



UNC  
SCHOOL OF LAW

University of North Carolina School of Law  
Carolina Law Scholarship Repository

---

Faculty Publications

Faculty Scholarship

---

2009

## Americanism Behind Barbed Wire

Eric L. Muller

*University of North Carolina School of Law*, [emuller@email.unc.edu](mailto:emuller@email.unc.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarship.law.unc.edu/faculty\\_publications](https://scholarship.law.unc.edu/faculty_publications)



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Publication: *Nanzan Review*

---

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Scholarship at Carolina Law Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Carolina Law Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact [law\\_repository@unc.edu](mailto:law_repository@unc.edu).

## Americanism behind Barbed Wire

Eric L. MULLER

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

It was impossible to live in the United States through the election of Barack Obama to the presidency without feeling that the country was turning a corner in its racial history. The cover of the January/February issue of *The Atlantic* magazine captured the mood well: over a close-up photograph of the President's light-brown face were emblazoned the words "The End of White America?" The magazine's cover story described "[t]he election of Barack Obama [as] just the most startling manifestation of a larger trend: the gradual erosion of 'whiteness' as the touchstone of what it means to be an American."<sup>1</sup> Surely it is premature to claim that the United States has entered an era in which race no longer plays any role in signifying who counts as fully American and who does not. But there can be no doubt that the role of race is waning.

I would like to point you to an additional striking illustration of this shift, one that preceded Obama's election by several years, and should be a matter of considerable interest to those who study the experience of Japanese Americans in the United States. It might come as a surprise to you that the two most prominent military critics of the Iraq War to speak out while still wearing their uniforms were American citizens of Japanese ancestry: Eric Shinseki, the retired four-star general and former Army Chief of Staff, and Ehren Watada, a First Lieutenant in the U.S. Army. In 2003, General Shinseki dared to publicly question the wisdom of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's plan to attempt the invasion and military occupation of Iraq with dangerously inadequate numbers of U.S. troops.<sup>2</sup> In 2006, Lieutenant Watada was the first commissioned officer to refuse deployment to Iraq on the ground that the invasion was illegal.<sup>3</sup> On their merits, the two soldiers' public criticisms had nothing in common: Shinseki dissented over the invasion's effectiveness while Watada dissented over the invasion's legality. Yet both men dared to criticize American military policy from within, and both are Japanese Americans.

If this fact does not come as a surprise to you, it most certainly would have come as a surprise to Sergeant-Major Tokutaro Nishimura Slocum. Known to his friends as "Tokie," Slocum was an "Issei" or first-generation Japanese immigrant to the United States who volunteered into the U.S. Army in World War I, fought and was gassed alongside other American soldiers on the battlefields of Europe, and then spent years trying to persuade the Congress that his patriotic sacrifice in the Great War entitled him to exemption from the law that then barred all Asians

from becoming American citizens.<sup>4</sup> Shinseki's and Watada's public criticisms would also have come as a surprise to Mike Masaoka, a leader of the "Nisei" generation of birthright citizens that followed Slocum's immigrant generation. Masaoka was the National Secretary and Field Executive of the super-patriotic and fiercely assimilationist Japanese American Citizens League ("JACL") at the outbreak of the Second World War. He spearheaded that organization's efforts to cooperate with the U.S. government's plan for the mass removal and detention of every person of Japanese ancestry along the West Coast, alien and citizen alike.<sup>5</sup> Pressing his fellow Nisei to act as "better Americans in a greater America,"<sup>6</sup> Masaoka and the JACL worked to suppress Nisei protest of the government's program of racial removal and incarceration, fearing that resistance would undermine the Nisei generation's claim to good Americanism.

It is hard not to picture these two Issei and Nisei leaders cringing in horror at the spectacle of two uniformed Sansei, Eric Shinseki and Ehren Watada, publicly doubting the wisdom and legality of an American military venture. But the fact that these two soldiers felt the American ground beneath them firm enough to support a critical posture during wartime speaks volumes about the distance the nation traveled from the first third of the twentieth century to the first decade of the twenty-first. The racial bar to membership in the American polity that excluded those of Tokie Slocum's generation crumbled. The possibility of loyal protest and dissent—an option unthinkable to Mike Masaoka—became available. How did this change take place? When did the doors of Americanism open to Japanese Americans?

In this paper I hope to shed at least a bit of new light on these questions by looking in an unexpected place: the episode in which the federal government removed all people of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast and incarcerated them during World War II, a period commonly (though erroneously) referred to as the Japanese American internment.<sup>7</sup> This is an unexpected place to look for data on the shifting definition of Americanism for Japanese Americans because this tragic episode is commonly understood as the high-water mark of twentieth-century racialism. Race, it is typically thought, was so powerful a determinant of Americanism at this moment of peril that even the Nisei, who held birthright citizenship under the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, were stripped of all of the rights of citizenship and treated as constructive enemy aliens for the war's duration.

This is indeed how the government viewed the Nisei in early 1942 when the repressive program began. But that monolithic assessment of the failed Americanism of Japanese Americans quickly fell apart. Careful examination of the approaches to citizenship and protest taken across the various agencies of the federal government in the years between 1942 and 1945 reveals surprisingly vibrant disagreement over the capacity of the Nisei to count as good Americans. Military and civilian agencies differed sharply over the extent to which outwardly "American" cultural practices and a willingness to submit to repression were

preconditions for membership in the American polity. To be sure, no government agency fixed the boundaries of Americanism in the places we might fix them today; all operated in the context of their time. Yet the fact that some wartime bureaucrats managed to sustain an idea of Americanism that tolerated cultural difference even minimally and allowed even a little space for dissent is noteworthy. That fact suggests that the door of a more multicultural and tolerant Americanism, long thought tightly closed in the years before and during the war, was already at least a bit ajar.

