

British Journal for Military History

Volume 12, Issue 2, July 2026

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ISSN: 2057-0422

Date of Publication: 23 July 2026

Citation: Maddie Hale, "WE MUST! WE WILL! WE CAN!": American identity in the newspapers of Japanese American incarceration camps, 1942-1945', *British Journal for Military History*, 12.2 (2026), pp. 27-46.

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‘WE MUST! WE WILL! WE CAN!’: American identity in the newspapers of Japanese American incarceration camps, 1942-1945

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the treatment of Japanese Americans on the West Coast during the Second World War and investigates definitions of Americanness, with a focus on the newspapers of civilian incarceration camps. The incarceration challenges stereotypical legacies of the Second World War as the ‘good war’ and exemplifies the paradoxical nature of American identity. However, vehement support in the newspapers for ‘American’ values and the war effort contradicts the evident unconstitutionality of the incarceration. Emphasis is also placed on the representation of women in the newspapers, to provide new perspectives regarding the legacies of the Second World War.

Introduction

On 7 December 1941 Japan attacked the American military base at Pearl Harbor. Just two months later, on 19 February 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 which was used as the basis for the incarceration of more than 110,000 Japanese Americans from the West Coast of the United States, many of whom were legal American citizens.¹ They were first moved to temporary Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA) Assembly Centers, and then to more permanent War Relocation Authority (WRA) Relocation Centers.

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DOI: [10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v1i2i2.1969](https://doi.org/10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v1i2i2.1969)

¹National Archives Catalog (NAC), NAID 5730250, Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Executive Order 9066*, 19 February 1942. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5730250>. Accessed 23 April 2025. The Western Defense Command (WDC) gave a total of 117,116 Japanese Americans incarcerated. John L. DeWitt, *Final Report, Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943), p.356.

Japanese Americans' race affected the way in which they were treated by the government, particularly following the Pearl Harbor attack, and this led to a desire or need to prove their loyalty to the United States. This article will discuss American identity as represented throughout the entire run of the camp newspapers, with a particular focus on those of the Assembly Centers, which hold the immediate response of Japanese Americans to the incarceration, but are largely neglected in the existing historiography. It will also consider the depiction of women in the newspapers, many of which contained women's features and columns, another unexplored aspect of the experience of Japanese Americans in the camps.

The unconstitutionality of this forced removal and mass incarceration evidently contradicts the notion of the 'good war'. The Second World War is often seen as the 'good war', as the US professed to fight for honourable ideals against a dishonourable enemy. This overlooks the many contradictions in the manifestation of these supposedly 'American' virtues on the home front. The camp newspapers, however, in professing patriotism and supporting the defending of 'American' ideals, such as democracy, freedom, and unity, reinforce the narrative of the 'good war', in the face of the incarceration.

Assessment of the incarceration began before the war had ended, but even in the present there is confusion about the terminology that should be used. As a means of legitimising the incarceration, the government used euphemistic language such as 'evacuation' or 'internment'. While many historians still use these contemporary terms in order to prevent confusion, as noted by Stephanie Hinnertshitz, it is important that the term 'incarceration' be used instead, as it more accurately reflects the legal definition of the process, and avoids the perpetuation of euphemistic terminology.²

²Stephanie Hinnertshitz, *Japanese American Incarceration: The Camps and Coerced Labor during World War II*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), p.5. On terminology see: Roger Daniels, 'Words Do Matter: A Note on Inappropriate Terminology and the Incarceration of the Japanese Americans', *Discover Nikkei*, 2, 1 (2008), n.p. <https://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2008/2/1/words-do-matter/>. Accessed 23 April 2025, Densho, *Terminology* (2019) <https://densho.org/terminology/>. Accessed 23 April 2025, Yoshinori H.T. Himel, 'Americans' Misuse of "Internment"', *Seattle Journal for Social Justice*, 14.3 (2016) pp.797-837, Karen L. Ishizuka, *Lost and Found: Reclaiming the Japanese American Incarceration*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), National Japanese American Historical Society (NJAHS), *Due Process: Americans of Japanese Ancestry and the United States Constitution 1787-1994*, (San Francisco: NJAHS, 1995), National Park Service (NPS), *Terminology and the Mass Incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II* (2022) <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/terminology-and-the-mass-incarceration-of-japanese-americans-during-world-war-ii.htm>. Accessed 23 April 2023, and Raymond www.bjmh.org.uk

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The incarceration itself was not only unjust, but illegal, and the government's use of the word 'internment' was a deliberate attempt to frame the mass removal and detention of tens of thousands of Japanese Americans as constitutional. In a simpler sense, the term 'internment' is an inaccurate one. As Yoshinori Himel notes, 'internment' was a legally justified scheme which allowed for the 'selective imprisonment of alien civilians, ... with rudimentary due process', so using this term to refer to the indiscriminate incarceration of 110,000 Japanese Americans is 'a deceptive whitewash'.³

Korematsu v. United States (1944) determined that the terms 'Assembly Centers' and 'Relocation Centers' were euphemisms for prisons and concentration camps, respectively.⁴ While 'concentration camp' is an accurate description, many historians avoid using the term due to the enduring connection of the term in the popular imagination to the Nazi 'extermination camps', as noted by Alice Yang Murray.⁵ Use of 'concentration camps' will be avoided here, in favour of the less controversial, but still accurate terms, 'incarceration camps' or 'prison camps'. 'Assembly Centers' and 'Relocation Centers' will be used in this article to distinguish between the earlier and later camps, but these are not precise descriptions, as they were all, in fact, prison camps. There were also specific words used to describe the different generations of Japanese Americans: first generation Japanese Americans, born in Japan, were known as 'Issei'; their American-born, citizen children were 'Nisei'; and those born in the US to Nisei parents were 'Sansei'. A separate categorization was 'Kibei': second generation Japanese Americans who had returned home to Japan for education.⁶

In early 1941, Curtis B. Munson was commissioned by President Roosevelt (FDR) to investigate the loyalty of Japanese Americans. The so-called 'Munson Report' was

Y. Okamura, 'The American Concentration Camps: A Cover-Up Through Euphemistic Terminology', *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 10, 3 (1982), pp.95-109 (p.95).

³Himel, Yoshinori H.T., 'Enough With the Euphemisms. They're Not 'Family Residential Centers.' They're Jails.', *The Washington Post*, 11 July 2018 https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/enough-with-the-euphemisms-theyre-not-family-residential-centers-theyre-jails/2018/07/11/7e1eb22c-8399-11e8-8553-a3ce89036c78_story.html. Accessed 11 November 2025.

