The shades were drawn in the front windows, making our house look like it was asleep. My mother stood on the front step and quickly shut the door behind me. Inside the living room was dark, tense voices came from the radio. The phrase “sneak attack” caught my ear when I came in. My father sat quietly in his favorite chair with his head in his hands. Pages of the newspaper lay scattered across the floor in front of the radio, like he had thrown them across the room.

That is the moment in life I remember most clearly. Every moment before and since are mere memory, faded at the edges. This image sits in my mind like a granite monument: my father, the strongest man in the world, was crying.

Twenty years before this, he traveled by ship to Monterey from his birthplace in Hakone, Japan, to dive for abalone. In a heavy canvas suit and a big brass helmet, he braved the coldest and roughest of California’s waters without fear. After working in the sea all day, Father learned English at night. He saved money for years to bring a woman he had only ever seen in a photograph over from Japan to start a family here. Ten years later I was born, their only child,

and his old Japanese life began to disappear. Now tears crept down his face, sliding onto his wrists and down the sleeves of his shirt. The American Dream he had built for himself was in danger of collapse.

I asked him, “Father, what is wrong?” I was afraid. He sat quietly like a statue and did not answer, did not even look up at me.

In her heavily accented English, my mother said “Please leave him be,” and she whisked me away to my room.

For hours I sat on the floor of my room, my ear craned towards the living room and listening for signs of life. I heard the drone of the voice from the radio say words like “Pearl Harbor”...“bombs”...“Japanese”...“war.” With a click the voices were silenced and the radio was switched off. The house filled with cold stillness.

Mother would try to speak to father in Japanese, the language they used when they didn’t want me to hear, but he still would not answer. After a few attempts she gave up and moved to the kitchen. I heard her bang pots and slam drawers while making lunch. His silence made the air feel tense.

Around noon Mother put lunch on the table and called me from my room. Small black bowls of rice steamed next to plates covered with cooked chicken, vegetables, and fruit. We ate while father remained unmoving in the same green chair. The phone rang, but no one answered it.

“Are we pretending we aren’t home?” I remember asking mother

She did not look away from her food. “Be quiet, do not disturb your father,” she replied. So we ate in silence, and I helped myself to father’s share of the pickled vegetables.

Father stood up after we finished. He moved without sound to the coat closet near the front door, and took down a film projector from the shelf. By the time Mother and I had finished cleaning the dishes, he had it set up. He sat down in his chair, the projector next to him on an end table. On the floor by his feet were several dozen small and flat cans, each containing memories of the Umezaki family's experiences in America. Father bought the camera before mother came here to be his wife. His original thought was to send films back home for his parents and wife-to-be to see, but they never got sent. Instead he showed them to his new wife after she arrived from Japan.

The two halves of a film can lay on the rose-patterned carpet, their insides shining like two abalone shells. He ran the film carefully through the sprockets of the projector and then switched it on. I saw a much younger version of my father appear on the wall, smiling and waving next to the quickly crashing waves of the sea shore. The young man joked for the camera, showing off exaggerated golf swings and doing silly dances. The reel ended while I stood in the doorway to the kitchen. The aged and real version of my father looked up at me as I watched his hands move methodically to open another film can and change the reel.

Patting the floor next to his chair he said, "Sit down Johnny, look at these." The first words I had heard him say all day.

I sat cross-legged on the worn carpet at the foot of his chair. This was my favorite spot to listen to the radio. Father clicked on the projector again, and grainy black-and-white images splashed across our living room wall. Father and Mother stood in front of our house wearing their best clothes, holding a signed document between them. "This is the day we bought the house," Father said, no emotion in his voice. Back on the wall, he picks her up and carries her through the front door. Mother looks embarrassed, taps his arm and points to the floor, but

Father is too happy to listen to her. “She hates it when I pick her up like that,” he continued. I had seen this reel before, but never heard the story that went along with it.

The waning afternoon sunlight drew to an early dusk as the films continued. The glowing cinder of a chain of cigarettes smoldered near my father’s face. Smoke curled and swelled through the light of the projector. The rapid clicking and ratcheting of the films being run through became a warm sound. When each film stopped, whipping its tail around a few times as it left the projector feed, he would quickly change it so the show would continue.

I saw myself as a toddler, in black and white, out on the sidewalk in front of our house. I stood up and tried to walk, but stumbled onto my backside and cried. A younger version of my mother, her skin smooth and glowing, scooped me up and laughed as she comforted me. She smiled at me and kissed my forehead, then waved at the camera, mouth moving without sound.

“We waited so long for you, Johnny,” father said, smiling back at the images on the wall. “Your Mother was so thrilled.” My toddler self disappeared from the wall, and so did his smile.

A new reel began. A large group of Japanese men and women are having a picnic on the rocky shore of a small bay. The picnic is formal, with white table cloths and fancy clothes. At the center table are a pair of large wooden chairs. A man sits on the left side, a demure woman on the right. The man talks and laughs with those around him while the woman looks on, smiles, and occasionally bows her head. Behind the picnic is the large building with “Point Lobos Canning Co.” painted in large white letters on the roof. This was where Father worked when he first arrived in California.

“This was an important day, it was just before you were born,” father said, his voice low. “The man in the big chair, that is Crown Prince Takamatsu.” As if by cue the frame jumped a bit, and the man was shown close up. “He had just gotten married to the woman next to him.”

She bowed her head formally to whoever had been holding the camera. “It was quite an honor for him to visit us while traveling the world after his marriage.” He stubbed out another cigarette, “He is the brother of the Emperor of Japan.”

When the film of the royal picnic ended, father threaded it through and we watched it again. This repeated a few more times, and I noticed new things each time. Large black cars in the background, workers standing around outside the cannery building in dirty clothes, my father sitting at the very end of one of the tables and later shaking the Prince’s hand.

I looked from the wall to the man sitting behind me and I asked, “Why are we watching this one over and over?”

“These films are our history. Remember what you see on that wall,” Father told me, never taking his eyes away from the images. Through the smoke his eyes looked glassy, like they might turn to water and flood right out of his face.

“Why? You always watch these when people come to visit us.” Usually I was asleep by the time the films came out, while the visiting family or friends reveled in history and rice wine.

Father blinked and looked at me, a single tear streamed down his cheek. “Because, after we watch them all, I am going to burn them.” His eyes returned to the wall, as if he had said nothing.

I stared at him, too stunned to say anything. Father took great pride in these films, and in the life that he documented through the lens of his camera. The idea of him destroying them was unthinkable to me.

The reels changed again and again that night. Dinner was served, but Father again did not join us. He was transfixed by the images on the wall. I had seen every film twice by the time I fell asleep leaning against my father’s leg, my dreams awash in celluloid memories.

Before he started on the third round of viewings he picked me and carried me to my room, where my mother helped him undress me and slide me under the blankets of my bed. It was the last time my parents tucked me in to bed together.

As the sun rose the next morning, my world became confined to the walls of our small house and the fence of the yard behind it. Mother kept me home from school, afraid of what the white children there might say or do to me. Father slept late, missing a morning on a boat overseeing abalone dives after a night watching films. The morning light uncovered the night's activities -- a full ashtray, film reels and can lids laying everywhere in shambled piles, and several empty rice wine bottles. The house was quiet all morning.

Just after lunch, President Roosevelt began to speak through the cloth covered speaker of our radio. "A day that will live in infamy," he said. The President's words were big, and I did not understand what he meant. Father was sitting in his chair again, a stern look on his face as he listened.

I looked at him and asked, "What does all that mean?"

"War," Father grunted back at me. "War with Japan." He then waved his hand at me, urging me to be quiet.

I stared at the radio as the words tumbled out of the speaker and past my ears. I tried to think of what it all meant. The United States, the country I was born and raised in, was at war with my parents' homeland. With Japanese people. Did that mean America was at war with me?

The phone began ringing before the President was done speaking. Father had whispered conversations in Japanese, talking fast with his hand cupped over the mouthpiece of the black

receiver. Mother and I sat together on the couch and listening. Every time a call came, she would take my hand in hers and squeezed it a bit.

I looked at Mother and asked, “What’s going on?” I was panicked, afraid that soldiers might march up Webster Street and capture us. I had no idea what was going on.

Father sat next to the phone waiting for the next call. He smoked cigarette after cigarette while sitting there, sweat beading on his brow. Mother chewed on her nails, eyes wide with fear as she looked from my father to the December sky outside. They were both quiet. We all jumped when the phone rang. Years later, Mother told me that the calls were from other Issei, news and gossip traveling as quickly as telephones could be dialed. The phone rang more than a dozen times that afternoon.