\* \* \*

I have noted that there is a conventional understanding of the racialist definition of Americanism in the war years, and that the claim in this paper at least modestly complicates it. To place my evidence in its proper context, I should first offer a somewhat fuller statement of this conventional account, and of the larger narrative about Americanism in the twentieth century in which this conventional account sits.

The nation entered the twentieth century with rival conceptions of Americanism, but with one particular model very much in ascendancy: the Americanism of Theodore Roosevelt. This was a fervently assimilationist Americanism, a norm of good citizenship that rejected all foreign attachment. Writing in the 1890s, Roosevelt acknowledged the huge wave of immigrants from Europe that was breaking on American shores, but avowed that the question of whether this European influx was good or bad “depend[ed] mainly on whether these newcomers do or do not throw themselves heartily into our national life, cease to be Europeans, and become Americans like the rest of us.” There was no room in Roosevelt’s America for “immigrants, or the sons of immigrants, . . . [who] cling to the speech, the customs, the ways of life, and the habits of thought of the Old World which they have left.” Naturally, Roosevelt’s Americanism also had no room for members of “races which do not readily assimilate with our own”—meaning most particularly those from Asia. But even white Europeans who remained “unassimilated” were “mere obstructions to the current of our national life.”<sup>8</sup> Those immigrants who hyphenated their Americanism, modifying it with the land of their or their parents’ birth, were and could not be true Americans.

This so-called “anti-hyphenate” movement dominated the Progressive movement through the first two decades of the twentieth century, first under Roosevelt himself as President and then under Woodrow Wilson, particularly in his second term.<sup>9</sup> It was not, however, the only understanding of Americanism that was mooted among Progressive-era intellectuals. A rival approach, that of a group some call the “cosmopolitans,” understood Americanism as depending not on the eradication but the preservation of cultural differences among immigrant communities. These cosmopolitans—scholars and activists as diverse as Eugene V. Debs, W. E. B. Du Bois, Jane Addams, and Louis Brandeis—shared the conviction that “American civilization had the potential to be richer than its

European counterparts because it was woven from more variegated thread.”<sup>10</sup> Horace Kallen supplied the most succinct statement of this vision of Americanism in an article called “Democracy Versus the Melting Pot” that he published in the *Nation* in 1915. Kallen saw America as “a democracy of nationalities, cooperating voluntarily and autonomously in the enterprise of self-realization through the perfection of men according to their kind.” The idea that in America “men” have a “kind”—an ethnic and cultural affiliate group—was central to Kallen’s views, as it also was to the nativist thinkers of Kallen’s day who were twisting Darwinian and eugenic theories to enforce a rigid racial and ethnic hierarchy with whites of Anglo and Nordic ancestry at its pinnacle. Kallen and the cosmopolitans, however, saw virtue in immigrant groups’ retention of their discrete cultural identities. Through their ethnic and cultural attachments, immigrants could help “American civilization” transform itself into “the perfection of the cooperative harmonies of ‘European civilization,’” a “multiplicity in a unity, an orchestration of mankind” in which each group contributed its own “specific timbre and tonality,” its own “theme and melody” to “the whole symphony” of society.<sup>11</sup>

This cosmopolitan vision did not manage to transcend its time on matters of race: only European instruments played in Kallen’s American orchestra. At least at this point in his career, Kallen had nothing at all to say about people of African or Asian ancestry.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, it is significant that the debate over Americanism in early twentieth-century America included an articulate voice preaching the preservation rather than the eradication of cultural difference.

It is harder to tease out from the work of the cosmopolitan progressives a conception of the extent to which good Americanism included the possibility of voicing disaffection with America. The great “hyphenation” debate turned on other matters; dissent was something that a scholar like Kallen had no occasion to address. However, certain of the other cosmopolitans did have such occasion. Louis Brandeis, for example, articulated a provocatively contingent definition of Americanism in his “True Americanism” address at Faneuil Hall in Boston on July 5, 1915. To “Americanize” an immigrant, said Brandeis, was to bring him “into complete harmony with our ideals,” but those ideals included a number of substantive and procedural guarantees to the immigrant: equal treatment, a reasonable income, public education, protection from overweening industrial power, and social insurance. Brandeis noted that some immigrants came to American shores needing no “Americanizing” at all; even though newly arrived, they were already “true Americans” in their full embrace of American ideals. The nation would fail these new but “true Americans,” Brandeis suggested, if the nation itself treated the immigrants inconsistently with those ideals and violated their rights. An immigrant’s good Americanism could often turn out to be America’s to lose, rather than the immigrant’s to prove.<sup>13</sup>

The entry of the United States into World War I and the First Red Scare either ended the aspirations of the cosmopolitan progressives or drove them very deep

underground. Woodrow Wilson, who in his first term from 1912 to 1916 at least modestly resisted the nativism and racist assimilationism of the day, caved to those pressures as a “war President” in his second term.<sup>14</sup> Wilson’s Americanism turned to “100 percent Americanism”; fears of Germans and communists broadened into suspicion of anyone who modified the term “American” with a hyphen. The nativist and racist instincts that had managed to capture only parts of the American South and West in the pre-war years came to dominate the national political discourse. Attorney General Palmer’s notorious raids for subversives focused heavily on dispreferred immigrant groups. And of course the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, while scaling back on the immigration of whites from Southern and Eastern Europe, completely cut off further immigration by Asians, including people from Japan.