⁴*Korematsu v. United States*, 323 U.S. 214 (1944) <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/323/214/>. Accessed 11 November 2025.

⁵Alice Yang Murray, *Historical Memories of the Japanese American Internment and the Struggle for Redress*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), p.7 and Hinnershitz, *Japanese American Incarceration* (2021), pp.255-256.

⁶There is no consensus amongst scholars regarding the presentation of these generational names, but this article will follow the example of Densho and capitalise, but not italicise, the terms 'Issei', 'Nisei', 'Kibei', and 'Sansei'.

submitted on 7 October, and the three generations of Japanese Americans were addressed and characterised distinctly. The Issei were 'probably loyal romantically to Japan' but Munson acknowledged that many had assimilated; the Nisei were considered 'pathetically eager' to show their loyalty to the US, whereas the Sansei were exonerated entirely; the report remarked that 'the Third generation of Japanese is a baby and may be disregarded for the purpose of this survey'; significantly, the report concluded that 'there will be no armed uprising of Japanese'.⁷ Despite these findings, all Japanese Americans on the West Coast, men, women, and children, were removed and imprisoned in camps.

When Japanese labourers began to emigrate to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, there was already an entrenched, indiscriminate anti-Asian sentiment on the West Coast.⁸ The growing Japanese population, alongside Japan's early twentieth century military successes, engendered anti-Japanese racism and provoked fears of a 'fifth-column' invasion or organised sabotage on the West Coast. The Pearl Harbor bombing exacerbated these fears, but the Americanness of Japanese Americans had been doubted long before the war. There was no evidence of *Japanese American* collusion in carrying out the attack on Pearl Harbor, but they were blamed nonetheless.⁹ On 12 February 1942, influential journalist Walter Lippmann published an article in the *Los Angeles Times*, in which he suggested that the lack of Japanese American sabotage was not 'a sign that there is nothing to be feared. It is a sign that the blow is well-organized and that it is held back until it can be struck with maximum

⁷Curtis B. Munson, 'Japanese on the West Coast,' in *American Concentration Camps: A Documentary History of the Relocation and Incarceration of Japanese Americans, 1942-1945*, Volume 1, July, 1940 - December 31, 1941, ed. by Roger Daniels, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989), n.p.

⁸On anti-Asian racism: Angela N. Ancheta., *Race, Rights, and the Asian American Experience*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), Roger Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), Sonia Gomez, "'Yankee, Why Does a Big Man like You Fear My Baby?': The Politics of the Anti-Japanese Movement, 1908-1924", *Amerasia*, 46, 2 (2020), pp.162-179, and Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

⁹Owen J. Roberts, *Attack Upon Pearl Harbor by Japanese Armed Forces* [Roberts Commission], 28 January 1942. <https://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/roberts/roberts.html>. Accessed 28 May 2025.

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effect.¹⁰ The *Los Angeles Times* also published a now infamous article on 2 February 1942, stating that:

Perhaps the most difficult and delicate question that confronts our powers that be is the handling - the safe and proper treatment - of our American-born Japanese, our Japanese-Americans, citizens by the accident of birth, but who are Japanese nevertheless. A viper is nonetheless a viper wherever the egg is hatched.¹¹

Leader of the Western Defense Command (WDC) General John L. DeWitt wrote in his 1943 report that the forced relocation was a military necessity, arguing that 'along the vital Pacific Coast over 112,000 potential enemies, of Japanese extraction, are at large today' and 'the very fact that no sabotage has taken place to date is a disturbing and confirming indication that such action will be taken.'¹² Reiterating Lippmann's earlier suggestion, their innocence was characterised by DeWitt as evidence of inherent guilt. The report went on to suggest that 'the Japanese race is an enemy race 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.'¹³ Race was a key factor in the decision-making of DeWitt, and the lack of large-scale incarceration of German and Italian Americans shows the difference in how white and non-white 'enemy' Americans were treated.¹⁴

¹⁰Walter Lippmann, 'The Fifth Column on the Coast', *Los Angeles Times*, 12 February 1942, p.32.

¹¹W.H. Anderson, 'The Question of Japanese Americans', *Los Angeles Times*, 2 February 1942, p.26.

¹²John L. DeWitt., *Final Report, Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943), p.34.

¹³DeWitt., *Final Report*. p.34.

¹⁴While German and Italian Americans were detained and interned, they were not subject to the same process of mass removal and incarceration that Japanese Americans were. German and Italian immigrants also faced less suspicion by virtue of their ability to become naturalised US citizens, although being a citizen did not save many from arrest. On German and Italian Americans, see: Nancy C. Carnevale, "'No Italian Spoken for the Duration of the War': Language, Italian-American Identity, and Cultural Pluralism in the World War II Years', *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 22,3 (2003), pp.3-33, Lawrence DiStasi, *Una Storia Segreta: The Secret History of Italian American Evacuation and Internment during World War II*, (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2001), Stephen Fox, *America's Invisible Gulag: A Biography of German American Internment and Exclusion in World War II*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), and John E. Schmitz, *Enemies Among Us: The Relocation, Internment, and Repatriation of German, Italian, and*

31 www.bjmh.org.uk

The FBI had carried out surveillance from 1940, compiling lists of German American, Italian American, and Japanese American organisations and individuals who were deemed to be dangerous. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, these lists were used, in conjunction with similar Department of Justice lists, to carry out the arrest of over one thousand Issei under the terms of 1798 Alien Enemies Act.¹⁵ In a memoir of her family's incarceration at Manzanar Assembly Center, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston described the arrest of her father:

He had become a man without a country. The land of his birth was at war with America; yet after thirty-five years here he was still prevented by law from becoming an American citizen. He was suddenly a man with no rights who looked exactly like the enemy.¹⁶

These initial arrests were of first generation, non-citizen Japanese Americans, but the forced removal and mass incarceration affected Issei and Nisei alike. In implementing the incarceration of Japanese Americans, the US government showed that it saw no difference between the immigrant Japanese Issei and the American-born citizen Nisei; they were the 'enemy' not because of their actions, but because, as DeWitt had suggested, they were an 'enemy race'. While fighting the 'good war' for democracy and equality, the United States was imprisoning tens of thousands of innocent American citizens on the basis of their race.

A series of Exclusion Orders were issued between 23 March and 22 July 1942, giving Japanese Americans notice of their impending relocation and incarceration.¹⁷ Between March and October 1942 they were imprisoned in sixteen temporary Assembly Centers, thirteen of which were in California, and the remaining three in Arizona, Oregon, and Washington. From May onwards, Japanese Americans were moved to ten permanent Relocation Centers, one each in Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, and Colorado,

Japanese Americans during the Second World War, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021).

¹⁵As Roger Daniels notes, this process, while unjust, was conducted legally, in accordance with the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, and fulfils the actual legal definition of the process of 'internment'. Daniels, 'Words Do Matter', *Discover Nikkei* (2008), n.p. and 'Alien Enemies Act' 50 U.S. Code § 21, 6 July 1798. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/50/21>. Accessed 25 April 2025.

¹⁶Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar: A True Story of Japanese American Experience During and After the World War II Internment*, (Random House, Inc., New York, 1983).

¹⁷Online Archive of California (OAC), Western Defense Command, *Civilian Exclusion Orders*, nos. 1-108, 1942 <https://oac.cdlib.org/ark:/28722/bk0014b1k1d/>. Accessed 23 April 2025.

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and two in California, Arizona, and Arkansas.¹⁸ The perimeters were surrounded by barbed wire, and manned by armed guards who had been ordered to arrest those who attempted to leave. While many were able to relocate to non-West Coast areas before the end of the war, they were still legally prohibited from returning to the West Coast until 18 December 1944, when the Supreme Court ruled that loyal American citizens could not be legally detained, and the WRA prepared to close its camps.¹⁹ All of the camps except one were closed by the end of 1945.²⁰

The administrative effort of maintaining provisions for more than 110,000 Japanese Americans was immediately evident, and newspapers, written by Japanese Americans, were quickly established in all but one of the sixteen WCCA camps. The WCCA camps were in operation for varying amounts of time and with different numbers of people in each camp, so the number of issues published varied greatly; the *Santa Anita Pacemaker*, Santa Anita Assembly Center, had fifty issues, whereas the *Arbo-Gram*, Marysville [Arboga] Assembly Center, had only four. All of the WRA Relocation Centers had a newspaper, and, as these camps were more permanent, there were many more issues. The onus for the creation of the camp press was on Japanese Americans; they were responsible for the writing, production, and distribution of the newspapers, although the WRA retained final say. The Relocation Center newspapers were able to rely upon advertisements for funding, but the WCCA camps had to contend with very limited funds and resources, with paper shortages often impacting publication.²¹ The newspapers were mimeographed, apart from in a few WRA camps which were later able to print their issues. Many of the papers included Japanese-language sections, as many Issei could not read English. The newspapers generally contained administrative information; news related to Japanese Americans, both inside and outside of the camps; birth, death, and marriage statistics; recreation schedules; sports pages; as well as editorials, humorous columns, and letters-to-the-editor segments.

The Assembly Center newspapers had a similar tone overall; while there tended to be more detail or personality in some of the more established newspapers at the larger

¹⁸For an overview of the individual camps see: Jeffrey F. Burton, et al, *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).

¹⁹Ex parte Mitsuye Endo, 323 U.S. 283 (1944), via Library of Congress (LOC) <https://www.loc.gov/item/usrep323283/>. Accessed 27 May 2025.

²⁰Tule Lake Relocation Center closed on 20 March 1946. It became a 'Segregation Center' on 15 July 1943, for 'disloyal' Japanese Americans,

²¹n.a., 'Arbogandering', *Arbo-Gram*, [1, 1] 23 May 1942, p.2, n.a., 'Notice', *Evacuazette*, [1, 2] 22 May 1942, p.2, and n.a., 'This Week's Angel', *Camp Harmony News-letter*, [1, 6] 12 June 1942, p. 1.

camps, criticism of the incarceration was largely non-existent across all of the papers. At the WRA camps, however, the character and focus of the individual newspapers did differ: the *Minidoka Irrigator* dedicated most of its pages to the exploits of Nisei soldiers; the *Heart Mountain Sentinel* included impassioned discussion of the draft resistance movement; whereas the *Denson Tribune* almost exclusively focused on encouraging Japanese Americans to relocate as soon as possible. While the Relocation Center newspapers did differ largely in what they printed, the voice of the newspapers in terms of criticism remained generally the same. They acknowledged the injustice of the situation, occasionally calling out certain individuals or groups for their role, but this was followed by an encouragement to try and make the best of their circumstances and to get on with it, in order to help the war effort.

The newspapers themselves described the reasons for their creation. The *Santa Anita Pacemaker* suggested that its purpose was to 'cover every activity of this center from the administration to vital statistics ... to who celebrated what birthday when'.²² The *Pomona Center News*, Pomona Assembly Center, asserted its aim was 'to make the stay of everyone just a little better'.²³ The *Manzanar Free Press*, Owens Valley [Manzanar] Assembly Center, suggested that it would 'try to make it as informative and as entertaining as any of the big dailies running on multiple presses'.²⁴ In stating the aims of the camp press, the editors attempted to normalise an exceptional situation: the camp newspapers were just like any other American newspaper.

American identity was a key theme in the newspapers, something that is difficult in itself to define. No reasonable attempt can be made here to comprehensively define Americanness, what is most important is the way in which it is defined by Japanese Americans in the camp newspapers. The nature of the incarceration meant that Japanese Americans were unavoidably confronted with the question of their American identity and the newspapers provided a medium for them to contemplate and present specific notions of Americanness. The wartime context meant that American identity was under a microscope more generally, with 'American' ideals, principles, and characteristics, such as freedom, unity, democracy and patriotism, offered as answers to the essential wartime question of 'Why We Fight?'. The US' national identity is often rooted in a varyingly defined but rigid ideological framework, which emphasizes specific and distinctly 'American' values which had been conceived and developed from the very beginnings of its settlement. G. K. Chesterton famously remarked that 'America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed'.²⁵ On 4 July 1942,

²²n.a., 'It's Yours', ??? [*Santa Anita Pacemaker*], [1, A] 18 April 1942, p.1.

²³n.a., 'The Policy of the Pomona Center News', *Pomona Center News*, [1, 1] 23 May 1942, p.2.

²⁴Ibid., p.2 and 'Editorial,' *Manzanar Free Press*, Vol. I, No. 1, April 11 (1942), p.1.

²⁵G.K. Chesterton, *What I Saw in America*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922), p.7.

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the *Tulare News*, Tulare Assembly Center, evoked the particular belief system of the Declaration of Independence and US Constitution, claiming that 'We, the free people, with the United States of America leading the charge, must fight, bleed, and die, that as we may preserve our unalienable rights to life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'²⁶ This 'creed' or these values may not necessarily be unique, or even accurate, representations of the reality of the United States, but what matters is that they were believed and even used as the justification for America's involvement and actions during the Second World War.

Through the newspapers, it is possible to see how Japanese Americans defined Americanness and what they considered to be 'American' values. They did not have complete freedom in publishing, but the papers provide an opportunity to see how they understood Americanness and how they presented themselves as 'American' to those outside the camps. On 11 July 1942, the *Tanforan Totalizer*, Tanforan Assembly Center, asked Japanese Americans what it meant to be an American: 'The replies were all in complete unanimity, saying that they are all Americans who believe in America's democratic principles; and by this tenet, we are all Americans – we, who firmly, steadfastly hold to our faith in the American way of life.' Individual responses included that of 18-year-old Martha Abe, who suggested that '[m]y ancestors are Japanese; but I am an American, since the word means belief in a free way of life, opposition to dictatorship and following America's Constitutional principles.' Thus, the championing of freedom and the importance of adhering to the Constitution were emphasised. Thirty-nine year-old Issei Harry Yoshida stated 'it is what I believe that makes me an American. ... Any good American would stand up 100% for the ideals and beliefs set down by the forefathers of America.'²⁷ The values espoused in the newspapers are: democracy, freedom or liberty, patriotism or a respect for America, and enthusiasm for the war effort. The discussion of identity in the newspapers cannot be read simplistically as a sincere declaration of support for the incarceration, however, and the multiple audiences of the papers should be considered. Their primary audience was those living in the camps, but the external audience was likely a consideration; the incarcerated Japanese Americans wished to declare their loyalty and patriotism to the watchful eyes of the local population and the camp administrators.

The optimism and positive tone employed by many of the WCCA camp newspapers inadvertently emphasised the irony of the incarceration. The *Pinedale Logger*, Pinedale Assembly Center) stated that 'in the year 1942 on this 4th of July we say, "We have liberty and we intend to keep it; we are serving notice to all aggressors that we Americans would welcome death rather than their rule of tyranny."²⁸ The notion of

²⁶Hiroshi Takusagawa, 'We must fight!', *Tulare News*, [1, 17] 4 July 1942, p.3.

²⁷n.a., 'Your Opinion, Please!', *Tanforan Totalizer*, [1, 9] 11 July 1942, p.7.

²⁸n.a., 'Message to the Axis', *Pinedale Logger*, [1, 7] 3 July 1942, p.3.

fighting a war for freedom, both for Americans and for the entire world, is a common theme in the newspapers. This evidently contrasts with the nature of the incarceration itself, as well as the fact that those in camps were prevented from fighting in the military until 1943, and were only able to fight in segregated units.

An article in the *Evacuazette* (Portland Assembly Center) entitled 'WE MUST! WE WILL! WE CAN!' stated that 'as a model democratic country, it is for the freedom loving people of the world to insure [sic] the preservation of all democratic governments and it is mandatory that we aid the peoples of those countries who have lost their freedom.'²⁹ In the 'Four Freedoms' speech of 6 January 1941, President Roosevelt had proclaimed support for the Allies in their 'defense of freedom' and expressed a determination to protect freedom of speech, of religion, from want, and from fear.³⁰ Japanese Americans were not unaware of the fact that they were excluded from these freedoms that the US professed to be fighting the war for. The newspapers make apparent the lack of freedom of speech in particular. The 'Four Freedoms' are referenced in an editorial of 2 November 1942, in the *Manzanar Free Press* which argued that 'American citizens of Japanese ancestry want an equal partnership and share in the enjoyment and struggle for the Four Freedoms.'³¹ Therefore, in the early months, the irony of the incarceration and the unfair treatment of Japanese Americans was acknowledged in the newspapers, without explicit criticism of the government.

The level of military control over the content of the newspapers varied. The incarceration was unconstitutional and the military would likely have been keen to avoid this being acknowledged. A policy of censorship would have been a clear violation of many American citizens' First Amendment rights in relation to freedom of the press. A certain level of censorship was to be expected and approved of, however, in line with the fact that Japanese Americans were seen as 'potential enemies'.³² Research regarding the camp newspapers is limited, as the majority of the relevant historiography focuses on the causes of the incarceration, but censorship has been the subject of several articles. Takeya Mizuno has discussed these censorship policies, arguing that the newspapers were used by the WRA as a 'public relations tool'; the positive tone of the newspapers created an optimistic and cheerful image of the camps

²⁹n.a., 'WE MUST! WE WILL! WE CAN!', *Evacuazette*, [1, 13], 30 June 1942, p.2.

³⁰The American Presidency Project (APP), Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union*, 6 January 1941.

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/209473>. Accessed 23 April 2025.

³¹D.T., 'Positive and Negative Propaganda', *Manzanar Free Press*, [2, 45] 2 November 1942, p.2.

³²DeWitt, *Final Report*. p.34.

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to counter accusations that the incarceration was unconstitutional.³³ Mizuno also investigated the Assembly Centers, arguing that the censorship was extreme, in comparison to the government's more relaxed overall policy. A number of more general analyses have been undertaken. Lauren Kessler discusses three camp newspapers, concluding that censorship was administered covertly to varying degrees in the different camps. The lack of mention of dissent in the newspapers shows that there were things that were not mentioned.³⁴ E. J. Friedlander has focused on Jerome Relocation Center's newspaper, arguing that restriction varied between camps and the *Denson Tribune* had more freedom than others, and notes that censorship was harshest in the initial months of the incarceration.³⁵ John D. Stevens also recognises that restriction was harshest in the earlier years; it largely depended upon the individual camp's relationship between the WRA administrators and the newspaper staff.³⁶ Catherine Luther investigates identity in the WRA camp newspapers, arguing that the earliest months of the incarceration saw a significant emphasis on American identity and a lack of criticism of the incarceration. As the war progressed, more acknowledgement was made of their Japanese heritage, but pride in American citizenship was still emphasised, alongside more open criticism.³⁷ Luther discusses only the WRA camps, but, importantly, this trajectory regarding identity is further confirmed by analysis of the WCCA camp press; the earliest months of the

³³Takeya Mizuno, 'Censorship in a Different Name: Press "Supervision" in Wartime Japanese American Camps 1942-1943', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 88, 1 (2011), pp.121-141, Takeya Mizuno, 'Journalism Under Military Guards and Searchlights: Newspaper Censorship at Japanese American Assembly Camps during World War II', *Journalism History*, 29, 3 (2003), pp.98-106, and Takeya Mizuno, 'The Creation of the "Free" Press in Japanese-American Camps: The War Relocation Authority's Planning and Making of the Camp Newspaper Policy', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 78, 3 (2001), pp.503-518.