Around four o’clock, Father began directing us to pick up various items throughout the house. Pictures of family back in Japan, small wooden dolls wearing paper kimonos, scrolls of rice paper with finely inked Kanji calligraphy. Anything Japanese in our house was piled on the living room floor. Some things, such as expensive dress kimonos and our nicer dishware were saved. Photographs, the home movie reels, and letters in Kanji were taken outside to the backyard and piled on the bricks of our back patio.

Father dug a small hole near the center of the yard, his lit cigarette still dangling from his mouth as the afternoon sun began its slide into dusk. The hole was maybe a foot and a half deep, and a couple feet wide. He threw the gathered items into the hole, then asked mother to bring him a can of kerosene from the garage.

Father stood over the shallow grave holding our family’s history, holding his head high. I knelt down next to the hole and put my hand on the contents, as if saying goodbye. I began to

cry as the fears and confusion from the last day boiled over inside me and forced their way out of my eyes.

When mother brought the red and white can from the garage, I stood up as father doused the pile with the clear liquid. The fumes assaulted my nose, and made my already damp eyes well up again. The world looked glassy to me as the paper in the hole began to wilt.

“Stand back,” he told us. Mother put her arms around my shoulders and pulled me back about ten feet from the hole. Father looked towards the sun sinking low into the crimson western skies, and spit the cigarette from his mouth onto the pile of memories. With an angry sound, hot orange flames erupted from the pile, and a thin column of smoke floated up from the fire.

The fire spread over the collected pieces of our Japanese life, consuming and erasing the Umezaki family legacy. Father knelt in the grass next to the pile, eyes closed as the blue-grey smoke washed over him. He looked as if the smoke was purifying him.

“Nothing will be the same now,” he said, eyes still closed. “I cannot know what happens next, but we must handle it with dignity.”

Small bits of paper, charred black, lofted themselves into the darkening evening sky. The fire changed from orange to peculiar shades of green, blue, and purple as they struck the chemical surfaces of home movies and photographs. With the help of the kerosene everything charred and burnt up in just a few moments.

Father joined us for dinner that night. Our first meal as a family in the day and half since my parents' homeland attacked the country we now call home. It was quiet, like most of the day had been. He ate in silence. Mother watched across the table with concern in her eyes. She barely touched the meal she had spent an hour preparing. I sat between the two, eyes moving from one to the other. Father picked at the sliced pork in front of him for maybe half an hour.

When I finished my own dinner I sat quietly with my hands folded until father finally put down his fork and waited for the plates to be cleared. Even after eyeing the uneaten prawns and tofu on my mother's plate, I did not try and take anything extra. It was maybe the first time I had been so obedient at the table.

The silence of our supper was broken by a loud thump on the roof. Mother jolted in her chair. Father and I just looked up, eyes scanning the white ceiling in our kitchen. Two more thumps on the roof in quick succession, and then one of the windows in the living room shattered. Father's chair slammed hard against the floor as he bolted up to his feet. He peered around the doorjamb to look into the living room. Mother grabbed my arm and pulled me down to join her on the floor under the table.

More stone bombs rained down on our house, each no larger than a human hand could hold. Another window broke, and several dents were left in the stucco on the outside walls. They were propelled by venomous breath that shouted the word "JAP!" with each hurled stone. Mother screamed, covering her head with her hands. Even under the safety of the table it felt like the roof would break open and unleash and torrential downpour of rocks, crushing us all inside. The deafening noise of the assault on our house chased the silence away into the night.

Soon the storm of hate ended at our house, and we could hear it fall on other houses in the block. A small cluster of Japanese lived in this neighborhood, forming a close community. Father peered out the kitchen window and said there were about twenty men in a small mob. Two men pushed wheelbarrows full of stones, the rest hurled the projectiles at the houses of the other Japanese on the street.

The three of us moved to my parents' bedroom at the back of the house. Father put a blanket over my mother and me to keep us warm. We sat quietly while Father turned off lights

and made sure the curtains were closed. Silently, he erased any signs that we were home and returned to us. The three of us then sat together on the floor, huddled together for safety. Even amid the nervousness of my parents and the chaos outside, I managed to fall asleep.

I awoke sometime later to the sound of someone pounding on our front door. Mother's body shook with the sound of each fist hitting the door's surface. It was still dark as Father moved past us towards the living room. There was something large and solid in his hand, held behind him for protection.

A voice shouted through the door, "Mister Kubota Umezaki, open up. This is the police."

"Thank goodness" my mother said, and she stood up to join my father. I followed them both out to the living room, where my father opened the door.

Four men stood on the other side in the dark. Father flipped on lights, and my eyes stung for a moment as they adjusted. Two of the men were wearing police uniforms, the others were wearing dark suits and fedoras. All four were white.

"Mister Umezaki, we would like you to come with us," the tallest of the four men spoke. His fedora was charcoal grey, the slicked-back hair underneath looked black.

"Is this about the rocks?" my mother asked. There was panic in her voice.

"Shush, Sadako," my father waved an arm behind him. His back was to us. "What is this about, officers?" Whatever had been in my father's hand was gone now.

"We just want to ask you a few questions," the shorter man in the fedora was speaking now. His voice sounded kind as he opened the screen door. The two uniformed policemen never spoke.

My father's body tensed as the men neared him. He then looked back at my mother and I, and sighed. "Yes, alright. Allow me to get my coat and hat, please," Father's words were meticulous.

"Sir, please, there is no time," the short one spoke again. Both men in the fedoras reached forward and grabbed my father's arms. "We need to go right now." One of the policemen disappeared, and I could hear a car door opening outside. The other officer assisted the men in fedoras as they pulled my father through the front door of the house.

"Wait, what?" The confusion in father's voice was palpable, but he did not struggle. He looked back again at my mother and I, "Sadako, please, lock the door behind me. I'll be home soon. Johnny, take care of your mother."

"I will," I replied to him. I reached out my right hand, trying to touch him before they were gone, but it was too late.

The men pushed Father into the back of a black sedan, and it drove off quickly towards downtown Monterey. Mother and I were standing on the front step of the house as we watched the car drive off and then turn right at Camino El Estero, just before the cemetery. Tears rolled down mother's cheeks.

"Is he in trouble?" I asked my mother. I was confused. Father always told me that the police were there to help whenever someone was in trouble, but he had never done anything wrong. "Will he be back soon?"

Faint puffs of steam leapt from Mother's mouth as she spoke into the cold night air, "I do not know, Yasujiro. We must be patient. You must be brave, for the both of us." She put a hand on my shoulder and urged me back into the house. My mother locked the door as the screen door closed slammed shut.

From Sea to Shining Sea



Oni noh mask picture, 2006.
From Wikimedia Commons, credit to Esteban Cavrico.

The television had been on mute for almost an hour, the same images play over and over – a plane flies into a building, explodes in a fireball, then a quick edit, and a pair of identical towers crumble to the earth one after the other. Susan stood in her kitchen with a hand over her mouth, looking past the kitchen doorway to see the large screen in the living room. She needed the silence the mute button afforded. Each scene unfolding on the screen was almost too much to bear – firemen rushing into buildings; people covered in grey dust huddled against cars and walls, tears clearing tracks down their cheeks. So many people in those buildings.

Her son Brian had left for school hours ago, trumpet in hand for band practice before the first bell. Susan had been trying to get design drawings and business files organized for a room redecoration meeting, when she flipped on CNN for background noise. At first she was not paying attention to the screen, then she heard screams and panicked voices from the set and looked up. Smoke, flames, tears, and dust. Three buildings and a field. Thousands of lives. It was too much information all at once, so she turned off the sound and occasionally looked back at the screen.

Outside the kitchen window a small black bird chirped from the spindly branch of a cherry tree. The tree had been a seedling from one Obachan, her grandmother, had planted behind her parents' first home in San Jose. Susan watched the branches, bare in anticipation of the coming autumn, as they swayed with the rhythm of the bird's song.

When Susan was five years-old, Obachan sat her down and taught her how to pray for the dead. Her aunt had just died from cancer, and Susan was confused and scared by the loss. Obachan comforted her granddaughter by teaching her prayers to wish her aunt a happy afterlife. In her parents' back yard, she and Obachan knelt on the grass beneath the cherry tree with a lit candle stuck into the ground. Together they lit sticks of incense, bowed and prayed, then stuck

the smoldering sticks in the grass near the base of the tree. The old Shinto rituals held magic for her young mind.

The old altar Obchan had brought with her from Japan sat in the living room, a low rectangular table with ornately carved legs. Susan ran her fingers over its dark red wood, polished to an ethereal shine, and carefully lifted it off the display shelf. She then placed it on the carpet in front of the television set, and rested her palms flat against its smooth surface. With her eyes closed Susan could see Obachan's wizened old smile.