In this environment, the ethnic and cultural pluralism of the pre-war cosmopolitans went into what John Higham called full “eclipse”;<sup>15</sup> liberals flocked to the older “melting pot” theory in which the heat of assimilationism boiled away an immigrant’s racial and ethnic distinctions and commitments. At the University of Chicago, sociologist Robert E. Park worked to transform the melting pot into a full-blown theory of assimilation that made good Americanism available even to non-whites, something that a progressive scholar like Horace Kallen had not been able to imagine. In this interwar period, when the commanding national discourse preached that race and nationality were all-important determinants of Americanism, the reactive liberal response was to contend that race and ethnicity were meaningless.<sup>16</sup>

It is in this context that one can appreciate the poignancy of Tokie Slocum’s effort through the mid-1930s to obtain American citizenship as a reward for his military service in the U.S. Army in World War I. As Lucy Salyer explains, “[b]y the 1920s, martial patriotism and racial nativism had made being ‘yellow’—the term referred both to the refusal to serve in the military and to the racially constructed category—grounds for exclusion from citizenship.”<sup>17</sup> The only workable strategy for a Japanese immigrant like Slocum to qualify for membership in the American polity was to spill blood on a battlefield in soldierly obedience and then appeal to Congress for a special exemption from the racial bar.

The conventional account of World War II in this narrative defines it as the climax of this long-growing racial nativism in the nation’s conception of Americanism. Race became not simply a bar to new citizenship but a destructor of old: notwithstanding their own birthright citizenship, the Nisei were consigned to the same dismal program of removal and incarceration as their non-citizen parents. Race simply consumed the rights of citizens, turning the Nisei into aliens in their own land. In Mae Ngai’s words, the government “nullified the[ ] citizenship” of Japanese Americans “exclusively on grounds of racial difference.”<sup>18</sup> For Ngai, a racial approach to Americanism tainted all of the organs of government—the military agencies that hatched and executed the plan

to remove the West Coast's population of Japanese ancestry and the civilian agency that oversaw their continued detention in the so-called "Relocation Centers" such as Manzanar, Minidoka, and Heart Mountain. The "nullification of Japanese Americans' citizenship," Ngai argues, was "a constitutive element" not just of military removal but civilian detention.<sup>19</sup> Richard Drinnon, writing about WRA Director Dillon S. Myer in his book *Keeper of Concentration Camps*, provocatively asserts that "[e]ven when they tried, white officials failed to keep more than half buried their conviction that not only the Japanese immigrants ... but also the American-born Nisei were ineradicably alien."<sup>20</sup> Racism, on these scholars' view, pervaded every piece of the government's wartime program.

In such a highly racialized environment, Japanese Americans' dissatisfaction with their treatment could equate with only one thing if it rose to the level of articulation: disloyalty. To protest the government's violation of civil rights was to confess bad Americanism. So powerful was this connection between dissent and bad citizenship that it dominated the thinking not just of government officials, but also of the leading Nisei advocacy group, Mike Masaoka's Japanese American Citizens League. This organization worked not to support but to undermine the protests of removal and detention that some Nisei mounted in the months and years after the government's repressive program began.<sup>21</sup> The urgent need of Japanese Americans to efface the racial boundary on citizenship that had stripped them of their claim to good Americanism left no space for the idea of loyal protest.

This, then, was the racial hole in which Japanese Americans found themselves at war's end, according to the conventional account of the period. And it would take two distinct developments before Japanese Americans could step out of that hole and into full Americanism. The first of these was one that Tokie Slocum's experience, and Lucy Salyer's scholarship, would predict: a renewed appeal to the ideal of military citizenship. At war's end, Japanese Americans and their allies would point with great pride—and great success—at the extraordinary service record of the members of the segregated all-Nisei 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team, many of whom had volunteered or been drafted from behind the barbed wire of the government's detention camps to fight for their country on the battlefields of Europe.<sup>22</sup> Through their sacrifices, these warriors would reestablish the candidacy of the Nisei for membership in the American polity, even if their valor could not in itself secure them that membership. Full membership would have to await the racially and culturally pluralist idea of Americanism that came to life through the racial, ethnic, and gender solidarity movements of the 1960s and the legal battles waged in those years against racial and gender segregation and oppression.

Only then, after the travails of the soldiers of the 442<sup>nd</sup> and the pluralist transformation of the 1960s, could a wounded veteran of the 442<sup>nd</sup>, Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawaii, stand in a sufficiently secure position to help bring down an American president as a member of the Senate Watergate Committee

without enduring charges of being un-American.<sup>23</sup> Only after that could a Nisei politician, Norman Mineta, represent an ascendant Silicon Valley in the United States Congress, or a Sansei athlete, Kristi Yamaguchi, become an Olympic champion and America's sweetheart. And only after those triumphs of good Americanism could two Sansei soldiers, Eric Shinseki and Ehren Watada, dare to step out and publicly question an American military venture.

\* \* \*

By referring to what I have just set out as the “conventional” narrative about the opening of Americanism to Americans of Japanese ancestry, I do not mean to denigrate it, or even to suggest that the arc of the narrative is basically erroneous. I do wish, however, to offer one observation about it: it depicts the years between the entry of the United States into World War I and the end of World War II as entirely lost to racial and nativist conceptions of Americanism. In particular, it characterizes—even caricatures—the government's repressive program against Japanese Americans in World War II as a more or less monolithic culmination of the racialism of the interwar years. All of the growth in the conception of Nisei (and, later, Sansei) Americanism, and all of the increased possibility for pluralism and dissent, comes after 1945.

