

II. "CAMERAS AND PHOTOGRAPHS WERE NOT PERMITTED IN THE CAMPS"

Photographic Documentation and Distortion
in Japanese American Internment Narratives

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Variations of my title quotation recur again and again in the literature written by Nikkei—people of Japanese descent living in the United States or Canada—about their imprisonment during World War II. The narrator of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, for instance, comments that "our cameras—even Stephen's toy one that he brought out to show them when they came—are all confiscated." "We are the despised rendered voiceless," she adds, "stripped of car, radio, camera and every means of communication." Yet the remark of absence—cameras taken away, forbidden—usually leads to an assertion of a right to presence, to voice, to self-representation. In Miné Okubo's *Citizen 13660*, the line "cameras and photographs were not permitted in the camps" is immediately followed by "so I recorded everything in sketches, drawings, and paintings." In *The Invisible Thread*, Yoshiko Uchida includes one of her paintings, captioned: "Since we were not allowed to have cameras, I painted this scene of a dust storm in Topaz."¹

Texts about camp life present cameras and photography in an ironic tension. On the one hand, as Susan Sontag says, "Photographs furnish evidence. Something we heard about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it." Nikkei writers use family album photographs to document their "Americanness" and documentary photographs of internment camps, taken by outsiders, to show what "really" happened. Yet Sontag also points out that "photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is the opposite of understanding, which starts from *not* accepting the world as it looks."² This line is particularly poignant and ironic for Nisei who were not "accepted" as citizens because of the way they "looked."

Their experiences led Nikkei writers and visual artists to anticipate Sontag's insight, to challenge the photographic record, exploring the erasure of Japanese Americans in various ways and the distortion of their experiences. They provide, in effect, new captions and frames for old photographs, raising questions about the historical uses to which photographs have been put and about what photographs can help us to understand. While work on



II.1 Miné Okubo, Untitled drawing from *Citizen 13660* (page 12).

Reproduced courtesy of Seiko Buckingham.

photography by Sontag, John Tagg, Laura Wexler, and others can offer illuminating contexts for understanding ambivalent representations of photographs, the Nikkei themselves provide theoretical approaches and insights into contemporary issues of representation, the gaze, and documentary "evidence." Okubo presents one undeniable example in figure 1. Her understanding of the role of the objectifying gaze is clear without the caption: "The people looked at all of us, both citizens and aliens, with suspicion and mistrust."³

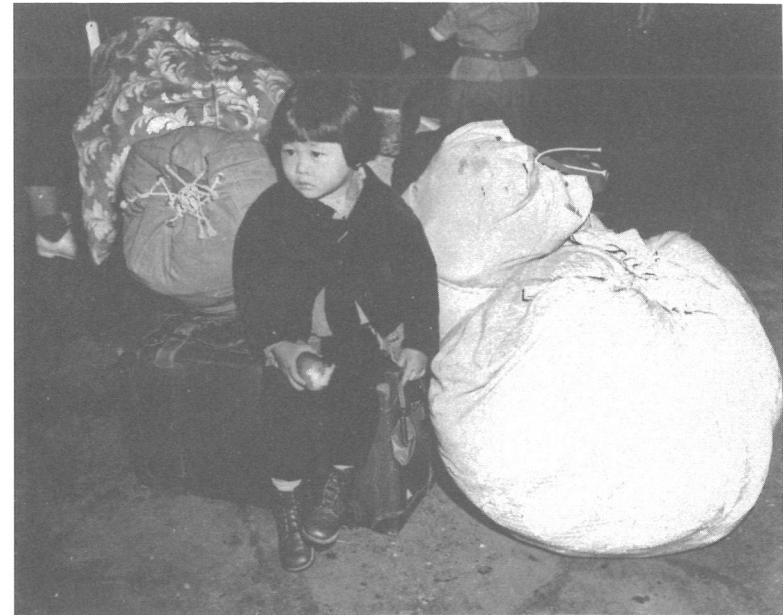
If a contemporary American has any idea what the camps built to "assemble" and "intern" Japanese Americans during World War II looked like or has an image of the internees themselves, the viewpoint was probably defined by the lens of one of the government photographers who documented the process of internment: Dorothea Lange, Clem Albers, Russell Lee, and others. Because of the wide circulation of similar photographs, images by Lange (fig. 2), Albers (fig. 3), and an unknown War Relocation Agency photographer (fig. 4) will look familiar even if you've never seen them.⁴

Of course, there are hundreds of these War Relocation Agency photographs, and I have selected these images, unfairly, with a point in mind.



11.2 Dorothea Lange, Grandfather and grandchildren awaiting evacuation bus, Hayward CA, 8 May 1942.
Records of the War Relocation Authority, National Archives no. RG 210.

They suggest that while these liberal veterans of the Work Projects Administration era were certainly sympathetic to the Nikkei, their finest work—or perhaps the work most often reproduced and circulated—sometimes seems to use Japanese Americans and their experiences as props to support an ironic political statement about American hypocrisy. As Anthony W. Lee argues in *Picturing Chinatown*, photographs of Asian Americans and the spaces they inhabit “speak most directly to the needs, desires, and assumptions of their makers.” These call forth the word “plight.” The images reflect persistent representations of Asian Americans. As Gary Okihiro has argued, “Asians have [frequently] been depicted as victims, most promi-



11.3 Clem Albers, Child awaiting evacuation.
Records of the War Relocation Authority, National Archives.

nently as objects of exclusion in the nineteenth-century Anti-Chinese movement and as ‘Americans betrayed’ in the twentieth-century concentration camps. The pervasiveness of that portrayal has prompted Roger Daniels to write: ‘Asians have been more celebrated for what has happened to them than for what they have accomplished.’”⁵

Some WRA images seem to be more about “America” (perhaps with a *k*) than about the experience of the internees. I don’t question the sincerity of Lange and Albers and others; unlike most North Americans, they recognized that the Nikkei were indeed victims of racism and of a government eager to consolidate support for a war effort, and they used their cameras to attempt to intervene by providing images with overt political content. As Sontag says, however, understanding can only come from “not accepting the world as it looks,” a point Nikkei writers insist upon. In these images the individual is subsumed to the political statement. In *The Burden of Representation*, John Tagg comments on what he calls “the gaze of the state.” “Documentary photography,” he says, “inscribed relations of power in representation which were structured like those of earlier practices of photo-



11.4 Photographer unknown, Japanese American girl in front of flag. Records of the War Relocation Authority, National Archives.

documentation: both speaking to those with relative power about those positioned as lacking, as the ‘feminised’ Other, as passive but pathetic objects capable only of offering themselves up to a benevolent, transcendent gaze, the gaze of the camera, and the gaze of the paternal state.”⁶

In Lange’s famous photograph *Dust Storm, Manzanar* (fig. 5), the “transcendent gaze” is apparent, revealed through aesthetics and framing and through editorial content. Note the perfectly balanced composition, probably cropped, the heavy irony of the flag directly in the middle foreground, proudly waving against the majestic mountains above the desert plain, reaching up into the spacious skies. My own heavy-handed irony suggests how readily this image conjures slogans of United States nationhood, identifies the Nikkei as a “people betrayed,” and casts them in the role of victim. The flag dominates; the few miniscule people are hardly noticeable. The lack of people is certainly “realistic”—they’d have taken cover—but nevertheless the Nikkei are erased, dwarfed by this mythic American land-



11.5 Dorothea Lange, *Dust Storm, Manzanar*. Records of the War Relocation Authority, National Archives.

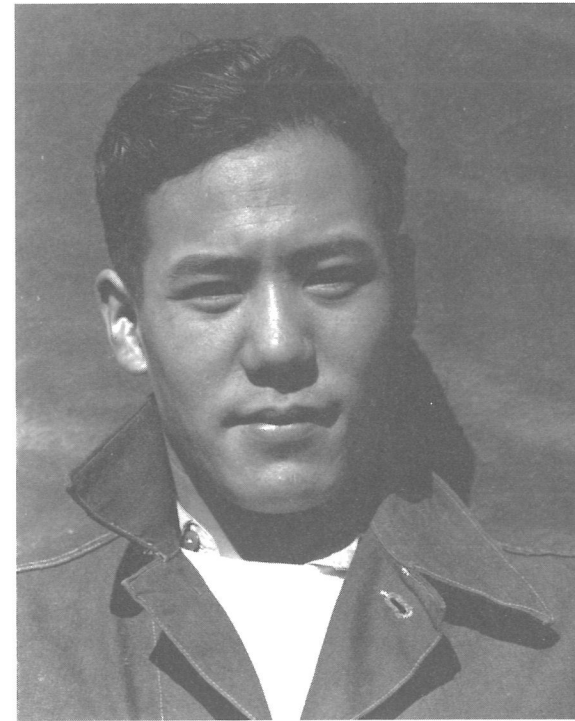
scape with its patriotic refrains, almost invisible, powerlessly buffeted by the storms of history.

Perhaps this ironic reading is the product of today’s political consciousness, however, for in *On Photography*, Sontag uses WRA images in particular as her example of how the “meaning” of photographs is not stable but contextual. She suggests that the politics of the 1960s allowed “many Americans, . . . looking at the photographs Dorothea Lange took of Nisei on the West Coast being transported to internment camps in 1942, to recognize their subject for what it was—a crime committed by the government against a large group of American citizens. Few people who saw those photographs in the 1940s could have had so unequivocal a reaction; the grounds for such a judgment were covered over by the pro-war consensus. Photographs cannot create a moral position, but they can reinforce one—and can help build a nascent one.” In fact, whatever the photographer’s intentions, the photograph’s meanings are contingent and contextual. As Martha Sandweiss points out, “the original artist often could not control the associations that adhered to his picture by the time it reached a public

audience.” The moral and historical influence of a photograph—whether of a young woman kneeling by a body at Kent State, of an (allegedly staged) group of soldiers raising a flag at Iwo Jima, or of a row of blindfolded Taliban prisoners at Guantánamo Bay—is the result of its circulation: it has been chosen for reproduction—by magazine editors, newspeople, television producers, government officials, academics—either because it tells the story they wish to tell or because it seems to embody a self-contained story. As Sandweiss says, photography has seemed “uniquely suited to capturing those fleeting moments that emblemized or distilled complex activities,” but the tendency to focus on “the individual image” as representing a “significant decisive moment” creates a historical record heavily dependent upon symbolism.⁷

There are images in which, to quote Lucy Lippard from another context, the “photograph becomes the people photographed,” in which the internees have been “freed from the ‘ethnographic present’—that patronizing frame that freezes personal and social specifics into generalization. . . . They are ‘present’ in part because of their undeniable personal presence.” Many appear in Ansel Adams’s *Born Free and Equal*. In this book, published in 1944 in the midst of the war, Adams had a clear political generalization to make: he was determined to represent internees as “loyal Americans.” The man in figure 6 takes up a full page, but his name is not revealed. Consistent with one of Adams’s major themes—the Nikkei’s varied occupations and work ethic—the caption is “A Woodworker.” Yet Bert K. Namura—as he was later identified—projects an “undeniable personal presence” and individuality.⁸ Although Adams certainly seeks to make a statement, his subjects gaze back and take control of the photograph. Perhaps demonstrating the truth of Sontag’s observation, *Born Free and Equal* is difficult to find because copies were publicly burned in protest.⁹

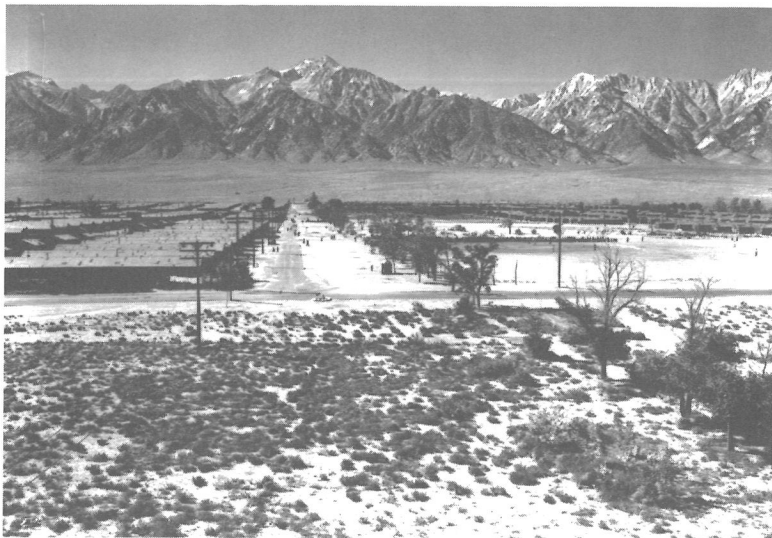
Yet comparing Adams to another Manzanar photographer reveals the differences between an insider’s and outsider’s view. Most of my earlier images are of the assembly process rather than life in internment camps. Photographers were restricted in what they were allowed to photograph in the camps, “forbidden to photograph the guard towers, the guards, or the barbed wire.” In an ingenious reading, Armor and Wright suggest Adams responded to the restrictions by implication. Figure 7, *City in the Desert*, they argue, “implies the existence of the guard towers, because it was taken from one.”¹⁰



11.6 Ansel Adams, *A Woodworker* (Bert K. Namura).
Library of Congress no. A35 tol M445B 303235.

Yet a photograph exists of one of the Manzanar towers, taken by the camp’s resident photographer, internee Toyo Miyatake. At a time when Japanese Americans were forbidden even to own cameras, let alone bring them into the camps, Miyatake, who had worked for years as a professional photographer in Los Angeles, sneaked a lens into Manzanar and built his own wooden camera, initially taking shots secretly. In figure 8, the focus is on the interior life, on the subjective private response to public events; when the gaze is turned outward, the viewer looks through the eyes of experience and sees the world from within, as we can see in Miyatake’s shot of the symbol of power that dominated his daily view in Manzanar.¹¹

Miyatake’s title, *Watchtower*, focuses our attention on the idea of surveillance—and, following Foucault, the concept of discipline—not surprisingly a dominant theme in internment art. The technological circle at the top of the tower, echoing the moon in the background, is a spotlight,



11.7 Ansel Adams, *City in the Desert*.
Library of Congress no. A351 Tol 3M 04 BX 303235.

suggesting exposure. Yet the watchtowers—and there are many more in paintings, such as George Matsusaboro Hibi's *Watch Tower* and Kenjiro Nomura's *Guard Tower*—manage to reverse Foucault's concept of surveillance. The internees do not internalize the position of authority. They look up, out, expressing a subjectivity resistant to, indeed reversing, governmental scrutiny. The dominating phallic images of surveillance against an empty landscape lead inevitably to the question, Who (or what) is being guarded from whom? They remind viewers of images where two photographers take aim at each other; but they also recall W. E. B. DuBois's perceptive description of how the minority American lives in a world "which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."¹²

The watchtower images spotlight the doubled viewpoint that runs throughout internment art. Many themes come together in the story of Kango Takamura, who drew figure 9, *Our Guard in the Watchtower Became a Spring Baseball Fan*, while "detained" in a prison camp at Santa Fe. Trained as



11.8 Toyo Miyatake, *Watchtower*. Reproduced in *Our World*, ed. Diane Honda.
Reproduced courtesy of the Miyatake Family.

a photographer, Takamura worked as a photo retoucher in RKO Studios in Hollywood. He was sent to the prison camp because before Pearl Harbor he had agreed to sell a Japanese friend a surplus movie camera from the studio. Under surveillance by the FBI, he was accused of selling the camera to the Japanese Army and arrested. In an interview after the war, the man who "touched up" film described the complex negotiations he made as he attempted to capture his point of view: "As you know, we cannot use any camera. So I thought sketching's all right. But I was afraid not supposed to sketch. Maybe government doesn't like that I sketch. . . . So I work in a very



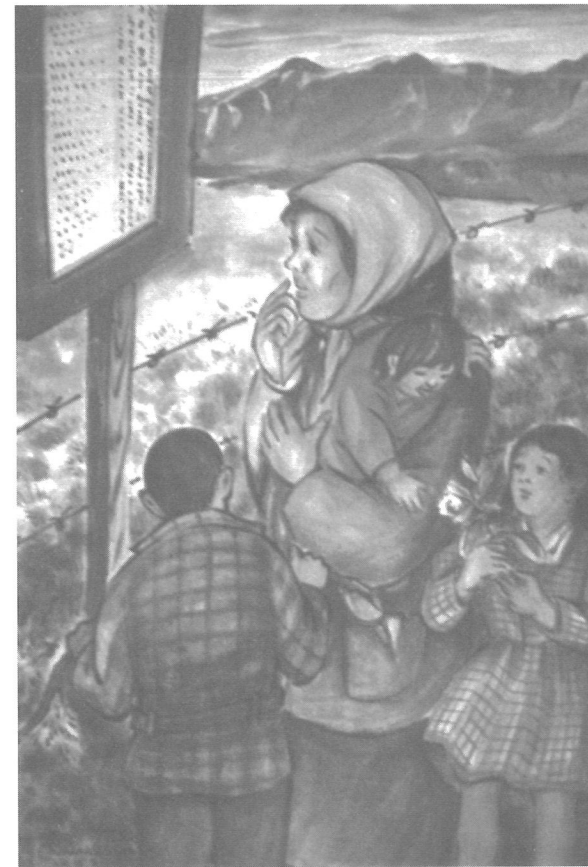
11.9 Kango Takamura, *Our Guard in the Watchtower Became a Spring Baseball Fan*.
JARP collection, Department of Special Collections,
Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

funny way purposely, made these funny pictures. . . Little by little, I sketch more like a photograph.”¹³

Along with the guard towers, the WRA also erased the barbed-wire fences from the public record, refusing to allow photographs of them, but internees found a way to comment, sometimes satirically, on their containment. In *Farewell to Manzanar*, for instance, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston describes her brother Woody’s “American Swing Band,” who sing—

Oh, give me land, lots of land
Under starry skies above,
Don’t fence me in.
Let me ride through the wide
Open country that I love
Don’t fence me in.¹⁴

With her typical wit, Okubo comments, “When the evacuation came, I said, ‘God has answered my prayers.’ All my friends asked why don’t I go East instead of going to Camp. I said, ‘No, I’m going camping.’” Okubo, who saw black comic ironies everywhere, has taught me to see them too.



11.10 Chiura Obata, *Regulations*.
Reproduced courtesy of the Obata Family.

One of the most interesting ironies is that those largely unpopulated, “desolate,” hard-to-reach areas favored by the War Relocation Agency for internment camps are now favored locations for backcountry camping trips, memorialized in snapshots. