On 7 December 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. Just over two months later, on 19 February 1942, the United States Government issued Executive Order 9066, ordering the removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast.¹ Brian Masaru Hayashi’s introduction to *Democratizing the Enemy* offers a brief summary. About 110,000 Japanese Americans were removed and were held in ten internment camps. These camps were located in Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming.² Almost two-thirds of Japanese Americans held U.S. citizenship, and their removal cost them “hundreds of millions of dollars in lost property and other assets.”³ Living conditions at the camps were difficult. In 1943 the War Relocation Authority (WRA) set up a Loyalty Registration, and interned Japanese Americans were also subjected to the draft.

The first WRA camp to close was Jerome, Arkansas, closed on 30 June 1944. Tule Lake, California, closed last, on 20 March 1946. The other eight WRA camps closed

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³ Ibid., 2.
in October and November of 1945. In 1948 the Evacuation Claims Act gave partial compensation for losses, and in 1988 the Civil Liberties Act gave additional payments.

Regarding terminology, this paper generally uses the term “internment camp” rather than “concentration camp.” Concentration camp is probably the preferred term in the literature, and perhaps the more accurate one to use (see Hayashi’s brief discussion of the term and Holocaust literature). However, like Hayashi, I wish to avoid confusion with Nazi concentration camps, which were intended to house populations prior to their organized murder, and I have most often used the term “internment camps” instead.

This paper is concerned mostly with memoir, but there are several sources that offer an entry point to the study of Japanese American internment. *Densho Encyclopedia* is an online publication by Densho, an organization whose “mission is to preserve the testimonies of Japanese Americans who were unjustly incarcerated during World War II before their memories are extinguished.” This website has hundreds of articles.

The Japanese American National Museum has a website too, and also a subsite for their Civil Liberties Archives and Study Center. Both offer many online materials,
and their Center, among other things, has a list of major sources. This paper was written in Utah, and so the Utah camp, Topaz, is of special interest. Topaz also has a museum with a website. In addition, Leonard J. Arrington, a renowned Utah and LDS scholar, has written on Topaz. His publications include “The Price of Prejudice,” a faculty honor lecture delivered at Utah State University in 1962. The lecture is particularly concerned with economic and statistical aspects of Topaz.

Two print sources of interest for a new reader are Ansel Adams’ photography of the Manzanar camp (in California) and Japanese Americans: From Relocation to Redress edited by Roger Daniels, Sandra C. Taylor, and Harry H.L. Kitano. It is important to balance text with other evidence, and Adams’s photography is of course impressive. The edited volume contains works by a broad range of authors, and serves as an in-depth introduction to this field of study.

While some of the above sources focus broadly on Japanese American interment, memoir is specific and personal. Although individually unique, several common threads run through these memoirs. Following Pearl Harbor, many Japanese American families burned all the documents and possessions that could link them to Japan. Racism was

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14 Daniels, Taylor, and Kitano, From Relocation to Redress.
rampant, and vandals commonly broke local Japanese gravestones. The FBI was quick to grab men, disappearing them for months and leaving women to supervise the forced relocation of their families. These sources do not describe what happened to the men questioned by the FBI, but two of the three emerged broken. One died within a few years, and one nearly did. Secondhand dealers smelled profit, and offered Japanese women insulting prices for the goods they were forced to sell. Many women preferred to smash their heirloom china rather than see it sold to unscrupulous dealers. At the camps, mess halls were highly damaging to a sense of family life. Younger children, not knowing any other way of life, began to include ‘waiting in line at mess hall’ when they played house. This essay endeavors to trace these threads through several works, including memoirs, journals, children’s books, and works based on oral history.

The first of these is Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston’s *Farewell to Manzanar*. Houston was seven years old when the U.S. government removed her, her mother, and her siblings to Manzanar internment camp. Houston’s father owned a commercial license and a boat, which made him a natural target for the FBI. He was picked up a few weeks after Pearl Harbor and taken to North Dakota, where he was held for nine months. In many ways, Houston’s story is about her father, about who he was before and after internment, and the personal cost of his experience. When he returned, “he was not the same man. Something terrible had happened to him in North Dakota.” Later, after internment, he

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16 Ibid., 38–39.