To be sure, certain branches and officials of the U.S. Army helped sear this caricature into historical memory. In his report justifying the decision to evict all people of Japanese (but not German or Italian) ancestry from the coast in the spring of 1942, Lieutenant General John DeWitt, the commander of the Western Defense Command, candidly reported a racial and nativist justification for the whole operation: “The Japanese race is an enemy race,” he wrote, “and while many second and third generation Japanese born on United States soil, possessed of United States citizenship, have become ‘Americanized,’ the racial strains are undiluted.”<sup>24</sup> Or, as he put it more bluntly to the newspapers, “A Jap’s a Jap.”<sup>25</sup> The Navy shared DeWitt’s assessment; it never accepted a single Japanese American as a sailor during the war. And this broad racial condemnation of people of Japanese ancestry did not fade for some military officers even after the early military crisis abated. As late as 1944, when the Army began training loyalty examiners to determine which individual Japanese Americans deserved to continue to be excluded on an individual basis from the West Coast after the mass exclusion of Japanese Americans came to an end, one of its teachers preached to his trainees that Japanese “civilization [was] different from what we call civilization among Western people” and that “the Japanese are considered a very primitive people so far as racial characteristics are concerned and so far as brain development is concerned.”<sup>26</sup>

But it would be a mistake to view this ugly racial nativism as defining the entirety of the government's approach to the question of what it meant for Japanese Americans to count as “American” during the war years. While it is true that the genesis of the government's removal and detention of Japanese Americans was coarsely racial, events quickly pressed various government



agencies past that exclusively racial grounding into territory where different and broader conceptions of Americanism could flourish. To be sure, none of these conceptions bear much resemblance to what we today might deem culturally pluralist or celebratory of the right to dissent. In the context of its time, however, the wartime disagreements among various federal government units and branches were remarkably robust.

Had the federal government simply locked up the West Coast's Japanese American population in the spring and summer of 1942 and thrown away the key for the war's duration, such disagreements would not have occurred. But this is not what happened. By the end of 1942, after responsibility for the oversight of the detained Japanese Americans had passed from military to civilian hands, a complex set of pressures arose that pushed in the direction of liberty for some internees and closer confinement for others, and that required government agencies to evaluate the loyalties of individual Japanese Americans.

Pressure to release some Japanese Americans from the camps came from several sources. For one, business interests—especially agricultural ones—near the ten camp sites in Wyoming, Idaho, California, Utah, Arizona, Colorado, and Arkansas recognized that the idle Japanese Americans behind barbed wire were a potential source of cheap labor. They lobbied for temporary work release for internees. Another somewhat ironic pressure for freedom for some internees came from units within the military. The army's Military Intelligence Service recognized early on that it would need soldiers who could speak Japanese; it quietly began looking for such soldiers in the camps as early as the mid-summer of 1942. Similarly, by the fall of 1942, the Japanese American Citizens' League had persuaded John J. McCloy, the Assistant Secretary of War, that young Nisei men ought to be permitted to volunteer out of the camps and into the armed forces in order to rehabilitate the good Americanism of the Nisei as a group in the public eye. Finally, the War Relocation Authority ("WRA"), the civilian agency that administered the ten camps, had its own reasons to want to release some of the Japanese Americans it was detaining. WRA officials saw danger in creating a culture of permanent detention and dependency for Japanese Americans and thought the opportunity to leave camp for new jobs and lives in the country's interior was crucial to the health of the Japanese American community. More cynically, WRA lawyers knew that the mass detention of Japanese Americans would be challenged in court, and advised the agency that a liberal furlough program for some internees would make it likelier that courts would uphold the detention of others.<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, there were pressures to shift some internees to even tighter confinement. Political leaders in the white communities adjacent to the camps argued that for security reasons, internees should be forbidden from leaving the premises. Occasional unrest in the camps drew media attention and calls for tougher treatment and closer confinement of the internees. Eventually these calls matured into demands, both from legislators and from military officials, for the

out-and-out segregation of the supposedly disloyal internees from the rest of the internee population. These demands fell on receptive ears at the civilian WRA. That agency came to see by the end of 1942 that it was running ten small cities with a total population of over 100,000 people, and that some of those people were what they called “troublemakers”—Japanese Americans whom they saw not so much as disloyal but as disruptive to the smooth operation of the camps. Segregation gave the WRA the opportunity to sift out its most troublesome individuals and shift them to a single camp, Tule Lake.<sup>28</sup>

By early 1943, the War Department, wishing to create the segregated Nisei unit that would become the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team, proposed a program of individually adjudicating the loyalty of all of the young men in the camps. The idea was that in a process that became known as “registration,” military teams would administer a questionnaire to all male American citizens of draft age in the camps, and from the results of the questionnaire, determine who was loyal enough to serve in the army. The War Relocation Authority, seeing these questionnaires as a helpful way to decide which internees were loyal enough to be permitted to leave camp for new jobs and homes in the country’s interior, agreed to the military’s proposal and expanded the scope of the registration to include all adult internees rather than just the young men of draft age. In the late winter and early spring, military teams fanned out across the ten camps to administer the registration questionnaires.<sup>29</sup>

The four-page forms were, in essence, a bureaucratic inquest into the Americanism of the incarcerated Japanese American community. The forms sought a wealth of primarily biographical and cultural information from the internees, who were asked to report on whether they had any relatives in Japan, the extent of any education they had received in Japan, whether they had ever traveled to Japan, whether they held dual citizenship, what their religion was, what organizations they belonged to, what newspapers and magazines they read, what entities they had made financial contributions to, whether they knew spoken or written Japanese, and the like. The two final questions, numbers 27 and 28, asked each internee whether he or she was willing to serve in the armed forces wherever he or she might be ordered and whether he or she was willing to forswear allegiance to the Japanese Emperor.