On the altar were several small copper bowls with dark rings inside that marked where they had once held water. With a bottle of water she filled the seven bowls, lining them across the altar's top. She knelt on the carpet behind the altar, eyes again fixed on the holes that billowed smoke on the screen. Flowers made of folded gold and red origami paper bloomed from a small black vase on the left side of the altar. On the right was a small white votive candle she lit with her father's old Zippo lighter from his days in the Army. Susan ran her index finger down the words etched into the smooth metal of the lighter: "442ND – GO FOR BROKE." She placed the lighter next to the candle.

A large bowl filled with sand and several dozen burnt stubs of incense sat in the center of the altar,. From a package on the lower tier of the shrine she pulled out five sticks of incense -- one each for the for the three smoking craters she had seen on the television, one for the safety of her family, and one for the safety of the planet. Susan made the same ritual gestures with each stick, just as her grandmother had shown her -- she lit the incense, held it between palms pressed flat against each other, and bowed toward the altar with her eyes closed.

She held her head low for a few moments each time, silently praying. After each bow she opened her eyes and watched as the smoke from the incense mixed with the smoke on the screen. With each completed prayer she placed the thin brown sticks in the bowl.

A reporter appeared on screen. Behind him was a hazy view of the Manhattan skyline, and to his right a giant plume of smoke where the World Trade Center had stood only hours earlier. Susan pushed the altar aside a bit, scented smoke danced up lazily. She moved closer to the television and used her hands to block out all of the screen except for the smoke. She made a box with her hands, palms flat on the screen and thumb tips together. She stared at the plume and tried to burn that image into her mind.

The scene changed to different plumes. The Pentagon, a field in Pennsylvania. Each time the smoke appeared in the frame created by her hands, but it always came back to New York. There was something about the smoke that she could not let go of.

The phone rang and dragged her out of the haze. Her eyes shot over to the clock on the wall, 10 minutes until 9. The ringing quickly filled her mind with panic, and she jumped up to her feet to answer it. A thousand nightmares ran through her head in the second before she clicked the TALK button on her cordless phone.

Any calm from prayers was lost the second she opened her mouth, “Yes, hello?” Susan’s heart was racing.

“Susie, it’s Mom,” the voice sounded shaky, almost alien.

“Mom, are you alright?” Susan felt her heart stop for the split second before her mother answered.

“Yes, I am okay. Just a bit... overwhelmed.” Through the phone Susan could hear the muffled voice of a newscaster she had been covering with her left palm.

“I know, it’s so unreal,” she was looking at the cherry tree again. “I’ve never seen anything like this.”

“I have,” her mother replied quickly. “This is what Pearl Harbor was like, what it felt like. It felt so far away.” Both were silent for a moment.

Her mother continued, “It’s going to happen again. Arrests, camps, destroyed lives.” Another pause in her mother’s voice. “People are going to want revenge, to punish whoever did this.” Her mother then cleared her throat, perhaps she had been crying before she called. “Do you remember what your father would say?”

“*Kurushimi*,” Susan whispered the word. A pain now that makes you stronger later. “Yes, I remember everything Papa told me. I could never forget.” There was silence again between mother and daughter for a few moments, while the news anchor droned on from her mother’s end. The voice sounded like announcements at a train station or airport, disembodied and indirect.

“We have to be strong after this,” her mother’s voice sounded stronger, more angry. “We can’t let fear to overrun the country like it did before.”

Susan glanced back at the smoke rising from the incense. “I remember Obachan too. I lit incense today, just like she taught me. I felt so powerless.”

The shift in subject calmed her mother’s voice, “Good, those prayers have always served our family well.” Another pause, “Are you going to work? Is Monterey even going to be open today? What about Brian?”

“Mom, they don’t close entire cities.” Susan tried to chuckle, but nothing happened. Nothing seemed funny today. “I’m going to call his school and find out what’s happening there. I’m supposed to meet a client in twenty minutes, but I can’t imagine that still happening.”

Her mother sighed on the other end. “Just be careful today, people are going to be angry. That’s what happened before.”

“I will, Mom. I need to get on the road though. I love you.”

“I love you too, Susan. Be careful. Bye.” A click, and the line went quiet.

Once again Susan’s kitchen was quiet. Outside, the bird had stopped singing and abandoned its cherry perch. She called Brian’s high school to find out what might be going on there. The students were going to be let out at noon. Parents had been trying to pick up students earlier, but it was causing too much chaos for the administration, so the decision was made to give the students a half-day instead. Susan asked that her son be told that she would pick him up, and then placed the phone back in its charger.

Susan needed to get away from the television set. She gave the columns of smoke one last look and switched the screen off. She then grabbed her keys, purse, and files, and walked out the door and into the world outside. It was a quiet and warm late-summer morning. Everything seemed too bright, like a photograph that had been underexposed.

The streets were still as Susan drove through downtown Monterey. Store and restaurant windows were all black, even the coffee shops were empty. After passing through the tunnel and into New Monterey, she passed armed soldiers standing outside the entrances to the Coast Guard station and the Presidio gates. Men and women with rifles watched the road, barricades had been hastily erected to keep the world out. Susan had lived in Monterey for twelve years, and this was the first time she had seen anything like this. Some of the soldiers watched the sky, others watched the road, hands twitchy when a car drove past too close.

A few blocks up Lighthouse Avenue Susan passed the familiar front window of her shop. The glass was nearly black with tinting, white letters proclaimed “omiya design.” Her storefront

was in the middle of a block of identical window and door combinations. She parked her car behind the building and walked around to unlock for the morning. It was almost 10:30 now. She was running late but the world did not seem to care today. Once the door was unlocked, she paused for a moment and listened to how quiet the street and city had become. A sound of mourning.

“Susan, how are you?” A husky voice came from a few feet to her left.

Breath caught in her throat, Susan turned toward the voice. Her fingers tensed around the keys in her right hand. A tall man with short black hair was standing in the doorway to the storefront next to hers. He was conservatively dressed, and wore a forced smile across an otherwise tense looking face. It was Khalil, who owned the restaurant next door to her shop, The Rose of Persia.

“Khalil, my goodness, you startled me,” she tried to forge a smile but was too shaken. The nervous look on her friend’s face rattled her even more. “Are you okay?”

The smile that had been betrayed by the tense lines around his eyes fell away. “I... I am worried. Those planes today, I am worried about who did this.” Khalil’s eyes moved from Susan to look up and down the quiet avenue, then back to her. In the three years they had known each other, she had never seen him acting so worried. Susan listened quietly as he continued, “Rumors have been flying fast, especially amongst other Muslims,” he held his hands out, palm up, and expressively moved them as he spoke. “In the last few hours I’ve received fifteen phone calls from friends. Everyone is worried. Were the people who did this Muslim? Why would they do it? What will happen to all of us here?” His voice raised a bit with each question.

Susan moved closer and put a hand on his shoulder. “Listen, Khalil. No one is sure what’s happened out there yet. We can’t jump to conclusions. I understand your concern.” His

tense eyes eased up a bit as she continued, "I've been thinking about this all morning." They both looked away for a few moments. She smiled and tried to take his mind off his worry, "Are you going to be open today? I sure could use some of that great dolmeh you make."

He smiled, "No, I am sorry. Asha wishes me to be home today." His voice seemed to calm with the mention of his wife's name. "The kids are scared, and she is being brave. Today we pray and comfort each other. I just came in to make sure nothing will spoil in the kitchen." The smile grew a bit more. "Thank you for listening to me, Susan. I am just nervous and a bit angry about what happened in New York today, but I need to head home. I will see you tomorrow?"

"Have a plate of dolmeh ready for me at lunch tomorrow, and we'll talk about it some more if you'd like," she patted her stomach with her hand and laughed a bit. "Say hello to your family for me."

"I will," he replied. "See you tomorrow," Khalil waved at her as he disappeared into the dark interior his restaurant, locking the glass door behind him. She waved back, opening the door to her shop and following suit.

The next couple of hours passed slowly for Susan. National Public Radio updated her with what little information was available, the calm and somber tones of the reporters doing their best to keep their listeners from panicking. Her appointment never showed up, so she waited impatiently until she could pick up Brian. At noon she joined a long parade of parents in cars doing the same thing, presenting identification to staff waiting with clipboards and small walkie-talkies. Brian came to the car with somber eyes, relieved to see his mother.

The afternoon and evening were spent talking and listening. Susan sat her son down and taught him the Shinto prayers of her Obachan. The pair sat under the cherry tree and took turns

lighting incense, bowing heads, and praying. Susan told the stories that her Obachan had told of Japan and coming to California. Brian became curious about the family's history in the internment camps, so they called Susan's mother. The three discussed the Omiya family history for several hours, the eldest doing most of the talking.

That night Susan dreamt of fury.

She floated in the sky, high above the surface of the Earth. She had no body, no voice.

Dark specks appeared on the western horizon, far off. Twenty objects in the sky. They came from a land labeled "the Far East," but she knew it was west. Twenty men in flying machines who thought they came from the center of the world. *It's dangerous when men think they come from the center of the world*, Susan thought. These men wore masks made of black lacquer, open mouths baring fangs like great dragons, and samurai armor. They flew old-style airplanes with propellers. Over the roar of the engines she could hear them shouting commands in the language of her grandparents. On each wing was a large red dot, the red so fierce that Susan thought they might erupt into flames. Their machines roared as they flew low over the vast ocean towards a small island.

The shape the island made Susan think of a sleeping baby, curled in a ball. The men flew low over its coast and soon flew over green mountains on the island towards a large harbor. Dozens of large grey ships were tied up in long rows, their hulls so close together they covered the water. The men aboard them were asleep as the sun began to climb over the eastern hills. A fleet of war at rest is a rare sight. Susan tried to scream, tried to warn the slumbering seamen, but was trapped by silence.

The planes appeared with the dawn and flew low over the unsuspecting ships. One by one they began to rain fire, dropping small bombs on the decks and smokestacks of the ships. Black smoke rose from the split hulls. Men on fire bobbed lifeless in waters covered with a iridescent coat of oil. The attack happened fast and with no warning. The great steel American fleet lay broken in the Hawaiian waters.

With the black smoke disappearing behind them, the planes flew east again. Over the coast of California. As they flew past, she saw her people being forced into buses and trains, white tags with painted numbers tied to their coats. White men in green uniforms pointed rifles at families and children as they gathered on street corners to be taken away.

The planes flew over the deserts of America, over more of her people huddled in shoddy wooden shacks trying to take shelter from the sting of another sandstorm. Barbed wire fences and guard towers surrounded the shacks, soldiers pointed rifles at the families as if to protect the vast expanses of desert from the threat inside the fences. As the planes flew on, their wings erupted with flame, each leaving a dark grey trail of smoke across the sky. Children on the ground pointed at the trails from the camps, only to be hushed by parents or grandparents.

Once past the deserts, their samurai armor fell off piece by piece. From under the armor appeared turbans and earth-colored robes, their dragon masks grew long black beards. Each plane was now just a ball of fire, roaring towards the Manhattan skyline. She watched helplessly as, one by one, they crashed into the flat sides of the World Trade Center towers. Fires roared out from the shattering glass walls of the buildings. Susan could hear the people inside, trapped and screaming for help. Black smoke raced towards the sky, forming evil shapes. Susan swore she could see the dragon mask of the pilots form in the smoke, laughing over the chaos the airplanes had caused. Then the buildings collapsed, falling together and shedding pieces of

shattered glass like razor-edged tears. The mass fell to the street, leaving two smoking holes in their wake.

The smoke cleared, and barbed wire fences appeared around the rubble. Inside were thousands of men who looked like Khalil. Outside the fence a crowd of faceless white people that stretched out as far as her eyes could see were shouting and cursing. Some fired guns over the heads of the men inside the fence, others threw stones, or bricks, or other pieces of rubble. The hate surrounding that fence was palpable. Susan wanted to throw herself over the fence, to try and protect the men inside. From the west, back towards home, she could hear Khalil's children crying.

History traveled east, a great dragon leaving blood and terror in its wake, and it began to repeat. The perils faced by her parents and grandparents rising anew. It is an ancient dragon, older than borders drawn by humanity. She wanted to fight it, but felt powerless. It was all so far away.

The next morning was quiet again, the sky's face free from the etchings left by jet trails. Nothing came to land in the city's small airport. The television stayed off, and Susan gathered herself together in solitude. Her son was still asleep in his room. After staying up so late making the family history his own, Susan felt he should have as much sleep as he needed. She needed to head back to her store though.

Stepping out the front door and heading to her car, Susan noticed something new had blossomed in her neighborhood. Up and down the block flags hung from nearly every home. Red, white, and blue fluttered in the morning breeze. Nylon flowers planted with pride and a sense of mourning on porches, trees, and even metal poles thrust into the Earth. The

neighborhood had suddenly erupted in patriotism. Even the Fourth of July failed to bring out such displays. She felt a bit unnerved by the displays as she drove down her street, as though her whole neighborhood had joined a club to which she had not gotten an invitation.

Today Susan drove to work just like she had the day before, and most every day before that for the last six years. The streets of Monterey had become busy again, or at least more noticeably so. Soldiers still held their posts outside their bases, but the rest of the city was feeling normal again.

As she neared the store, Susan noticed several cars and a van parked in front at odd angles, like they had been in a hurry. There were two black sedans and two police cars there, all flashing lights. She noticed the door to The Rose of Persia open and a pair of officers standing outside on either side. Susan parked behind the building as she always had, and walked quickly towards the door to her store. The officer standing between her door and the restaurant's door saw Susan approaching and quickly moved to intercept.

"Ma'am, may I ask your business here?" His brass name tag read "WILLIAMS" in black letters as serious as the look on his face. He held his left hand up, palm out, in an effort to deter her from looking. His right hand hovered near the pistol on his right hip.

"This is my shop here," Susan pointed at the front window. "I'm just trying to go to work." Her voice became a bit shaky when she saw where the officer's hand was. "What's going on? Is everything alright?"

"Government business ma'am," his left hand was waving back and forth a bit. "I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to step back." Inside the open door a cry erupted, and several male voices began shouting. Susan felt her breath catch in her throat, panic seizing her windpipe as the sounds erupted from inside the restaurant. Officer Williams' face did not move or change.

The receiver to his radio chirped and squawked something incoherent from the shoulder of his uniform.

Susan stood about ten feet from the door to her shop and four feet from the officer, unable to move. The other officer standing by the door, a blonde man wearing dark sunglasses, peeked back into the doorway, then looked at Williams and shouted, “Okay, here we go.”

“Ma’am, please stand back,” Williams said in a serious tone. He moved towards Susan and she instinctually stepped back a few paces. Behind him a couple of faceless men in dark suits walked quickly out of the restaurant doorway and towards the van. They quickly opened the door as another pair of men in suits came out with Khalil between them. Her friend’s hands were cuffed behind his back, his shoulders being pushed forward by the suited men flanking him.

Everything slowed down for a moment. Khalil was being pushed forward, he looked up and his eyes met with Susan’s. His face seemed etched with lines of pain, his eyes filled with resignation. Sweat from his forehead occasionally dripped down past his eyes, mixing with tears. Just before he was pushed into the van he nodded at her. Susan tried to smile or wave back at him, but was paralyzed by the scene unfolding in front of her.

The door slid shut behind them and the van started and moved into traffic. A few more men in suits emerged from the restaurant and got into the black cars. A pair of police officers exited the restaurant next and left in a patrol car. Williams and the blonde officer then did the same. Susan stood on the sidewalk outside of her store, alone.

A cry erupted from inside the restaurant, and Susan moved towards it. Inside the dining room was dim, and her eyes took a second to adjust. Dark shapes took form, and Susan found Asha kneeling on the floor between a pair of tables, crying. Several chairs lay on their sides next to her.

Susan walked slowly towards her, and spoke in a hushed voice to avoid startling her, “Asha, I...” There were suddenly no words in her throat. Asha looked up at Susan, eyes red like fire, damp streaks on her cheeks. Stray strands of black hair fell forward from under the black and crimson scarf that covered her head. Susan knelt down and put her arms around her.

Asha leaned her head into Susan’s shoulder and began to speak between sobs. “They... They took him. Men from the government.” The accent in her speech made her words sound sharp and exact. “They say he is a threat here,” her body shook with sobs. “That is all they said, that he is a threat.”

A flood of memories raced through Susan’s head. Every family story she had ever heard. Coming to America from Japan, Pearl Harbor, the arrest of her grandfather in the middle of the night, the camps, the struggle... The pain had been suffered by the Issei, Nisei, and Sansei. Everything suddenly made sense to her. The dragon her family had been fighting for generations had returned. Just as her father told her, *kurushimi*.

“Asha, this is not over.” Susan felt her spine stiffen with the words, felt the power running through her as she said them.

“What do you mean?” Asha was a bit confused as she looked up at Susan. “What can I do?” Her eyes were drying now, her face still tight with worry. “What happens now?”

Susan stood up and looked out the front window towards the street. Her arms hung at her sides, hands clenched into tight fists. “We fight.”