17 Ibid., 38.
turned to drinking, and nearly killed himself with alcohol.\textsuperscript{18} This experience “sobered him up permanently” and he leased 100 acres north of Santa Clara. He continued to live there, “raising premium berries,” until his death.\textsuperscript{19} 336 men were sent to Montana or South Dakota (raising a question of why Houston recalls her father as being held in North Dakota).\textsuperscript{20} Ben Uchida and Yoshiko Uchida (not from the same family) both record similar experiences.\textsuperscript{21} For the men who were taken, and their families (if they had them), the FBI questioning could be especially damaging.

Houston includes several other threads common to the memoir literature, such as burning material after Pearl Harbor and secondhand dealers. He burned a beautiful flag he had carried from Hiroshima as well as documents and “anything that might suggest he still had some connection to Japan.”\textsuperscript{22} Japanese Americans knew immediately that they had to appear as American as possible, even if it literally meant trying to burn their Japanese past out of their lives. Despite this measure, her father was still taken to the Dakotas and her family was forcibly removed from the West coast.

Secondhand dealers’ attempts to acquire Japanese Americans’ property brought out other common themes. Japanese Americans were only allowed to take a few suitcases

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 144–49.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 149.


\textsuperscript{22} Houston and Houston, \textit{Farewell to Manzanar}, 6.
with them; almost everything they owned had to be left behind, either with a government that clearly cared nothing for their rights, with friends, abandoned, or sold cheaply to secondhand dealers. Houston notes that “the secondhand dealers had been prowling around for weeks, like wolves, offering humiliating prices for goods and furniture they knew many of us would have to sell sooner or later.”

Houston’s mother had already abandoned all but her most valuable possessions, and what remained reads almost like a list of middle-class wealth, the kind of inherited wealth a family passes from generation to generation for memory, presentation, and as a monetary safeguard against disaster. She had “her pottery, her silver, heirlooms like the kimonos Granny had brought from Japan, tea sets, lacquered tables, and one fine old set of china, blue and white porcelain, almost translucent.” A dealer offered her fifteen dollars for the china. With all the stress of forced relocation, Houston’s mother was already at her emotional limit. She took “a dinner plate and hurled it at the floor right in front of” the dealer’s feet. Ironically, the dealer protested that “those are valuable dishes!” but Houston’s mother chased him from the house, smashing one piece after another. When he was gone, she continued until the whole set was destroyed. Most obviously, this expresses the frustration and insults borne by the Japanese American community. It also shows the transfer of wealth from Japanese Americans to whites. White eagerness to acquire culturally Japanese items is interesting. Although they hated and feared the Japanese and Japanese Americans, they

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23 Ibid., 12.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 13.
were excited to acquire not just Japanese land and businesses, but Japanese cultural objects as well.

Houston’s story of her post-war high school’s carnival queen competition has a similar and far more familiar note of racism and desire. Her homeroom chose her to compete in the contest, and she was careful in how she crafted her image:

I knew I couldn’t beat the other contestants at their own game, that is, look like a bobbysoxer. Yet neither could I look too Japanese-y. I decided to go exotic, with a flower-print sarong, black hair loose and a hibiscus flower behind my ear. When I walked barefooted out onto the varnished gymnasium floor, between the filled bleachers, the howls and whistles from the boys were double what had greeted any of the other girls. 26

There was apparently some attempt to fix the contest and elect another girl. Houston sensed that she “would lose either way,” but a well-meaning male high-school friend prevented the fix and Houston won. 27 Her father was furious; her mother helped her pick out a dress for the coronation ceremony. Her mother chose a modest ball-gown that Houston felt was “absolutely right. I had used a low-cut sarong to win the contest. But once chosen I would be a white-gowned figure out of Gone With the Wind; I would be respectable.” 28 Houston manipulated her racial category, and managed to win the contest, but does not seem to have won respectability (she was not invited to the after-party). 29

This story could be unpacked at length. Perhaps its most important points are Houston’s high-school awareness of how to use her racial category to generate sex appeal, and her desire to be something more than a sex object, to have the respect of her peers.