Registration was a gross miscalculation on the part of both the military and the WRA. Many internees, resentful at having been uprooted from their homes on racial suspicion of disloyalty and incarcerated for a year in desolate camps, had little desire to undergo this kind of scrutiny. Many feared that registration was a prelude to breaking up their families and communities, or to forcing them out into hostile white communities. Question 27, about military service, was understood as seeking to trick them into volunteering into the army. And Question 28, the so-called “loyalty” question, was the most infuriating of all; it insulted the Nisei by asking them to renounce a supposed allegiance to the Emperor that none of them had ever sworn in the first place.

The internees' responses to the registration questionnaires were not what either military or civilian officials had anticipated. A stunning twelve percent of those who filled out the questionnaire either answered the loyalty question with an outright "no" or qualified an affirmative answer. The "mortality of loyalty," as an official in the Assistant Secretary of War's Office called it, was particularly high among Nisei men: more than one in five of them answered "no" to the loyalty question. And even more disturbingly to military and civilian officials, many internees responded to the registration process by filing requests for repatriation (in the case of the Issei) or expatriation (in the case of Nisei) to Japan. What had been designed as a sifting mechanism became, to a significant degree, a vent for the internees' anger and frustrations and an invitation to dissent and resistance.<sup>30</sup>

With tens of thousands of completed questionnaires on their hands, military and civilian officials then had the problem of reducing the answers and other available intelligence data to concrete conclusions about who was and who was not a loyal American. This is where we can see the emergence of some striking differences between the military and civilian conceptions of Americanism. Two rival systems of loyalty adjudication sprang up from this data, one of them dominated by the military and the other controlled by the civilian WRA. The military-dominated system, called the Japanese American Joint Board ("JAJB"), was responsible for making recommendations on who was loyal enough to be allowed to leave camp as well as findings on which of the incarcerated Japanese Americans could, if released, be granted permission to take jobs in industries deemed to be of military sensitivity. The other system, developed and implemented by the civilian WRA, was designed to make an ultimate determination on which internees were sufficiently loyal to be allowed to leave a camp for a new job and home in the country's interior.<sup>31</sup>

The JAJB and the WRA each developed its own crude point system to turn an internee's answers on his or her registration questionnaire into a total loyalty score.<sup>32</sup> Consider these excerpts from the two systems of evaluation

Excerpts from the Japanese American Joint Board's Point System

Ques. 7. <sup>33</sup>	a. If registered in Communist Party. b. If registered voter.	2-minus 1-plus
Ques. 8.	a. If spouse is citizen of Japan. b. If spouse is a Nisei.	1-minus 1-plus
Ques. 12.	a. If subject has one or more of the following in Japan: wife, children, parents, brothers, or sisters.	3-minus
Ques. 13.	d. If subject attended Japanese Language School more than 3 years in this country. f. If subject received entire education from schools in U.S.	2-minus 3-plus
Ques. 14.	a. If subject has traveled to Japan 3 or more times. d. If subject has traveled to Japan once. e. If subject has traveled to Japan twice. f. If subject has never traveled to Japan.	Reject 1-minus 3-minus 1-plus
Ques. 15.	d. If subject was employed as Japanese Language School instructor. g. If subject was employed by reputable American business doing business only in U.S.	3-minus 2-plus
Ques. 16	a. If subject is Shintoist. b. If subject is a Buddhist. c. If subject is Christian.	Reject 1-minus 2-plus
Ques. 18	a. If subject reads, writes and speaks Japanese good. b. If subject reads and/ or writes Japanese fair or good.	2-minus 1-minus
Ques. 19	a. If subject is an instructor in Japanese hobbies or sports. (Jyudo, Kyudo, and Kendo) b. If subject is an instructor in American sport or hobby.	2-minus 2-plus
Ques. 24	a. For each Japanese or Japanese-American periodical, trade journal or magazine.	1-minus
Ques. 26	a. If subject himself has ever applied for repatriation.	Reject <sup>34</sup>

Excerpts from the War Relocation Authority's Point System

	Weight	
	Positive	Negative
<i>Question 7</i> <sup>35</sup>		
1. Registered voter	1 or 2 <sup>36</sup>	
<i>Question 8</i>		
2. Married, and spouse is a Japanese alien		
3. Married and spouse is not of Japanese race	3	
<i>Question 12</i>		
1. Parents living and in Japan		1
3. Brothers, sisters, in Japan		1
4. Married and spouse now in Japan		2
5. Parent, sons, or brothers in Japanese military		3
<i>Question 13</i>		
1. Attended American high school	1	
2. Graduate of American high school	2	
9. Attendance at Japanese language school in U. S. for more than two years		1
<i>Question 14</i>		
1. Traveled twice to Japan since 1935		2
2. Traveled three or more times to Japan since 1935		3
<i>Question 15</i>		
5. Employment by an American-Caucasian firm or individual except canneries, fisheries, or other Japanese gang labor employers	2	
6. Occupation—Japanese language school instructor		3
<i>Question 16</i>		
1. Christian	1	
2. Buddhist priests		2
3. Shinto Priests (Tenriko sect)		3
4. Shinto Priests (Dai Jingu shrine)		Deny
<i>Question 19</i>		
1. Japanese sports instructor		2
<i>Question 26</i>		
1. Application for expatriation to Japan		
Subsequent application for cancellation		2
No subsequent application for cancellation		Deny <sup>37</sup>

To our early-twenty-first-century eyes, both agencies' systems blunderingly conflated a handful of cultural contacts with good or lapsed Americanism, and both proceeded from the same absurd assumption that national identity and loyalty were matters that could be quantified and tallied like points in a tennis match. In addition, it must be noted that there were instances of numerical agreement between the military and civilian systems: they agreed on the significance of Nisei employment, for example, and assigned the same negative point values to being an instructor of Japanese language in the United States.