Personal Narrative Essay

This project was not easy. I will cast no illusions that the ideas and stories came together in a single moment of inspiration. Things worth doing are rarely easy, as the saying goes, and neither are things that you *must* do. This Capstone was definitely something that I had to write. Going into the project, I had no idea how much of an emotional investment writing these three stories was going to be. Through research and writing, the history of Japanese immigrants to America and the generations that followed them became more than just a topic I liked to study. I became passionate about the Japanese American history, and having written the stories now, I feel a strong connection with the topic.

I first became interested in the Japanese American experience when I was in eighth grade. While studying World War II in a U.S. history class, my father decided to tell me a little story. A girl he dated in high school had been raised in a place called Manzanar, where her parents taught at the orphanage. He then stopped and asked if I knew where Manzanar was, and what its significance was. When I shook my fourteen year-old head and said I'd never heard of it, my education began.

He spent the next hour telling me about camps in the desert where Japanese Americans were sent during the war, forced to leave their homes because of sabotage fears in the wake of the Pearl Harbor attack. The next day he came home with books from the library, full of black and white pictures showing shacks made of rough wood and tar paper. Those thin materials were all the internees had to hold back the sand storms, oppressively hot summers, and cold winters. A few weeks later we traveled as a family to the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles. There I heard stories directly from the mouths of internees about the conditions of life in the camps. I also read detailed accounts of over a hundred years of the struggles faced by the Japanese American community. Stories my young mind could not really comprehend, yet

made a lasting impression. My eyes had been opened to a story I was not being taught in my history class.

Through the years, details of the stories I heard at the museum faded away, but the experience never did. When I began to study the Japanese American experience more in-depth in college, I felt like the personal voices of those stories were not very loud. So much of what was written was approached from a dry academic standpoint. No matter how many times I read about the number of people sent to camps by the American government, or about laws enacted in the early twentieth century to keep Japanese from owning land, I never got a real personal feel for what that experience was like or how it felt.

During the time I was deciding on what I would work on for my Capstone topic, I was taking a class titled “The Japanese American Experience.” The class was the third of three Japanese culture courses I took to fulfill my language and culture requirement here at CSUMB. The first book read for the class was Jeanne Watasuki Houston’s memoir Farewell to Manzanar. For the first time, I felt a personal connection to the trials and stresses that Japanese Americans dealt with during their time in the internment camps. I also came to realize that “internment” was just a cleaned-up title the government had put on the camps – they were really concentration camps. It amazed me that I had never read the book before, especially since it is sometimes taught in high schools. While reading it, ideas began to come together in my head. Houston’s book merged with the stories my father had told me and the things I had learned over many years of casual study on the Japanese American struggle – this is what I was going to write about.

I also realized that Asian American voices were not heard as loudly at CSUMB as the voices of other cultures. The university prides itself on making diverse voices heard, but I have rarely heard the Asian American viewpoint. Given the scope of struggles that have been faced

by Japanese immigrants to this country and their descendants, I decided to try to lend voice to those struggles. Once I had decided on the larger topic, I had to figure out specifics like where to set the stories and what sorts of issues I would tackle.

The textbooks for the “Japanese American Experience” class proved a valuable resource for this project. After finishing Houston’s book, we began reading The Japanese in the Monterey Bay Region by local historian Sandy Lydon. Here was a history of Japanese Americans living in the same area that I do, so I could see the locations in my head easily. The history between 1890 and about 1920 alone was ripe with territory that needed to be explored. Early Japanese being forced to live in the Chinatown on the south side of the Pajaro river in Watsonville and in Salinas, land ownership laws changed in California to keep Japanese from owning their property or homes, and restrictions placed on abalone harvests simply because the Japanese were starting to make money fishing for a sea creature that had been largely ignored by the local fishing industry. There were personal stories behind all these events that I felt the need to write about, and so the seeds were planted for the first story of this project, “A Letter Home From The Gold Mountain.” Lydon’s book helped me decide to focus on the Monterey region for my own stories. Plus writing about local characters helps me put the CSUMB Vision Statement to work by focusing on the diverse people of tri-county area. Local resources also would put me more in touch with the stories than if I had decided to write about a place I do not know very well.

Around that same time, I met with Dr. Chris Hasegawa, the dean of Extended Education here at CSUMB, and himself a third generation (Sansei) Japanese American. After discussing with him the broad topic I wanted to research, I asked if he thought there was anything specific that would make for a good story or raise a voice that needed to be heard. He told me of something interesting he had heard about happening in the days following the September 11th

terrorist attacks. The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) lobbied Congress to make sure that innocent Arab and Muslim Americans would not be rounded up and sent to camps or punished in similarly unjust fashions. The group worked to make sure that the mistakes that happened in the wake of Pearl Harbor nearly sixty years before would not happen again.

That moment felt like a lightning bolt had struck my brain. As I was making notes of what Dr. Hasegawa was telling me, bits of story began to develop in my brain. The Japanese American reaction to the 9/11 attacks had never occurred to me. Here was a cultural group that had been persecuted because of a sneak attack on American soil. Six decades later comes a similar situation, but this time Arab and Muslim Americans became the suspected perpetrators. Beyond the appeals of the JACL, how might an individual Japanese American react? An idea occurred to me: a story of a Japanese American witnessing the arrest of a Muslim American on baseless charges, and then explore what mental and psychological reactions they might have had. It would be a way to draw parallels to the concentration camp experience and present day events. Plus I could try and humanize the ill effects of the federal government's "War on Terror." The idea then evolved into my third story, "From Sea to Shining Sea."

Dr. Hasegawa also introduced me to Larry Oda of the Monterey Peninsula chapter of the JACL. During a long phone conversation I ran the ideas I had developed past him. Not only did he think that the early 20th century and 9/11 story ideas I had were good ones, but he also pointed me towards some literature and scholarly books that would help me research them both. Lydon and Houston were the two authors he recommended most, but also suggested I look up Julie Otsuka's novel When The Emperor Was Divine, and David Yoo's collection of essays called Growing Up Nisei. I was also gifted a copy of a book that the MP-JACL published about five years ago titled The Japanese of the Monterey Peninsula. This beautiful book is more in depth to

the local Japanese American experience than Lydon's book, and even has street maps of neighborhoods in Monterey and Pacific Grove that had a large concentration of Japanese. This book has become an invaluable source for my first and second stories.

I also consulted with HCOM faculty member Qun Wang about Japanese American authors, and came away with more names to look up. Chief among his recommendations were the authors Toshio Mori, Holly Uyemoto, Hisaye Yamamoto, and David Mura. With this mountain of literature and academic sources in my possession, I began to read voraciously. I am not normally a fast reader, but my brain could not get enough of these authors and the aesthetic gaps they filled in my research.

Reading the literature proved to be the most valuable part of doing my research. One of my chief concerns was using an accurate voice when writing my three short stories. By reading a wide variety of novels and short stories, and also reading authors were Issei, Nisei, and Sansei, I was able to see just how diverse their voices were. There was no one distinct voice to capture, instead I had to worry about developing the characters for my stories and allowing them to have their own voices. It may seem like common sense to let this occur, but I was very concerned that what I wrote might come off as sounding either trite or like I had completely misunderstood what I thought the culture sounded like.

After gathering many books and looking through them, I noticed a pair of common themes: the experience of the internment camps, and the trials of assimilation into American culture. Both of these subjects have been looked at through the lenses of the first three generations of Japanese Americans in literature. Will the fourth and fifth generations of Japanese Americans write of the same things as they come into their own? It will be interesting to see.

The most common subject, and perhaps the most obvious, is that of the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. The movement of a cultural population into concentration camps is obviously a defining moment, but what amazed me in the writings is how the subject was dealt with. Writers of the Issei (first) or Nisei (second) generation tended to reflect on the internment experience as something that they had to do, with little that could be done to stop it. There is regret in their writings as well, and a sadness at the lives they had to leave behind as the government stole their liberty. Writers of the Sansei (third) generation tend to look at it with far more anger and bitterness. Many Sansei were either children in the camps, or were born after the experience and only knew it through the stories of their parents and grandparents. Jeanne Watasuki Houston, a Sansei herself, is a great example of this angry type of writing. Her memoir is full of venom towards the experience. She published the book in 1973, when the camp experience was being written about for the first time as more than a historical footnote, and young Japanese Americans began to demand compensation from the government for what had been done to their culture. Houston's second book, written 30 years later, deals with the camps in a more wistful way, attempting to look at the experience through Issei and Nisei eyes, not just her own childhood memories. Getting a multi-generational view of the camps has been vital in doing my research, because it allowed me to hear each generation's voice. Hearing them helped me portray my characters in an honest and genuine way. When writing the stories for this project, I wanted to accurately portray those voices.