26 Ibid., 150.
27 Ibid., 151.
28 Ibid., 155.
29 Ibid., 157.
Yoshiko Uchida’s story shares many similarities with Houston’s. First, Uchida’s father was also picked up by the FBI, though he was taken to Missoula, Montana rather than the Dakotas.\textsuperscript{30} He was picked up almost immediately after Pearl Harbor, perhaps even the same day, and was not ‘released’ to Topaz until May 8, 1942.\textsuperscript{31} However, unlike Houston’s father, it seems that Uchida’s father was in reasonable shape when he returned from Missoula. He welcomed his family and was talkative, keeping other residents up discussing until his wife sent everyone home at 10pm.\textsuperscript{32} He sustained this early activity and served on many committees at Topaz. He was prominent enough to draw the attention of people who saw him as a collaborator with the camp administrators, and this threat of violence prompted the camp administrators to grant him an early release.\textsuperscript{33} Whatever the reason, Uchida’s father was far less damaged by his time with the FBI.

Uchida’s narrative focuses mostly on her time before internment; she is not actually a prisoner (at Tanforan) until just over halfway through this memoir.\textsuperscript{34} Her dual heritage is a major focus of this work. Her mother made pongee dresses with red and blue belts for Uchida and her sister to wear to the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, but she and her family also visited Japan while she was still young.\textsuperscript{35} At the time, she was trying to be American and neither she nor her sister were willing to learn Japanese. She

\textsuperscript{30} Uchida, \textit{The Invisible Thread}, 65.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 63–64, 81.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 82.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 101, 113, 125.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 74.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 4, 51–52.
mentions an episode where a photographer was trying to edge her out of a girl scouts picture, but a white friend of hers grabbed her and held her in the frame. Uchida closes her pre-war narrative with a description of her early enrollment at the University of California at Berkeley where she became an active part of a Japanese American social scene centered around the Japanese Men’s and Women’s Student Clubs. She was even elected President of the Japanese Women’s Student Club for a year.\(^{36}\)

However, Uchida does not neglect her time at Topaz and Tanforan, and her work in education was a large part of that time. She initially worked with her sister at a nursery, but was not a good fit and soon moved to the elementary school. She observes that her elementary students were “unaware of the irony” of reciting the Pledge of Allegiance behind barbed wire.\(^{37}\) However, Ben Uchida’s journal indicates that he was continually aware of exactly such ironies. He was twelve when first imprisoned, placing him a year or two out of elementary, but his sarcasm and awareness of the situation are strong enough that one wonders how oblivious the elementary students really were. How young did one have to be to miss this irony?

Uchida touches several other themes of camp life, including the lack of privacy, sickness, and dust storms. Privacy was virtually non-existent, with people only separated from each other by thin partitions. The partitions did not even extend from the floor to the roof, there was a “foot-high open space between the sloping stable roof and the partition tops.”\(^{38}\) Uchida could hear nearly every noise made in the stables. The lack of privacy,

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 15, 55, 57, 59.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 83–84.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 80.
lack of living space, and poor conditions combined to make for an especially difficult situation any time bodily functions were less than optimal. While her sister was too sick to realistically visit the latrine, Uchida would make a racket rustling newspapers to cover the noise of her sister using a makeshift bedpan. When her father was being threatened, Uchida attempted to turn disease to her advantage, recalling a female artist at Tanforan who hung out a quarantine sign to gain some privacy.\textsuperscript{39}

Uchida also makes it clear that the dust storms in Topaz were more than a nuisance. They were a major hazard. One was bad enough that it swept all of their chicken coops and chickens away. Internees took cover in their barracks during intense storms. Even years later, Uchida wrote that, “I dreaded those dust storms more than anything I have encountered in my life, but we had many more before I left Topaz. Even today the mere thought of them churns me up inside.”\textsuperscript{40} These days, reports of bad weather tend to use a norm based on the viewpoint of a car-dependent person who would not contemplate walking further than a block under the most sunny and gloriously mild of weather conditions. After so many exaggerated reports, it can become difficult to take reports of inclement weather seriously. Uchida, however, is not a hyperbolic writer and she forces one to realize that these dust storms were a real force, likely capable of shutting down entire towns, much less shabbily built internment camps.

Uchida is a prolific writer, having over two dozen works to her name, including many relating to Japanese Americans. One such work is \textit{The Bracelet}, illustrated by Joanna Yardley. \textit{The Bracelet} tells the story of Emi, a young girl taken to Tanforan and

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 114.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 103–4.
later Topaz. Her father is imprisoned by the FBI in Montana because he worked for a Japanese company. A white friend gives Emi a bracelet just as Emi is leaving for Tanforan. The main point of the story is that when Emi loses the bracelet, she finds that she is still able to remember her friend, that treasured friends, family, and even possessions can be remembered and are “things we carry in our hearts and take with us no matter where we are sent.”  

41 Although this book is in many ways autobiographical and certainly has much history, its primary message is more general, saying that although material possessions may be taken from you, connections to loved ones are less easily severed. And of course, with all the questions children ask, this book has a strong likelihood of encouraging both parents and children to consider Japanese American internment.

Ken Mochizuki has published multiple children’s books, including two on Japanese Americans, *Baseball Saved Us* in 1993 and *Heroes* in 1995. Dom Lee illustrated both. *Baseball Saved Us* won a Parent’s Choice Award in 1993. It is set in an internment camp, and although it does not say specifically, the main character is first taken to a race track and then to what seems like a desert, suggesting that Mochizuki may be referencing Tanforan and Topaz. Mochizuki shows the lack of privacy, and also mentions that teenagers ate with their friends, a common practice in the camps and one that was the cause of much familial breakdown and dysfunction. Houston, for example, wrote that, “my own family, after three years of mess hall living, collapsed as an integrated unit.” 42 But the book’s main point is about baseball, surveillance and racism,


42 Houston and Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 32.
and acceptance through victory. Surveillance is a main theme, with the guard in the
watchtower often referenced. During the championship game, the main character is one
strike from being out. He sees the guard watching, and this time, gets angry and hits a
home run. His teammates hoist him on their shoulders and he gets a thumbs-up from the
guard. Later, after internment, the boy is playing on a team. His skills in camp got him a
spot, despite his small size. The crowd was screaming “Jap” at him, and he was unsettled.
Then he remembers the guard, calms his nerves (rather than getting angry) and hits it
over the fence. The book closes with him at the middle of a jubilant team. Mochizuki’s
book is positive, but there is a note that is perhaps both disturbing and accurate:
acceptance is earned, it is not given, it is not a right. It makes sense for a playground, and
the critique may be that adult society is no better.

*Heroes* is told from the perspective of a Japanese American boy whose only
friends insist on playing war games where he is cast as the enemy. Interestingly, one of
the other boys is black. The boy protests that his dad was in the army too, but his friends
do not believe him. His father and uncle were both in the war, but neither are willing to
talk about it and neither offer the boy much support. Things reach a climax when the
other boys chase Danny all the way back to his father’s gas station, and crying, he asks
his father and uncle for help. The next day, his father and uncle pick him up from school,
both wearing their medals and his uncle wearing his officer’s uniform. The other kids are
thoroughly impressed, and the boy is now accepted into their group, even leading them as

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43 Ken Mochizuki, *Baseball Saved Us*, illustrated by Dom Lee (New York: Lee &
they run off to play football.\textsuperscript{44} Again, it is a happy ending, but there is perhaps a similar critique, that acceptance must be earned. This time, one sees that adult acceptance is earned not through baseball, but through war. It is positive, and there is much support for this view of the famous all-Japanese 442nd winning acceptance for Japanese Americans, but the narrative remains uncomfortable.