But what is important for the purposes of this study are the differences between the two systems, and the considerably greater space that the civilian WRA opened up for Nisei Americanism than its military counterpart. In the eyes of the JAJB, a citizen's Americanism was impeached if he or she had a non-citizen spouse; this was not troubling to the WRA so long as the spouse was not in Japan. Having any first-degree relation in Japan was deeply damning for the JAJB; it was markedly less so for the WRA. The WRA deemed a Nisei's attendance at a Japanese language after-school program to be far less threatening to his or her status as an American than did the JAJB. The JAJB was only prepared to award a Nisei positive loyalty points if he or she had gotten all of his or her schooling in the United States; the WRA awarded positive points just for high school. If a Nisei practiced the Shinto religion, or had taken three or more trips to Japan, the JAJB saw these as absolutely fatal to a Nisei's Americanism; the civilian WRA did not. While both systems saw Christianity as favoring Americanism, the military-dominated JAJB saw Buddhism as detracting from it while the WRA did not. The WRA did not see Japanese language abilities as undermining a Nisei's Americanism; the JAJB did. Neither was the WRA concerned if a Nisei read Japanese or Japanese-American magazines, but the JAJB assigned a negative point for each such publication. And the JAJB wanted to know whether a Nisei was a communist, while the WRA assessed no negative points for a Nisei's political views no matter what they were.

For a better sense of how the military and civilian systems differed, consider the case of a hypothetical Nisei farm worker in his early twenties who got his education through high school in the United States, traveled to Japan once as a child to visit relatives, attended four years of a Japanese-language after-school program in the United States while in elementary and junior high school, had a sister in Japan and a brother in the U.S. Army, read the English-language *Rafu Shimpo* newspaper published in Los Angeles, attended a Buddhist church, and was a registered voter. This imaginary (but not atypical) young man would have received a loyalty score of *negative two* from the JAJB but a *positive six* from the WRA.<sup>38</sup> While the archival record does not reveal how many points a Nisei needed for a positive finding by either agency, this was a remarkably different assessment of the American identity of an American citizen.

The differences between the two systems were not simply academic. They had real impacts on the lives of Japanese Americans. For a number of reasons not

germane to this study, the two systems were called upon to make parallel findings in many thousands of cases. And much to the anger of the military officials on the JAJB, the WRA, pursuant to its own adjudications, released one out of every three internees whom the JAJB had found disloyal.<sup>39</sup>

The military and civilian agencies also developed markedly different understandings of the decisions of some Nisei to answer “no” to Question 28 on the registration form, the so-called “loyalty question,” as well as to the decisions of some Nisei to seek expatriation to Japan. It must be remembered that these “no” answers and expatriation requests came at a time when Japanese Americans had already been forced from their homes, with all of the personal and property loss that eviction entailed, and then incarcerated for at least a year in tarpaper barracks behind barbed wire without any semblance of legal process—and all of this on account of nothing more than the fact of their ancestry. This was a moment of great anxiety within the camps, as many Issei and Nisei internees feared that the government might be implementing plans to break up families by forcing some internees out of the camps into the military or what they feared would be a hostile American society. It was, in other words, a time of enormous stress, fear, resentment, and anger in the camps.

The military understanding of “no” answers to the loyalty question and requests for expatriation was breathtakingly simple: they were a declaration of disloyalty, a confession that the internee considered him- or herself Japanese and not American. Even an internee’s subsequent request to rescind his or her “no” answer or to withdraw his or her request for expatriation meant nothing to the military. The military undertook no investigation of the circumstances leading to the “no” answer or the expatriation request; it simply accepted the piece of paper filed by the internee at face value and concluded that he or she was disloyal.

The civilian War Relocation Authority, however, appreciated that matters were not so simple. WRA officials understood that the registration questionnaires had brought to the surface complex feelings swirling within the camps—anger, worry, resentment, and frustration. They also understood that what the questionnaires had precipitated was a crisis over civil rights rather than loyalty. Thus, in April of 1943, the Chief of the WRA’s Community Analysis Section confirmed in a memorandum to the Chief of the WRA’s Community Management Section that “[s]ince civil rights was the main issue [at the camps] in relation to registration, no repressive measures should be taken against persons who, through their objections to registration, were attempting to defend their civil rights,” including “a number of people who answered ‘No’ or gave qualified answers to Question 28.” This official found it nothing short of “Machiavellian to thrust self-respecting citizens into concentration camp conditions and then call them disloyal for protesting this treatment by refusing to pledge allegiance in this situation.”<sup>40</sup> The WRA’s director, Dillon Myer, was similarly perceptive about the complex motives that had led to many citizens’ requests for expatriation. “[I]n many cases,” he noted in the summer of 1944, “requests for expatriation [were] not

motivated by pro-Japanese or anti-American attitudes,” but instead came from “a fear of forced relocation [out of a camp]” or “were the result of parental or group pressure.”<sup>41</sup>

The WRA acted on these more nuanced understandings. Rather than automatically treat “no” answers to Question 28 and requests for expatriation as conclusive evidence of disloyalty, the WRA sought further information. For each internee who answered ‘no’ to Question 28, or qualified his answer in some way, or requested expatriation, the WRA held a hearing at which the internee had the chance to change or explain the negative answer or expatriation request. WRA hearing officers would question the internee about what had led him or her to such a potentially fateful decision. As the WRA’s top lawyer put it, only where the WRA was comfortable that the internee “appreciated the significance and consequences of his action and was not merely acting out of temporary anger or bitterness” would the WRA conclude that the internee was “definitely deciding upon allegiance to Japan.”<sup>42</sup>

This brief comparison of the military and civilian approaches to adjudicating the loyalty of individual Japanese Americans between 1943 and 1945 reveals that the government’s conception of Americanism was no racist monolith. In particular, the civilian War Relocation Authority showed in a number of ways that a conception of Americanism that was at least modestly pluralist and tolerant of dissent thrived during the war years. In evaluating the allegiances of individual Japanese Americans, the WRA steered clear of the rank racial nativism that plagued the work of the military-dominated Japanese American Joint Board and managed to implement a test of Americanism that attached no strong negative valence to certain Japanese cultural, linguistic, and religious practices. To be sure, the WRA’s approach was more fiercely assimilationist than the pre-World-War-I cosmopolitan progressives would have preferred.<sup>43</sup> By today’s standards, it is not even faintly a model of cultural pluralism. But for a time of “total war,” and a repressive episode that is typically understood as monochromatically racist, the WRA’s definition of Americanism shows unexpected shades of color.

Similarly, in its approach to “no” answers on the loyalty questionnaire and to requests for expatriation, the WRA revealed a surprising appreciation for the conception of Americanism that Louis Brandeis had articulated at Faneuil Hall back in 1915. Brandeis had argued that some of those thought to be outside the American body politic might well be fully American by virtue of their commitment to substantive and procedural justice, and that the nation could undermine those new but true Americans by denying them justice. Dissent and what we might call justified disaffection did not, for Brandeis, inherently detract from good Americanism. This was an idea that military officials assessing Japanese Americans’ loyalties in World War II could never grasp. To them, a Japanese American’s “no” answer or expatriation request was invariably an admission of unamericanism. The WRA, by contrast, proved itself able to



appreciate the toll that months and even years of civil rights violations could take on an incarcerated Japanese American. At least in this context,<sup>44</sup> the WRA was able to understand that protest could come from a frustrated commitment to American norms of justice and that it did not need to represent a subversion or repudiation of Americanism.

\* \* \*

The evidence that I have offered in this paper tends at least mildly to complicate the prevailing narrative about the government's approach to Americanism during the years of World War II. Whereas Lucy Salyer's work on World War I and the interwar period would imply that only a warrior model of citizenship might overcome the prevailing racial model, my evidence suggests that in at least some quarters of government, a third model remained viable, one at least somewhat more understanding of cultural difference and somewhat less insistent upon unquestioning obedience. Whereas scholars such as Mae Ngai and Richard Drinnon see racialism as pervading all of the conditions that the government imposed on Japanese Americans' entitlement to membership in the American polity, my evidence suggests differences in the kind and degree of impact that race played for the leading military and civilian agencies, with the civilian WRA taking an approach that was, at least in the context of its time, progressive.

Here I use the word "progressive" advisedly. In the WRA's methods of assessing the Americanism of Japanese Americans, we can hear at least an echo of the ideas of the cosmopolitan progressives of the pre-World-War-I years. It has generally been assumed that that movement's project went on hiatus in the days leading up to the Great War and did not resume until taken up by others well after World War II drew to a close. My evidence suggests that the project did not entirely vanish during the war and interwar years, and that Americanism remained a contested idea within the federal government even in a time of total war. This is not to say that WRA officials, were they alive today, would be pleased to know that General Eric Shinseki and Lieutenant Ehren Watada took the lead in publicly questioning an American war and its planning. It is, however, to say that the road that led to the American ground beneath Shinseki and Watada ran through, rather than around, the Japanese American internment camps of World War II.

## Notes

1. Hua Hsu, "The End of White America?" *The Atlantic*, January/February 2009, available at <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200901/end-of-whiteness>.
2. Eric Schmitt, "Plans for Policing a Postwar Iraq," *The New York Times*, 9 April 2003, B1, B4.
3. Sam Skolnik and Carol Smith, "Not Going and Not Going Quietly: Soldier Against Iraq War Won't Seek Objector Status," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 8 June 2006, A1.