The second theme is that of assimilation. Generation by generation, Japanese Americans have become more incorporated into dominant American society. The Issei had the biggest connection to their Japanese homeland. The Nisei were raised with a deep sense of stoicism that is very Japanese. The Sansei (and the Yonesei, or fourth generation) have been the most affected

by American culture, since they have been raised completely immersed in it. Still, they are sometimes seen as outsiders because they do not fit into the white model of being an American. Issei writers like Henry Kiyama or Toshio Mori write stories about the difficulties of assimilation because they did not know the language well when they arrived in America, and because of the many laws and rules set against them. So the first wave of Japanese immigrants lived in tight-knit communities where they helped each other succeed here in America. Such communities were often the focus of hate, much like Chinatowns or any other ethnic neighborhoods. Nisei writers such as Hisaye Yamamoto discuss how hard it is to fit into American culture when one has an education from public schools and has been raised with cultural sensibilities of Japanese parents. They were encouraged to fit in, but not to forget their Japanese heritage. In works by Sansei like David Mura or Houston, the focus is more about being assimilated into culture, but feeling a bit outcast because of their Japanese faces and what their cultural heritage represents historically represents to many. Not accepted wholly by American culture, and feeling outcast by their own Japanese heritage. Many Sansei write about getting in touch with their heritage as a way to empower themselves, and make the Japanese American culture stronger. This has encouraged a resurgence of Japanese art forms such as taiko drumming within the community, and the resurgence of Japantowns in urban areas. In a way, the Sansei are the generation that has really started to come to peace with being both Japanese and Americans.

A very important thing that talking with both Dr. Hasegawa and Mr. Oda did for me was to keep me from getting discouraged about writing these stories. When I first started to approach this topic, I wondered if I had any right to write about it. Can a white male authentically write about a culture that he has no ties to and little direct experience with? I was even hesitant to talk to either Dr. Hasegawa or Mr. Oda about writing these stories at first. Was I just co-opting

someone else's oppression? As I began researching and writing the stories, this thought made me nervous.

While I could not write the three stories from my own personal experience, I did enough research that I felt like I really had a handle on what the experience was like. That does not mean that I understand it completely, nor can I claim it as my own. Much like how I can only understand history by reading and learning as much as I can about it, the research was the best way that I could touch and live the history of the Japanese American community. Once I started writing the stories, I tried to make the events my own by putting myself into each story. The way that Kazuo, Johnny, and Susan react to events in the stories is based on how I would react and what I would do in those situations. I do not think that cheapens the characters at all, in fact I think it enriches them. By putting myself in the metaphorical shoes of my characters, I have broadened my own understanding of not only the events themselves, but how it felt to be affected by them.

Since the stories in my project deal with racism, sometimes they were difficult to write. For a white male like myself, whose last name is even White, is this an okay thing to do? The racist sentiments and uses of words like "Jap" certainly are not ones that I share, but I understand that they are an important part of the cultural narrative. When writing the sections dealing with racism though, I found them to be incredibly draining and mentally taxing. Maybe it was my psyche reacting to feelings of being persecuted and the focus of hate. I have never knowingly been on the receiving end of that kind of hatred, so I wonder if this has been a normal reaction to it. It was equal parts anger and fear, with a touch of guilt mixed in. I am unsure where the guilt came from in that mix.

As I began writing the stories, I had very simple goals. I wanted to create personal stories that centered around singular events, such as bombings and terrorist attacks. In each case the ideas grew and expanded, and soon I had tales that were all over ten pages in length. That worried me at first, and caused me think that I had perhaps done a little overkill in writing. Peer reviews and other readers assured me though that the lengths were not bothersome, and that what I had written flowed very well. When writing long works like that, it's very reassuring to hear that kind of praise. I worried about my words becoming too dry and hard to read.

The most difficult part of writing the stories was deciding how to end them. There was originally so much that I wanted to cover in each tale, that they easily could have gotten away from me. "From Sea to Shining Sea" was an example of that when I first wrote it, since it doubled in size every time I sat down to work on it. That sort of exponential growth could have continued, and I would have had a novel on my hands. I had to make decisions where to stop each story. Would Kazuo finally find his success? What happened to Johnny and his mother after his father's arrest? What did Susan mean when she said it was time to fight? I wanted to answer each question, but felt that everything was already too long. Instead, I purposely left the stories open ended to let the reader answer the questions themselves. Perhaps they will go and do further research on their own, and learn about the curfews and seized bank assets Japanese Americans faced in the opening months of 1942. Maybe they will see the success that early Japanese settlers in Monterey found fishing and opening up services like shoe repair stores and groceries. It is my hope that the reader becomes so interested in the characters, and even attached to them, that they would then be encouraged to research what happens next. Encouraging people to seek knowledge is the best way I know to break silences.

I am unsure how to end this essay. Writing these stories has been one of the most difficult things I have ever attempted, and also the most rewarding. Aside from the general sense of well-being that doing social action writing can bring about, this project has also given me a lot of confidence in my own writing. The words that I place on a page and the stories that I create have meaning. They are more than simple exercises done to try and express my own thoughts on a concept or a social issue. This is work that comes straight from my heart, and I've invested a lot of emotion into these stories. I hope that comes across easily to anyone who reads them. Maybe I will do something bigger with these stories one day, perhaps take one of the stories and turn it into a novel. My options are limitless.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary & Craft Sources:

9066 to 9/11. Dir./Ed. Robert A. Nakamura. Pro./Wri. Karen L. Ishizuka. DVD. Frank H. Watase Media Arts Center, Japanese American National Museum, 2004.

An incredible video put together by the Japanese American National Museum, this piece connects oral history accounts of incarceration of Japanese Americans after the bombing of Pearl Harbor to violations of civil liberties and rights of Arab and Muslim Americans after the World Trade Center attacks of September 11th, 2001. There are first hand accounts of civil rights violations from both time periods, as well as historians and civil rights lawyers explaining how the United States government had no right to follow either course of action.

Executive Order 9066. 19 Feb. 1942

<<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=74&page=transcript>>.

This is the full text of the Executive Order signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In order to tell a story about government acts that led to the incarceration of Japanese Americans, it is vitally important to know the exact words that led to internment. Roosevelt's words are the official government position on Japanese Americans at the start of World War II. It dehumanized them, and gave permission for the government to treat this group of people any way it chose.

Houston, Jeanne Wakatsuki & James D. Houston. Farewell to Manzanar. New York, NY: Dell Laurel Leaf. 1973.

This is considered to be the definitive account of the Japanese American experience in the

internment camps. It's an account of Houston's family experience in the camps, through her teenaged eyes. It's the seminal work on the subject, and no study of Japanese American literature could be done without coming across this book. This entire book is engaging. I'm not sure it's easy to just pick one thing about it that catches my attention the most.

Houston, Jeanne Watasuki. The Legend of Fire Horse Woman. New York, NY: Kensington Books. 2003.

Written thirty years after Farewell to Manzanar, this is Houston's debut novel. Again she tackles the subject of internment camps, this time telling a multigenerational tale of three women in one family, daughter, mother, and grandmother. Along with the more typical themes within a novel of the Japanese American experience, this novel also weaves in elements of mysticism and spirituality. This novel is quite valuable as a fictional work written by someone who lived the internment experience, and is told not only from the perspectives of the women, but it is also told in two different time periods. The story of the mother and the daughter takes place in the Manzanar concentration camp, while the tale of the grandmother takes place both in the camp and flashes back to her arrival and adventures in America around the turn of the 20th century. It is a very interesting style.

Kiyama, Henry (Yoshitaka); translated by Frederik L. Schodt. The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco, 1904 – 1924. Berkeley, CA: Stonebridge Press. 1999.

This book collects a series of comics strips drawn between 1904 and 1924 by Japanese

immigrant Henry Kiyama. The comics were drawn to document his experiences in San Francisco. Though there is humor to the comics, they also give a good first-hand example of what Japanese immigrants had to go through once they arrived in California early in the 20th century. This collection is almost a memoir in drawings, and it's quite fascinating to read. Not just for the situations, but also in how this Issei immigrant portrays his interaction with a world that doesn't speak his native language, and how he is trying to learn it. The collection documents from a first-hand perspective how the Issei tried their hardest to assimilate into American culture, but were stopped at every attempt by how they looked and the fact that they had to learn the language as they went along.

Lydon, Sandy. The Japanese in the Monterey Bay Region: A Brief History. Capitola, CA: Capitola Book Company. 1997.

This book gives an encapsulated history of Japanese Americans in the Monterey region (including Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito counties). It marks their triumphs, trials, and tribulations from the first arrivals in 1887, through the internment camps of World War II, and up to the present day. It's an invaluable resource. As I began to read it, various bits of the history taking place all around me began to excite my mind. This is where I first became aware that the Japanese were forced to live with or around Chinese villages and Chinatowns in the region. They tried to move out and assimilate as best they could into the surrounding communities, but instead were pushed back in.