Rather than being a children’s book, \textit{The Children of Topaz} is a book that focuses on the perspective of children. Coauthors Michael O. Tunnell and George W. Chilcoat based their work on a diary from Lillian Yamauchi Hori’s 1943 third-grade class at Topaz. The book is structured around selected journal entries with each entry supported by a great deal of background text and commentary by the authors. The introduction starts two new threads, and makes an interesting point about racism. Chilcoat and Tunnell include a photograph of vandalized Japanese American gravestones, and also a short paragraph about the suicide of World War I veteran Hideo Murata.\textsuperscript{45} Regarding racism, the authors cite a 1942 Gallup poll showing that the American people hated Hitler, rather than the Germans as a whole. With the Japanese, however, the racial category itself, rather than just the Emperor, was hated.\textsuperscript{46} Their introduction also notes that, at the time, Topaz was the fifth largest city in Utah.\textsuperscript{47}

The classroom journal provides a day-to-day view of camp life. Illness is mentioned repeatedly, starting with cold and flu, then flu again, and finally an outbreak

\textsuperscript{44} Ken Mochizuki, \textit{Heroes}, illustrated by Dom Lee (New York: Lee & Low Books, 1995).

\textsuperscript{45} Tunnell and Chilcoat, \textit{The Children of Topaz}, 5, 9.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 7.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 16.
of polio. Because of the close quarters and lack of private living space, illness was particularly likely to spread in the camps. With a deadly virus such as polio, this was a serious concern. Plumbing and fires were other continuous problems. Although the plumbing was usually just a major inconvenience, the children noted in their May 18, 1943 entry that “Kimiko’s mother was burned very badly by hot water.” Fire, the authors observe, was a danger because of the “tar-paper-and-wood construction” of the barracks. Less disastrous are the frequent mentions of Boy Scouts and Brownies. Apparently it was not unusual for the Boy Scouts to be allowed out to go hiking. Regarding education philosophy at Topaz, the authors reference Eleanor Gerard Sekerak, a white high school teacher in the camp, and explain that, “the core philosophy of the camp schools was to teach the democratic way of life.” The authors go on to note that despite this absurdity, Ms. Yamauchi Hori’s class participated actively in the American Red Cross, thus showing patriotism. However, with respect to the major event of James Wakasa’s shooting, the diary records only that “On Sunday evening at 7:30 o’clock, an old man, Mr. James H. Wakasa passed away.”

One of the stranger connections within the memoir literature are the observations of young children playing house. The authors quote an uncited passage by Yoshiko Uchida, which describes how the children would simulate mealtime by waiting in lines at

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48 Ibid., 23, 31, 35.
49 Ibid., 24, 39, 55.
50 Ibid., 24, 58, 62, 65.
51 Ibid., 18–19.
52 Ibid., 27.
imaginary mess halls, rather than eating in kitchens in homes.\textsuperscript{53} Ben Uchida’s sister Naomi was in tears after making a nearly identical observation during her time in Mirror Lake Internment Camp. Uchida writes,

Naomi was crying when I got home. Some of the little girls next door were playing house, she said. They were standing in line holding up their empty plates, and Naomi asked them what they were doing. They said they were waiting for their dinners. I didn’t see what was so bad about that, and I could see Naomi was getting mad at me because I didn’t get it.

“Don’t you see,” she said, practically screaming at me. “These little girls are growing up thinking that standing in line with a tray in a mess hall is the way it’s supposed to be. They don’t even know about setting your own table or sitting down to eat in your own kitchen with just your family. They’re not going to know that this way isn’t right. What’s going to happen to them? What’s going to happen to us?”\textsuperscript{54}

Of course, this is reminiscent of Houston’s claim that mess hall eating was a key point in the collapse of her family. These memoir and the journals make a clear point about how camp life was inimical to family life.

Published in 1999, Ben Uchida’s journal makes many points that are now familiar. His family burned their Japanese documents and belongings the day following Pearl Harbor. Local Japanese gravestones were destroyed.\textsuperscript{55} His father was taken to Missoula, Montana, and when he returned, he was a broken man and hardly knew his own family. Ben Uchida’s father died in 1945, a few years after his FBI interrogations.\textsuperscript{56} Families are disintegrating around mealtimes, especially as the teenagers fight with their

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 37.


\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 5–6, 8.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 8, 17, 116–20, 132.
parents. Once again there are stories of prowling secondhand dealers, and a neighbor, Mrs. Watanabe, reacted very similarly to Houston’s mother:

Mrs. Watanabe was so insulted by how little they offered that she took every glass and dish in the house and threw them against the living room wall until the floor was covered with broken bits and pieces. She even smashed all the fine dishes she got when she was married. She told Mama she would rather destroy everything she owned than let those “vultures” have it.

The government man went running out of Mrs. Watanabe’s house yelling that she was a crazy woman. Mrs. Watanabe yelled right back, asking him who was crazier: her for smashing everything or him for thinking she would sell it all for $11? But Ben Uchida adds something new to the story. He explains that all Japanese bank accounts had been frozen, and his family was forced to sell their valuables in order to have enough money to survive.

Ben Uchida writes remarkably well and is a keen observer, especially considering that he was only twelve when he was relocated. His most defining feature is his sarcasm and his continual awareness of the injustice and absurdity of the situation. When discussing the Mirror Lake high school graduating class, he comments that “word is that they’re going to be given class handcuffs instead of class rings.” Earlier, when he learns that the camp streets will be named after trees, he writes, “since there aren’t any trees, it might have made more sense if they’d named the streets after things we see every day: Machine Gun Lane, Barbed Wire Boulevard, Electric Fence Avenue — things like

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57 Ibid., 65.
58 Ibid., 18–19.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 124.
that.”

He is relentless. His sarcasm makes for an entertaining read, it puts the whole camp in a new light, and it might have helped Ben Uchida stay sane.

Lauren Kessler’s *Stubborn Twig* is different. She covers three generations of the Yasui family, basing her work on oral histories. She begins with a discussion of history, both a traditional patriotic narrative and the more recent counter narrative, and makes a link to 9-11, “the demonization of Arab Americans,” the Patriot Act, and the division between red and blue states. The internment of Japanese Americans has several uncomfortable parallels, and as history moves further from the Nazi death camps, it closes in on the first and second Iraq wars and the current war on terror. When racial categories are deprived of their rights, Japanese American internment comes to mind. Kessler closes with a discussion of memory and story, of how granddaughter Holly Yasui, a filmmaker and playwright, is now telling the family story, and of how it took Holly Yasui’s father 28 years to break his silence on the suicide of her grandfather, Masuo Yasui. Kessler’s story is a sort of classic American dream struggle. Immigrants come, work hard, encounter serious racism, and persevere, becoming “doctors, lawyers and teachers, entrepreneurs, artists and activists.” In a word, members of a model minority.

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61 Ibid., 107.
63 Ibid., xiv.
64 Ibid., 275.
65 Ibid., xiv.
Ellen Levine’s *A Fence Away from Freedom* is also based on oral history. She “needed the small details of the event multiplied many times” and, as shown here, individual recollection often provides exactly that. She interviewed dozens of internees and structured her book entirely around those interviews. Each chapter opens with a few pages of text followed by several pages containing the headings of interviews and their quoted or paraphrased material underneath. Perhaps because of the nature of oral history and its ability to bring detail to light, Levine focuses on three unusual and often marginal elements. First, she has a chapter on homeless Japanese American children. They were not officially confined to the camps, but the adult Japanese Americans who ran the orphanages were, and so most of the children were shipped to Manzanar. She has another chapter on the Japanese Peruvians, and how the U.S. made arrangements with Latin American countries to imprison their residents of Japanese descent. The U.S. made these arrangements before Pearl Harbor and agreed to foot the bill for Japanese imprisonment and facilitate their transfer to U.S. holding areas. Of particular interest is Levine’s unusual focus on draft resisters. Her chapter on Japanese American combat troops is relatively short, while her chapter on draft resisters is the second-longest in her book. In fact, Yosh Kuromiya, a key resource for Eric Muller’s study of draft resistance, is one of the perennial sources of primary material quoted in Levine’s book, appearing in almost every chapter.