4. For more on Slocum, see Lucy E. Salyer, "Baptism by Fire: Race, Military Citizenship, and U.S. Citizenship Policy," *The Journal of American History*, 91 (2004), 847-76; Bill Hosokawa, *JACL in Quest of Justice* (New York, 1982), 42-43.
5. A full, if fawning, narrative of Masaoka's life is found in Bill Hosokawa, *They Call Me Moses Masaoka* (New York, 1987). More critical biographical sketches of Masaoka can be found in Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850* (Seattle, 1988), 221-24, and especially in Richard Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps: Dillon S. Myer and American Racism*, (Berkeley, 1987), 66-73.
6. The JACL Creed, quoted in Bill Yenne, *Rising Sons: The Japanese American GIs Who Fought for the United States in World War II* (New York, 2007), 15.
7. The term is erroneous because "internment" is a legal term of art referring to the lawful detention of enemy aliens. American citizens of Japanese ancestry were not "interned" in the United States during World War II; they were unlawfully incarcerated. See Roger Daniels, "Words Do Matter: A Note on Inappropriate Terminology and the Incarceration of Japanese Americans," in *Nikkei in the Pacific Northwest*, ed. Louis Fiset and Gail Nomura (Seattle, 2005), 190.
8. Theodore Roosevelt, "True Americanism," *The Forum Magazine*, April 1894, available at <http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/trta.html>.
9. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism* (New Brunswick, 1955), 198.
10. Jonathan M. Hansen, *The Lost Promise of Patriotism: Debating American Identity, 1890-1920* (Chicago, 2003), 95-96.
11. Horace M. Kallen, "Democracy Versus the Melting Pot," *The Nation*, 25 Feb. 1915, available at <http://www.expo98.msu.edu/people/Kallen.htm>.
12. Much later, Kallen would briefly address the place of African Americans in American history and the American polity. See Horace M. Kallen, *Cultural Pluralism and the American Idea* (Philadelphia, 1956), 76-83. I am aware of no place in Kallen's work where he addressed the assimilation of Japanese Americans.
13. Louis D. Brandeis. "True Americanism." 5 July 1915, available at <http://www.law.louisville.edu/library/collections/brandeis/node/224>.
14. Hansen, *The Lost Promise of Patriotism*, 158-61; Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 199-212.
15. John Higham, *Send These to Me: Immigrants in Urban America* (Baltimore, 1984), p. 214.
16. *Ibid.*, 214-20.
17. Salyer, "Baptism by Fire," 848.
18. Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, 2004), 175.
19. *Ibid.*, 179.
20. Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps*, 29.
21. See Daniels, *Asian America*, 222-23.
22. One good account of the formation and exploits of the 442<sup>nd</sup> is Robert Asahina, *Just Americans: How Japanese Americans Won a War at Home and Abroad* (New York, 2006).
23. It is, however, worth noting in this connection that the lawyer for indicted presidential aide H. R. Haldeman referred dismissively to Senator Inouye as "that little Jap" during the Senate Watergate hearings. See <http://openweb.tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/1973-8/1973-08-01-CBS-6.html>

24. Memorandum, John DeWitt to the Secretary of War, February 13, 1942, reprinted at <http://www.unc.edu/~emuller/isthatlegal/DeWitt1.jpg> and <http://www.unc.edu/~emuller/isthatlegal/DeWitt2.jpg>.
25. DeWitt is quoted to this effect in the official report of the federal Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, *Personal Justice Denied* (Seattle, 1997), 66.
26. Colonel Oliver Perry Morton Hazzard, quoted in Muller, *American Inquisition*, 117.
27. For more on these pressures toward freedom for some internees, see *ibid.*, 22–25.
28. For more on the pressures toward confinement and segregation, see *ibid.*, 25–27.
29. The registration process is described in fuller detail in *Personal Justice Denied*, 191–97.
30. For more on the internees’ responses to registration, see Muller, *American Inquisition*, 36–38.
31. See *ibid.*, 39–40, 54–57.
32. Each of the agencies later abandoned its point system and replaced it with something it found more workable. The point systems are nonetheless useful—even though they were not used throughout the period in question—in that they provide an unusually concise account of each agency’s understanding of Americanism.
33. The question number corresponds to the question number on the registration questionnaire.
34. “Japanese-American Schedule for Rating, Referral, or Rejection, P. S. D.,” 24 March 1943, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland, Record Group 389, Entry 480, Box 1732.
35. Again, the question number corresponds to the registration questionnaire.
36. In the original document, this number is a “7,” but that was certainly a typographical error. In the context of the rest of the point scores on the form, this number was surely intended to be a “1” or a “2.”
37. War Relocation Authority, “Analysis of Leave Clearance Applications—Citizens,” National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC, Record Group 210, Entry 16, Box 286.
38. The calculations would be as follows. Under the JAJB’s system, he would have received 3–plus for entire education in the United States, 1–minus for one trip to Japan; 2–minus for four years of Japanese language school in the United States; 3–minus for having a sister in Japan; 1–plus for having a brother in the U.S. Army; 1–plus for being a registered voter; 1–minus for reading the *Rafu Shimpo*. Under the WRA’s system, he would have received 3–plus for having a brother in the U.S. Army; 1–minus for having a sister in Japan; 1–plus for attending Japanese language school; no points for travel to Japan; no points for his reading preferences; no points for attending a Buddhist church; and presumably 2–plus for being a registered voter.
39. Muller, *American Inquisition*, 55–56.
40. Memorandum, John F. Embree to John H. Provinse, 23 April 1943, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC, Record Group 210, Entry 16, Box 286.
41. Dillon S. Myer to Major Stewart W. Mark, 21 July 1944, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC, Record Group 210, Entry 16, Box 286.
42. Philip M. Glick to Edgar Bernhard, 30 June 1944, *Japanese Evacuation and Resettlement Study Records*, microfilm reel 23, frame 121.
43. The WRA’s loyalty adjudications facilitated its larger program of “resettling” internees in jobs and communities in the interior. That program was an intense “melting pot” program; the WRA pressured departing internees to act as “American” as possible and discouraged them from associating with other Japanese Americans in their new communities. See

Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps*, 53.

44. It must be noted that in a number of other contexts, the WRA proved itself unable to conceptualize internees' protests as consistent with good Americanism. For example, when internees at many of the camps resisted the reimposition of the military draft in 1944, the WRA did not credit the draft resisters' claims that they were engaging in loyal protest but instead reacted quite punitively. See Eric L. Muller, *Free to Die for their Country: The Story of the Japanese American Draft Resisters in World War II* (Chicago, 2001), 75-76, 86-99. In the main, however, the WRA did not see protest as evidence of disloyalty; it saw protest as disruptive, a threat to peace and order in the camps. See Muller, *American Inquisition*, 80-82.