Mori, Toshio. Yokohama, California. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press. 1949.

This collection of short stories about Japanese American life in the city of Oakland in the years

leading up to the second world war is a pioneering work by a Japanese American author. Through these twenty-two stories, Mori paints a very personable picture of what life was like for the Japanese American community in the 1930's and 40's. It tells not only about day-to-day life, but also shows some of the humor and more legendary tales that come from the community. Because he was untrained as a writer, there is a very distinct voice to his writings that is important to read. It's very honest and very raw.

Mura, David. Turning Japanese: Memoirs of a Sansei. New York, NY: Anchor/Random House. 1992.

A third-generation Japanese American (Sansei) spends a year living in Japan, and explores how different he is, both there and in America. My third story will be a Sansei tale, so it was important to hear a Sansei voice. I'd heard many good things about Mura from instructors, so I came across this book. Mura spends a lot of time talking about feeling different, because of how he looks and because of his family history. The Sansei generation is supposed to be almost wholly assimilated into American culture, so why do they still feel different? It's an interesting first-hand experience account.

Otsuka, Julie. When the Emperor Was Divine. New York, NY: Anchor Books/Random House. 2002.

An amazing account of a Japanese American family in Berkeley who spend time in Topaz Lake during World War II, and then return to their old home after the war to find it changed. What makes this book stunning is how Otsuka writes the story from five different points of view. Each section is written from a different perspective: the mother, the sister, the

brother, a non-gender specific chapter from both the children's point of view, and finally that of the father. Given how short the novel is, the way it is cut up makes it seem like five short stories on the same subject. This approach is very dear to my writing heart, and I'm glad to have seen it done.

Tateishi, John. Action Memorandum: re: Outreach to Arab and Muslim Communities. To Chapter Presidents of the Japanese American Citizens League. 21 Sept. 2001
< http://www.jacl.org/current_prs/am010921.htm>.

This is a memorandum written by the national president of the JACL, alerting all branches to the growing hostility towards Arab Americans after the 9/11 attacks. The group felt the echoes of the Japanese American internment during World War II brewing and felt it was time to stand up as a group and oppose it.

Uyemoto, Holly. Go. New York, NY: Plume, a division of the Penguin Group. 1996.

Uyemoto is another Sansei writer, who uses her second novel as a platform to explore the generational divide within the Japanese American community. One theme is that the Nisei generation were taught a stoic resolve by their Issei parents, but the Sansei generation were raised more assimilated into the American culture. This difference in upbringing lacked the stoicism their parents' knew, and so Sansei had a more confused emotional reaction to how Japanese Americans are seen by America at large. This idea of an emotional difference between the different generations of Japanese Americans is something I wish to touch upon in my third story. A Sansei reacts

differently than her Nisei mother to the events of September 11th, 2001. She reacts in a more visceral way.

Yamamoto, Hisaye. Seventeen Syllables and other stories. Latham, NY: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. 1988.

A collection of fifteen short stories written over a span of 40 years by a second generation (Nisei) Japanese American author. This collection tells tales from a wide time span through a unique lens. The collection was suggested to me when I asked Qun Wang for help finding literary sources. Some of the stories are from the perspective of a child listening to elders. Others were of elders telling stories to the next generation. Both were very moving storytelling techniques. As an example of Nisei writing, I think it shows me what a voice from that generation sounds like, and what sorts of topics are on their minds. Yamamoto is just one author, but she is considered to be a prime example of a Nisei writer.

Yamada, David T. and Oral History Committee, MP/JACL. The Japanese of the Monterey Peninsula: Their Legacy & History 1895-1995. Monterey, CA: Monterey Peninsula Japanese American Citizens League. 1995.

This book was put together by the local chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League, and is a direct history of the Japanese on the Monterey Peninsula. It's pulled together from oral histories and other historical accounts to build an accurate picture of the Japanese American experience on the peninsula. The book was mentioned to me by Larry Oda, a member of a local JACL chapter when I asked him for good sources on the

subject. On his recommendation I tracked it down in the CSUMB library, which had been gifted several copies. This is a collection of first-hand accounts, which are immensely inspiring. Reading the histories presented here gets my mind going in all sorts of ways.

Yamauchi, Wakako. Songs My Mother Taught Me: Stories, Plays, and Memoirs. New York, NY: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York. 1994.

This collection gives a wide cross section of Yamauchi's work, and tells tales of both the Issei (her mother's generation) and the Nisei (her generation). Yamauchi gives a mixed perspective through these tales, though generally with a Nisei lens. The variety of writing styles in the collection, as well as Yamauchi's voice, are what drew me to this collection. In her introduction, Yamauchi writes "My stories are about immigrants. There have always been immigrants. We were there in prehistory, travelers from another place, another continent, or just stragglers from a larger society. We are a tribe of wanderers remembering a garden we'd left or looking for an Eden that waits." The relationship between Issei and Nisei generations is an important one, and it's something I might like to deal with in my second story.

Secondary Sources:

Cole, David. Enemy Aliens: Double Standards and Constitutional Freedoms in the War on Terrorism. New York, NY: The New Press. 2003, revised 2005.

While mainly dealing with the current Bush administration's dismissal of the civil liberties of American citizens and immigrants in trying to prevent another terrorist attack, this book also gives a history of other such actions here in the United States and what laws and loopholes allow them to happen. Immigrant exclusion acts since the late 18th century and a long section about the Japanese relocation effort are discussed along with accounts of Arab and Muslim Americans who have had their rights taken away by the government because they were suspect. Suspect because of their religion or the nation of their birth or parents' birth. An estimated 5000 "suspected terrorists" have been arrested and held since the September 11th terrorist attacks. Only one has been charged with a crime. Most were detained for questioning with no legal representation. This book tells many of these tales. It's a dense read, but incredibly interesting.

Daniels, Roger. "Incarceration of the Japanese Americans: A Sixty-Year Perspective." The History Teacher 35.3 (2002): 297-310.

A historical review of the events that lead to the incarceration of Japanese Americans during the second world war. Also includes reflections of the author in making comparisons to the treatment of Arab and Muslim Americans after the September 11th attacks. An important piece for my bibliography because it gives a historical analysis of both internment and the later violation of American civil rights 60 years later.

Dragon, 11th century drawing by Muh-ki. New York Public Library Digital Gallery,
<<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/>>. Retrieved April 10, 2006.

This is the image used on the cover of this project.

Kurashige, Lon. Japanese American: Celebration and Conflict – A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival in Los Angeles, 1934-1990. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 2002.

The title gives the briefest summary there can be of this book. More importantly,

Kurashige looks at attempts by the Japanese American community to both assimilate into American society, and retain ties to the ethnicity and culture at their roots. It looks more specifically to the historically large Japanese American community in the Los Angeles area.

Lydon, Sandy. Chinese Gold: The Chinese in the Monterey Bay Region. Capitola, CA: Capitola Book Company. 1985.

A comprehensive study of the history of the Chinese in the Monterey Bay area, from the pioneering immigrants that came in the 1850's all the way to the present day. I'm primarily interested in the information about Chinese villages and Chinatowns in the region between 1860 and 1900. When the Japanese first arrived in the area, they were made to live with the Chinese based on how they looked. Learning about the villages and Chinatowns will give me a good sense of background for the first story in my Capstone. I have a fair idea of where I want this story to go. In depth reading will help develop that story further and perhaps allow me to go in directions I was not previously aware of.

Okada, John. No-No Boy. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press. 1957.

This is the only novel Okada published, and it nearly faded into complete obscurity. It's an account of a man in the camps who refused to sign the Loyalty Oath the government sent through, and spent the second half of World War II in prison. Okada had a story to tell, but the Japanese American community was not ready to hear it, and neither was the U.S. at large. It was not until later that his community rediscovered the book, and brought it into the spotlight.

Oni noh mask picture. From Wikimedia Commons, credit to Esteban Cavrico, <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page>. Retrieved April 13, 2006.

This is the image used on the title page of my third story, "From Sea to Shining Sea."

Sakura blossoms picture. From the website "ogawanaoki takes," <<http://www.goopunch.net/freephoto/>>. Retrieved April 13, 2006.

This is the image used on the title page of my second story, "Sakura."

Two slim Japanese gentlemen, by William T. Smedley, 1894. New York Public Library Digital Gallery, <<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/>>. Retrieved April 10, 2006.

This is the image used on the title page of my first story, "A Letter Home From The Gold Mountain."

Yoo, David K. Growing Up Nisei: Race, Generation, and Culture among Japanese Americans of California, 1924-49. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press. 2000.

The focus of this book is about the Nisei, or second generation of Japanese Americans. They are the first generation born on American soil and became an important group during the forced internment of all Japanese Americans. This book covers their experience in California from the start of the Nisei generation until a few years after internment. The book gives a wider focus of the Nisei experience past just the internment camps. Since the second story I want to write would deal with the Nisei in the days and weeks just after the Pearl Harbor attack, this book gives a good peak at life for them in California at the time. The book also talks a lot about how assimilated they were, even down to the religions the Nisei practiced. The depth of personal topics covered seemed larger than is typically covered in a scholarly book, but I think the author was personally invested in writing the book.

Appendices

Appendix A: Interdisciplinary Reflection Essay

When I began writing the three short stories that would make up the creative portfolio for my Capstone, I put no conscious thought into what Major Learning Outcomes might be incorporated into their creation. I just wanted to write the stories that had formed in my brain after months of research and thought. After a little time thinking about the process, I took a look at the names and classes for each MLO in the Humanities and Communication major. It amazes me how many of them had eased in to my process. The skills I learned in five courses especially prepared me to write this Capstone.

This makes perfect sense to me though. As students, we are presented the different learning outcomes as pieces of a larger puzzle. Once we have them gathered together, we begin to see the image on top better. What the puzzle looks like changes though, depending on what we hold it up to. If we're examining race relations in America, the outcome pieces will help up put together an accurate and informative portrait of that. In my case, I used the outcomes to help me portray both the emotions of the Japanese American characters I had created, but to also give an accurate sketch of the subculture they live in and how it relates to the larger American culture. Without the skills learned from the Major Learning Outcomes I am sure that I would not have been able to do this very well. Instead I might have been left with generalizations and story ideas that had not been researched or developed in any sort of effective way.

The Outcome that has had the biggest impact on both my Capstone and my learning experience at CSUMB has been MLO 8, Creative Writing & Social Action. This outcome embodies what my chosen concentration has been about for me. Not only do the courses help to ensure that my creative writing skills have greatly improved, but that I am also far more comfortable presenting my works to the world at large. I am no longer afraid of doing public readings of what I've written, even though it's not my favorite thing to do. I have also learned to

share my work with my colleagues with the idea that they won't be judgmental about what I've written, but will instead help me hone my words to make them even more powerful. More important than that though is that I am really beginning to realize the impact of what I write on the world around me. Part of why I'm choosing to write about Japanese Americans and racism is because I found a lack of that voice both on campus and in the larger literary world. Plenty has been written about Japanese American life, but I found little about personal reactions to racism and the loss of civil liberties. So I did a lot of research into three specific events and what happened to Japanese Americans, and then crafted three stories to help reflect not only what I learned but also what emotions these events evoked in myself. I wanted to capture moments that I had never directly read about, in order to help myself and the world outside to try and get a better understand what happened. To make the Japanese American experience something more than a couple paragraphs in a history textbook about internment camps.

The Historical Analysis outcome did a lot to help my entire Capstone process as well. It takes more than a stack of books and a few juicy quotes to really *know* a subject. You need to know how to read those books with a critical eye, and you need to know how to look for the story that's beyond what's written on the pages. I took Cecilia O'Leary's class "History According to the Movies" for this MLO, and one of the chief things I took away from her course was to not take any historical presentation at face value. That lesson was applied directly to the films that Professor O'Leary showed us in class, but the lesson worked deeper for me than that. For the complete picture, one needs multiple sources. Those sources may not cover the same exact territory, but you can get a better idea of that territory by putting all the information together. This is exactly what I did with my Capstone too. In gathering my primary and secondary sources, I wanted to make sure that I had materials that presented multiple points of

view from within the Japanese American community. I wanted to read material from the female point of view as well as the male. I wanted to hear what people from the Issei, Nisei, and Sansei generations had to say about civil rights or the internment camps. I wanted to read novels, short stories, and poems as examples of craft, to see differing styles of writing and content. I am very satisfied with the selection of source that I collected, and I definitely owe that what I learned within this outcome.

Once I had my sources gathered and knew what I was looking for in terms of historical information, it was time to start reading them for voice. MLO 6 was a vital aid in this aspect, especially what I learned about cultural voice in both the “Asian American Literature” class I took while participating in the Study @ Sea program, and from Professor Qun Wang’s class “Race, Colonialism, and Film.” From both classes I learned to pick up on the nuances of ethnic communities and cultures through both literature and films. This outcome works very well when combined with MLO 7. I really combined what I learned in both to help develop my understanding of how the Japanese American community functions both externally and internally. Finding a voice for my characters that really reflected the culture they came from, or were descended from, was really important to me during the writing process. With the use of tools learned in these classes, that was much easier for me than I expected.

The use of skills I learned in the MLO 5 melded well with those learned in 6 and 7 as well. This is where I start to really see how well the different disciplines we learn in HCOM all work well together. I took Professor Diana Garcia’s class “20th Century Immigrant Narratives” to fulfill this outcome. Through the use of literature written by immigrants to America, we learned about how different generations of immigrants assimilate differently to American culture. The daughter of an immigrant will tend to assimilate better because she was born here,

but will not quite be accepted as completely as the American ideal would suggest. This is a very common theme in Japanese American culture, and part of the generational struggle between the Issei, Nisei, and Sansei. The Issei try to hold onto their traditional Japanese beliefs and ideals, while chasing the American dream. The Nisei were raised with the strict ideals of their parents, but are far more Americanized because they were born and educated here in America. Even more assimilated are the Sansei, who were often raised with little to no Japanese culture in their daily lives, since their Nisei parents resented it so much in the way they were raised.

Generational strife and structure was something I learned quite well to recognize, thanks to this learning outcome. Given that the roots of my family here in America go back about three-hundred years, it was not something I quite understood before.

A core Learning Outcome is MLO1, something that students across the board here are told to learn. I learned critical communication skills in “Cooperative Argumentation,” as so many others did. On the surface it may not seem like this outcome directly relates to the topic of my Capstone, but it actually merges in with all the other MLO’s quite seamlessly. The class was concerned with learning how to convey information and opinion on sensitive topics, such as racism and civil rights, in a way that is neither inflammatory nor combative. Basically, we learned how not to beat someone over the head with our opinions, but instead to learn how to discuss them in a rational way so that both sides get their point of view across. Given that my Capstone deals with issues of racism, I think that the skills I acquired in this class helped me portray hatred in a way that is fair. To show it in a way that doesn’t point out “this is the bad guy” in neon red letters, since I prefer subtlety.

Appendix B: Electronic Poster

HCOM Senior Capstone

Digital Poster

Spring 2006

Name:

Thomas White

Project Title:

Defying the Dragon: Stories of Three Generations of Japanese American Struggle Against Racism on the Monterey Peninsula

Concentration:

Creative Writing & Social Action

Project Abstract

Three short stories explore the lives of three generations of Japanese Americans during difficult times. The first story takes place at the turn of the 20th century, the second on December 7th, 1941, and the third on September 11th, 2001.

Project Context & Contributions

Through the stories in this project, I explore the Japanese American experience during trying times on a personal and emotional level. In writing these stories, I hope to raise awareness to a story that is largely unheard, and sometimes unfamiliar.

Relevant Links

Executive Order 9066:
Resulting in the Relocation
of Japanese Americans:
<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=74#>

September 11th Action
Memo to JAACL Chapters:
http://www.jaACL.org/current_prs/am010921.htm



Dragon, 11th century. New York Public Library On-line Picture Collection

Project Format

The Capstone has been written as a collection of three short stories.

Selected Bibliography

Mori, Toshio. *Yokohama, California*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press. 1949.

Otsuka, Julie. *When the Emperor Was Divine*. New York, NY: Anchor Books/Random House. 2002.

Lydon, Sandy. *The Japanese in the Monterey Bay Region: A Brief History*. Capitola, CA: Capitola Book Company. 1997.

Story Excerpt

When the film of the royal picnic ended, father threaded it through and we watched it again. This repeated a few more times. I noticed new things each time. Large black cars in the background, workers milling about outside the cannery building, my father sitting at the very end of one of the tables.

Looking from the wall to the man sitting behind me, I asked, "Why are we watching this one over and over?"

"These films are our history. Remember what you see on that wall," father told me, never taking his eyes away from the images. Through the smoke his eyes looked glassy, like they might turn to water and flood right out of his face.

"Why? You always watch these when people come to visit us."

Father blinked and looked at me. A single tear streamed down his cheek. "Because, after we watch them all I am going to burn them." His eyes returned to the wall, as if he had said nothing.

Dragon image from: <<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/>>.