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67 Ibid., 84–91.

68 Ibid., 92–113.
As with Kessler and Levine, much of Muller’s information comes from primary source interviews. Japanese American internment is not Muller’s primary area of study. He is a law professor, and he happened to see a photo of 63 draft resistors in a courtroom that caught his interest, paired with various personal and professional interests, and led to this book. At the time of publication in 2001, Muller still knew of no other books about Japanese American draft resistors. As a legal scholar, Muller has a particular and interesting perspective. Ultimately, he believes that the U.S. government was on relatively solid legal ground when they insisted on drafting interned Japanese Americans. However strong their moral ground, the draft resistors were on a poor legal footing. This seems incredible, almost unbelievable (until one remembers other past operations of the U.S. justice system), and so it is very useful for Muller to put forth his opinion as a professional legal scholar. Few historians without a legal background would be willing to come to such an utterly absurd conclusion.

However, Muller makes it clear that although he thinks the draft resistors were on shaky legal ground, he supports their position and counts himself as an ally. To bolster that position, he obtained the crucial support of Senator Daniel Inouye, who both volunteered during World War II and wrote a foreword praising the draft resistors. Muller also finds that most of the draft resistors remain proud of their choice, yet do not

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70 Ibid., 195.

71 Ibid., 196.

72 Ibid., xi.
bear grudges against the U.S. Despite both white racism and ostracism from their own community, most have gone on to find steady employment and seem to have done reasonably well.73 Another main point of Muller’s is that this narrative of protest is crucial to the identity of Japanese Americans. Obedience and duty, Muller writes, are more Japanese than American virtues.74 It is these draft resisters, as much as the men of the celebrated 442nd, who advanced Japanese American integration.

This essay has followed several threads, including FBI imprisonment, families burning Japanese documents and possessions, vandals breaking headstones, women smashing china rather than selling it at insulting prices, mess halls wreaking havoc on families, young children waiting in line for mess hall when they played house, and others. Rather than any particular element, what these threads have shown most clearly is how these genres, ruled by primary source information from human memories, are both chaotic and full of detail. In small groups, specific theses can be applied, such as Muller’s work with the draft resisters. However, when these threads are either taken singly or as a whole cloth, they have a tendency to defy all but the broadest of theses. Individually, they refuse to be taken as anything but actual human lives, and as a collection they represent a diversity of experiences and perspectives rather than a single clear narrative.

These genres accomplish several things that more traditional histories do not. They communicate emotion strongly through individual personal stories. They show a wealth of detail that simply does not fit within conventional aggregated narratives. They communicate a sense of place through verbal pictures, and can function as a sort of

73 Ibid., 6, 192.
74 Ibid., 6, 197.
guided tour to photographs, allowing readers to almost see a photograph through a resident’s eyes. For an historian in search of a project, they open a multitude of doors, constantly prompting questions and offering leads for new research. How widespread was the destruction of gravestones? Is there a geographic pattern to the destruction? What happened at the FBI facilities in Montana and South Dakota? What was their architecture and population? Were the locals aware of them? Does the FBI still have records? How many inmates died on site? What are the histories of those who were released? Has an accounting of movable property losses been done? Most broadly, several questions of gender emerge from these memories. Men were disappeared, women managed the relocation of their families, men both served and resisted — were forced into a specific decision women were not, and women endured pregnancy and childbirth in the camps. A great many books have been written on Japanese American internment. This brief investigation of memoirs, journals, children’s books and oral histories has shown that many specific angles and questions remain within this experience.
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