³⁴Lauren Kessler, 'Fettered Freedoms: The Journalism of World War II Japanese Internment Camps', *Journalism History*, 15, 2-3 (1988), pp.70-79. See also: Stacia Bensyl, 'Lives in Print: The Literary Magazine in Japanese American Internment Camps', *Japan Studies Association Journal*, 8 (2010), pp.84-100, and Glen Feighery, 'Now We Are One': How Japanese American Internment Camp Newspapers Helped Create Communities, 1942-1943', *American Journalism*, 42, 1 (2025), pp.70-87.

³⁵E. J. Friedlander, 'Freedom of Press behind Barbed Wire: Paul Yokota and the Jerome Relocation Center Newspaper', *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 44, 4 (1985), pp.303-313.

³⁶John D. Stevens, 'From Behind Barbed Wire: Freedom of the Press in World War II Japanese Centers', *Journalism Quarterly*, 48, 2 (1971), pp.279-287.

³⁷Catherine Luther, 'Reflections of Cultural Identities in Conflict: Japanese American Internment Camp Newspapers during World War II', *Journalism History*, 29, 2 (2003), pp.69-81.

incarceration saw the heaviest censorship and the strongest commitment to the US and the war effort.

Heavy censorship was framed by the WCCA as 'supervision' or 'guidance.'³⁸ It is, naturally, impossible to know what was *not* published in the newspapers, although an example of censorship in the *Camp Harmony News-Letter*, Puyallup [Camp Harmony] Assembly Center, shows that some articles were removed from the newspaper after publication, with entire sections struck from the pages. It is unclear why these articles were removed, but certain phrases are still visible, including the words 'lost faith' and 'with the United States', which suggests that this was a topic not to be mentioned.³⁹ It is also likely that self-censorship was performed by the newspaper staff as they knew what would or would not be published. As Hisaye Yamamoto, a columnist of the *Poston Chronicle*, Poston Relocation Center, recalled in a 1994 interview:

HY [Hisaye Yamamoto]: Well, we pretty much knew the rules so we didn't write stories that would be subversive or anything like that.

EO [Emiko Omori]: So what were the rules?

HY: Patriotism, patriotism. That was the rule. ...

EO: Would you call it censorship?

HY: Oh, yeah. Sure.

EO: I mean, did you have, was the press free to speak its mind –

HY: Well, like the Manzanar press called itself the Manzanar Free Press. But I doubt it, you know.⁴⁰

The presence of censorship was also noted during the incarceration. An anonymous publication entitled *The Evacuee Speaks Newsletter* was circulated from Santa Anita Assembly Center in August 1942. It noted that the 'rigid censorship' meant appeasing the administrators took precedence over 'the more important and immediate task of maintaining the morale of center residents'.⁴¹

The role of self-censorship is important; the camp press cannot be taken as an accurate representation of Japanese Americans' views, but it shows how they responded to the war and incarceration, and how they presented this to an audience which included those outside of the camps. In 1942, the *Santa Anita Pacemaker* stated in its farewell

³⁸DeWitt, *Final Report*. p.213.

³⁹*Camp Harmony News-Letter*, [1, 11] 1 August 1942, pp.2-3.

⁴⁰Hisaye Yamamoto, 'Hisaye Yamamoto Interview', interviewed by Chizu Omori and Emiko Omori, Densho Digital Repository (DDR), 21 March 1994. <https://ddr.densho.org/narrators/143/>. Accessed 25 April 2025.

⁴¹n.a., 'The Problems of an Assembly Center Newspaper', *The Evacuee Speaks Newsletter*, 15 September 1942, p.5.

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issue that several libraries and universities had requested copies of the newspapers, proudly proclaiming that 'Harvard uses our paper in its political science courses'.⁴² Editor Paul Yokota noted: 'the eyes of the nation see the Japanese Americans at Santa Anita, ... determined to prove to America that they, too, are Americans'.⁴³ The newspaper staff were aware that their every move was being watched, and that the newspapers would be used as a historical document in years to come. For many years before Second World War, Japanese Americans' American identity had been repeatedly questioned, and the newspapers exemplify how many felt it was necessary to emphasise their Americanness, rather than openly criticise the government or military, as might be expected.

While the Assembly Center newspapers were almost entirely free of criticism, there is evidence of contemporary dissent outside of the camp newspapers. In 1942, *The Evacuee Speaks Newsletter* described the incarceration as 'a violation of the principles that our country is fighting for' and as a 'violation of the Constitutional rights of American citizens.' The initial banning of Japanese-language literature in the WCCA camps was described as 'a milder form of the Nazi "burning of books"', an opinion not proffered in the camp newspapers.⁴⁴ *The Evacuee Speaks* was critical of the camps, but still provided a diplomatic assessment of the incarceration that encouraged cooperation and loyalty to America overall. It proves that there was dissent amongst Japanese Americans during the war, and the lack of evidence of this in the newspapers shows that even the more restrained expressions of discontent were not accepted by the WCCA camp administrators.

As the years progressed, Japanese Americans were by no means free to publish whatever they pleased, but criticism of the incarceration did appear. Critical editorials from other newspapers were sometimes reprinted, but disapproval from the newspaper staff themselves usually maintained an optimistic tone. The *Gila News-Courier*, Gila River Relocation Center, stated on 9 January 1943 that 'we have missed liberty these past six months. ... We want it back again' and acknowledged that America 'is yet far from a true democracy', but still ended with a message of hope, and a belief in America's potential to be a democratic and equal nation.⁴⁵ As noted by Luther regarding the WRA camps, Japanese Americans felt it less necessary to hold

⁴²Paul Yokota, 'Records of a Curious Interval', *Santa Anita Pacemaker*, [Farewell Edition] 1942, p.21. The last dated edition of the *Santa Anita Pacemaker* is 7 October 1942, so it is likely that the farewell edition was issued in October 1942.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p.21.

⁴⁴OAC, 'Hearing Boards for the Evacuees', *The Evacuee Speaks News-Letter*, 1 August 1942, p.1. <https://oac.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/k6kd25z6/?brand=oac4>. Accessed 23 April 2025, and 'On Civil Liberties', *The Evacuee Speaks News-Letter*, 1 August 1942, p.1.

⁴⁵J.N. 'The Goal – Humanity', *Gila News-Courier*, [2, 4] 9 January 1943, p.2.

back their criticism as the war progressed, whether due to the fact that it was becoming increasingly difficult to justify the incarceration, or because they felt they had proved themselves, as exemplified by their increased role in the war effort and the successes of the all-Nisei Battalion.⁴⁶ The *Rohwer Outpost*, Rohwer Relocation Center, was more overtly critical; on 10 March 1943, it described the removal and incarceration as 'selfish and undemocratic measures' going 'against the fundamental tenets of the US Constitution.'⁴⁷ Again, on 17 April 1943, the *Outpost* highlighted the importance of the US being 'a unified nation' and criticised DeWitt for 'carry[ing] on Jap-baiting tactics' arguing that 'the safety of not only the West [C]oast but the whole of the United States is endangered' by such divisiveness.⁴⁸ The editorial importantly criticised the implication that Japanese Americans were incapable of assimilating, and becoming Americans.

This criticism in the Relocation Centers suggests that censorship had eased since the Assembly Centers, as evidenced by the alignment of editorials written in the camp with those written outside, many of which were reprinted in the camp newspapers. An article entitled 'My Only Crime is My Face,' was published in *Liberty* magazine, on 14 August 1943, by journalist Mary Oyama, a Japanese American, incarcerated first in Santa Anita Assembly Center and then Heart Mountain Relocation Center. She asserted that:

[A]lthough we still feel that the basis on which we were evacuated (because of racial extraction) was unjust, and although we believe our incarceration was illegal (because of our American Bill of Rights!), we have decided that the fullest cooperation with the government is the very best way to prove our loyalty to our country.⁴⁹

The *Heart Mountain Sentinel* referred to Oyama's article written with 'characteristic feminine sensitivity', acknowledging the importance of a national magazine printing 'a nisei's side of this great tragedy', and endorsing the article as 'required reading'.⁵⁰ The article acknowledged the illegality of the incarceration, but still encouraged

⁴⁶Luther, 'Reflections of Cultural Identities in Conflict', *Journalism History* (2003).

⁴⁷n.a., 'Democracy at Home', *Rohwer Outpost*, [2, 20] 10 March 1943, p.6.

⁴⁸n.a., 'Is a Jap always a Jap?', *Rohwer Outpost*, [2, 31] 17 April 1943, p.6, and n.a., 'DeWitt on Japanese', *Manzanar Free Press*, [3, 31] 17 April 1943, p.2.

⁴⁹Mary Oyama, 'My Only Crime is My Face', *Liberty*, 14 August 1943. pp. 11, pp.57-58 (p.58). See also: Eddie Shimano, 'Blueprint for a Slum', *Common Ground*, [Summer] 1943, pp.78-85.

⁵⁰n.a., 'Liberty Features Mary Oyama's Moving Article on Evacuation', *Heart Mountain Sentinel*, [2, 32] 7 August 1943, p.4, and n.a., "My Only Crime is My Face", *Heart Mountain Sentinel*, [2, 32] 7 August 1943, p.4.

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cooperation and loyalty. The similarity of the nature of the criticism in the camp editorials to Oyama's article demonstrates the importance accorded by Japanese Americans to how they were represented to outside audiences.

The voices of women, such as Oyama, have largely been ignored by scholarship of the incarceration. While several general studies of the incarceration have briefly discussed women's roles, there is a lack of research regarding women's experience in the camps, and even more specifically within the newspapers. A 'general' account of life in the camps is captured in the existing literature, but upon closer scrutiny the current historiography obscures the experience of women, as the 'general' is in actuality almost exclusively male. A focus on women's experiences provides an understanding of the ways in which Japanese American women engaged with American identity in distinct ways. There is a limited amount of work which provides either a brief survey of women's lives as part of a larger study, or focuses on specific themes such as sport, beauty, and military service.⁵¹ Women's voices in the camp newspapers are either given passing mention or are not discussed at all, and this constitutes a significant gap in the historiography.

Historical assessment of this omission of Japanese American women began in 1984, with Valerie J. Matsumoto's article entitled 'Japanese American Women during the Second World War'. Matsumoto argued that women's experiences in the camps were complex and diverse; while women faced racism and the obvious stresses that came with the upheaval of their lives, they were given more freedom in some facets of life. The communal living conditions meant that Issei women now had more leisure time, whereas Nisei women were untied from restrictive traditions of arranged marriage and had more freedom in terms of work opportunities.⁵² Evelyn Nakano Glenn's 1986 sociological study *Issei, Nisei, War Bride* focuses on the labour and family structures of three generations of Japanese American women in domestic service. Glenn, like Matsumoto, argues that the traditional patriarchal structure of family was weakened

⁵¹There are a number of articles that emphasise more specific aspects of the lives of Japanese American women, including: Evelyn Nakano Glenn, 'The Dialectics of Wage Work: Japanese-American Women and Domestic Service, 1905-1940', *Feminist Studies*, 6, 3 (1980) pp.427-471, Leslie A. Ito, 'Japanese American Women and the Student Relocation Movement, 1942-1945', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 21, 3 (2000), pp.1-24, Valerie J. Matsumoto, 'Desperately Seeking 'Deirdre': Gender Roles, Multicultural Relations, and Nisei Women Writers of the 1930s', *Frontiers*, 12, 1 (1991), pp.19-32, and Eileen H. Tamura, 'Gender, Schooling and Teaching, and the Nisei in Hawaii': Episode in American Immigration History, 1900-1940', *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 14, 4 (1995), pp.3-26.

⁵²Valerie J. Matsumoto, 'Japanese American Women during World War II', *Frontiers*, 8, 1 (1984), pp.6-14.

in the camps; Nisei who were wed in the incarceration years tended to have more equal marriages than those of their parents as well as more work opportunities.⁵³

Mei Nakano's book *Japanese American Women* also takes an intergenerational approach with a particular emphasis on the second-generation women.⁵⁴ Nakano notes the importance of increased leisure time for Issei women, as well as the weakening of patriarchal family structures. This change in family life through an enforced communal way of living meant that private family time was made largely impossible, and time was spent instead with friends and neighbours. Intergenerational studies such as these are significant, as scholarship tends to focus on Nisei women, largely due to the accessibility of sources related to their experiences. It is important that Issei voices are not overlooked, and interviews, memoirs, art, and other writings can be used to add nuance to the understanding of Japanese American experiences.⁵⁵

Samuel O. Regalado's 'Incarcerated Sport' focuses on the experiences of Nisei women by investigating the ways in which sport developed as a recreational activity in the WRA camps. Regalado argued that softball provided a means of maintaining women's morale, and that it helped to engender the sense of independence that they had come to experience in other areas of camp life. Mention is made of coverage of women's sports in the newspapers and how this differed from men's sports; the achievements of Japanese American women were underemphasised, and coverage, on occasion, focused instead entirely on their appearance.⁵⁶ Regalado's findings regarding the WRA

⁵³Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

⁵⁴Mei Nakano, *Japanese American Women: Three Generations 1890-1990*, (Berkeley: Mina Press Publishing, 1990).

⁵⁵On Issei women, see: Yuji Ichioka, 'Amerika Nadeshiko: Japanese Immigrant Women in the United States, 1900-1924', *Pacific Historical Review*, 69, 2 (1980), p. 339-357, Kelli Y. Nakamura, 'Issei Women and Work: Washerwomen, Prostitutes, Midwives, and Barbers', *The Hawaiian Journal of History*, 49, 1 (2015), pp.119-148, Kazuhiro Oharazeki, 'Listening to the Voices of 'Other' Women in Japanese North America: Japanese Prostitutes and Barmaids in the American North West, 1887-1920', *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 32, 4 (2013), pp.5-40, Ryoko Okamura, 'Untold Stories of Issei Women: Collective Images and Individual Experiences in Japanese American Oral History', *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, 28 (2021), pp. 9-40, Eileen Sunada Sarasohn, *Issei Women: Echoes from Another Frontier* (Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1998), and Yukari Takai, 'Recrafting Marriage in Meiji Hawai'i, 1885-1913', *Gender & History*, 31, 3 (2019), pp.646-664.

⁵⁶Samuel O. Regalado, 'Incarcerated Sport: Nisei Women's Softball and Athletics During Japanese American Internment', *Journal of Sport History*, 27, 3 (2000), pp.431-444.

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camps are also evidenced in the WCCA camp newspapers, where women's sports columns used condescending language and often emphasised 'the shapely legs' and appearance of women over their sporting ability.⁵⁷

The experiences of the few Japanese American women in the Women's Army Corps are examined in Brenda Moore's *Serving Our Country*. Moore noted that the service of Japanese Americans had been largely forgotten in Second World War historiography, and that of Japanese American women had been ignored completely. Some Japanese American women remained in the military, but most returned to domestic work or marriage, fulfilling their desire to achieve the American dream.⁵⁸

Matsumoto's earlier article was developed in *City Girls*, which provides a useful study of Japanese American women prior to the war, and how this impacted their lives within the camps and the years that followed.⁵⁹ It considers the ways in which Nisei women navigated their lives as women, as daughters, and as Americans. Matsumoto argues that involvement in girls' clubs prior to the war allowed Nisei women to create similar clubs and communities within the camps, and provided them with skills to assist with new employment opportunities. The camp newspapers are discussed; women's features were similar to those of the mainstream press, focusing on women as homemakers, wives, and mothers, and showcased Nisei women's desire to connect to American culture. Malia McAndrew's article 'Japanese American Beauty Pageants and Minstrel Shows' investigates the newspapers' representation of gender and Americanness.⁶⁰ The article notes the ways in which girls and young women in the camps constructed an American identity aesthetically, by attempting to present themselves as what they believed was the American ideal; physically attractive and patriotic. The Assembly Center newspapers encouraged women to be beautiful for the benefit of men; the *Arbo-Gram* encouraged women to 'keep your feminine appearance' because 'a boy may be casting longing glances in your direction as you

⁵⁷n.a., 'Chance for Mrs', *Mercedian*, [1, 3] 23 June 1942, p.4. See also: Lillian Fukaye, 'The Feminine Side', *Turlock TAC*, [1, 1] 3 June 1942, p.3, n.a., "'A" Girls Frolic', *Camp Harmony News-Letter*, [1, 7] 17 June 1942, p.4, and n.a., 'Girls Sports', *Evacuazette*, [1, 6] 5 June 1942, p.4.

⁵⁸Brenda L. Moore, *Serving Our Country: Japanese American Women in the Military during World War II*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

⁵⁹Valerie J. Matsumoto, *City Girls: The Nisei Social World in Los Angeles, 1920-1950*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). For postwar era, see: Precious Yamaguchi, *Experiences of Japanese American Women during and after World War II: Living in Internment Camps and Rebuilding life afterwards*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014).

⁶⁰Malia McAndrew, 'Japanese American Beauty Pageants and Minstrel Shows: The Performance of Gender and Race by Nisei Youth During World War II' *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 7.1 (2014), pp.42-64.

saunter through this hot and dusty camp.⁶¹ General optimism was encouraged, the *Mercedian*, Merced Assembly Center, stated that 'when things are worst find something to smile about'.⁶² Support for the war effort was applauded, whether through 'building an enduring generation of finer Americans' as a mother, or 'keep[ing] up with women in war industries' by working on camouflage nets and in mess halls.⁶³ McAndrew also investigates the ways in which the Americanness of Japanese Americans was depicted as being superior to that of other minority groups, particularly through minstrel shows which denigrated and caricatured African Americans.

In both WCCA and WRA newspapers there were several women's features which provide a vital insight into the representation of women during Second World War. Some of the newspapers had individual women's articles dotted throughout, such as an article from the *Manzanar Free Press* entitled 'To the Ladies: Helpful Hints on Skin Care'.⁶⁴ Women's columns such as the *Tanforan Totalizer*'s 'With the Womenfolk' gave advice on dealing with unfamiliar conditions, such as hot weather and dry skin.⁶⁵ In the WCCA newspapers, there were the Arbo-Gram's 'Big Sister' column; the *Mercedian*'s 'Fem-a-lites' column; and the 'Feminine Forum' column in the *Santa Anita Pacemaker*. There was also a 'Girls Sports' column in the *Evacuazette* and various women's sports articles throughout the newspapers. In the WRA camps, the *Minidoka Irrigator*, Minidoka Relocation Center, had a women's column called 'Feminidoka', which included similar articles about hair and clothing. This column was edited by Cherry Kinoshita, who discussed the column in a later interview, recalling that she wrote 'light things, you know, like what do you do with your hairstyle when the dust is blowing and all that kind of silly stupid stuff'. Despite the column's frivolous content, Kinoshita noted the struggles of being incarcerated, stating that 'it really hit me that, you know, here we are prisoners. We're prisoners and we hadn't done anything wrong'.⁶⁶ There were also the *Granada Pioneer*'s, Granada [Amache] Relocation Center, 'Between us Girls' column; the *Topaz Times*'s, Topaz Relocation Center, 'Women's Mirror' page; and the *Tulean Dispatch*, Tule Lake Relocation Center, included women's articles in

⁶¹ n.a., 'Big Sister', *Arbo-Gram*, [1, 1] 23 May 1942, p.3.

⁶² Lily Shoji, 'Overheard', *Mercedian*, [1, 20] 21 August 1942, p.4

⁶³ n.a., 'Facing the Future', *Fresno Grapevine*, [Vignette] October 1942, p. 71 and n.a., 'Feminine Forum', *Santa Anita Pacemaker*, [Farewell Edition] 7 October 1942, p.11.

⁶⁴ n.a., 'To the Ladies: Helpful Hints on Skin Care', *Manzanar Free Press*, [1, 6] 29 April 1942, p.3.

⁶⁵ n.a., 'With the Womenfolk', *Tanforan Totalizer*, [1, 4] 6 June 1942, p.5.

⁶⁶ Cherry Kinoshita, 'Cherry Kinoshita Interview [Segment 9]', interview by Becky Fukuda and Tracy Lai, DDR, 26 September 1997

<https://ddr.densho.org/interviews/ddr-densho-1000-34-1/>. Accessed 25 April 2025.

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several of its special editions. Overall, the women's features predominantly include articles regarding: clothing, hair, and make-up; relationships; motherhood; and sports.

This brief survey of the focus and emphasis of content in the camps reveals a stereotypically feminine focus on beauty, clothing, and relationships, and this was occasionally related directly to the war effort. A light-hearted article in the *El Joaquin*, Stockton Assembly Center, asked: 'Girls ... are you doing your part in this country's war effort? Are you doing your best to maintain morale in the United States? Are you beautiful? Are you doing anything tonight?'⁶⁷ 'Fem-a-lites' asserted: 'When things are worst find something to smile about. Keep your chin up and keep 'em smiling.'⁶⁸ Women's contribution to the war effort in the camps was to be 'beautiful', and to maintain morale by keeping a smile on their face. As Melissa McEuen noted 'if keeping morale high seemed the ultimate priority on the American home front, then women's bodies would be put into service of the goal'.⁶⁹ The women's war effort was very different from men's, and Japanese American women's experience in relation to wartime identity was even more complicated given that they could not, due to their imprisonment, participate in the ways that other women were able to. While they engaged in a range of work in the camps, such as making camouflage nets for the military or helping with war bond drives, they were largely excluded from serving in the auxiliaries or working in factories.⁷⁰

The nature of the women's features offers an opportunity to investigate the intersection of race and gender. Japanese Americans, especially women, are often seen as a monolith or a statistic, and future scholarship should aim to amplify their voices, and make use of the abundant material that is readily available. By using the newspapers alongside oral history interviews, written testimony, paintings, memoirs, and novels, it is possible to include Japanese American women in the historiography to add nuance to the greater understanding of women's experiences in the Second World War.⁷¹

⁶⁷n.a., 'The Public', *El Joaquin*, [1, 2] 3 June 1942, p.2.

⁶⁸Lily Shoji, 'Fem-a-lites', *Mercedian*, [1, 20] 21 August 1942, p.4.

⁶⁹Melissa A. McEuen, *Making War, Making Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1941-1945*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), p.57.

⁷⁰Japanese American Citizens League, *They Work for Victory: The Story of Japanese Americans and the War Effort*, (c.1945)

<https://omeka.uvu.edu/exhibits/show/japaneseamericaninternment/item/237>.

Accessed 28 May 2025.

⁷¹Oral History Interviews, DDR <https://ddr.densho.org/narrators/>. Accessed 21 April 2025. Memoirs by Japanese American women include: Jeanette S. Arakawa, *The Little Exile*, (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2017), Mary Matsuda Gruenewald, *Looking Like the Enemy: My Story of Imprisonment in Japanese-American Internment Camps*, (Troutdale, Ore.: New Sage Press, 2005), Hisako Hibi, *Peaceful Painter: Memoirs of an Issei Woman*

Scholarship about women during the war generally focuses on the experiences of white women, and often reduces a diverse range of experiences into a seemingly singular narrative. The specific experience of incarceration is especially obscured by this.

The existing historiography of the incarceration requires examination and expansion. Despite the vast amount of source material, past scholarship has favoured a top-down approach. As Roger Daniels notes, 'much of the Asian American experience is [...] 'negative history' or 'history that recounted what was done to these immigrant peoples rather than what they themselves did.'⁷² Emphasising the voices of Japanese Americans through analysis of the camp press, prioritising women, allows for a greater understanding of what it means to be an American, and for a more complete and thorough understanding of the Second World War and its legacies. The incarceration itself also questions the prominent view of the Second World War as the 'good war'. While the US claimed to be fighting the war for democracy and freedom, tens of thousands of Japanese Americans were imprisoned unconstitutionally in incarceration camps. Despite this injustice, the newspapers often positively represent the US and the war effort, even in the cases of criticism of the incarceration; In Munson's words, Japanese Americans were 'pathetically eager' to emphasise their loyalty to the United States. This positive portrayal, however, was not a sign of a lack of dissent amongst Japanese Americans. The camp press was used rather as a vehicle for Japanese Americans to demonstrate their loyalty and Americanness which had so obviously been invalidated by the incarceration, and for decades prior. As Catherine Luther notes, changes in the newspapers over the course of incarceration show the developing perceptions of Japanese American loyalty and the incarceration, and this article's inclusion of the WCCA camp newspapers provides evidence of this in the very early months of the incarceration.⁷³ By the end of the war, Japanese Americans had gone some way to proving their loyalty, and felt more able to criticise the incarceration and the contradictions of the 'good war' narrative much more overtly.

Artist, (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2004), Lily Yuriko Nakai Havey, *Gasa Gasa Girl Goes to Camp: A Nisei Youth behind a World War II Fence*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2014), Haru Matsui [Ayako Ishigaki], *Restless Wave: My Life in Two Worlds, a Memoir*, (New York: Modern Age Books, 1940), and Kiyo Sato, *Kiyo's Story: A Japanese-American Family's Quest for the American Dream*, (New York: Soho Press, 2009). On art in the camps see: Delphine Hirasuna, *The Art of Gaman: Arts and Crafts from the Japanese American Internment Camps, 1942-1946*, (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2005) and Kristine C. Kuramitsu, 'Internment and Identity in Japanese American Art,' *American Quarterly*, 47, 4 (1995), pp.619-658.

⁷²Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), p.xiii, p.4.

⁷³Luther, 'Reflections of Cultural Identities in Conflict', *Journalism History* (2003).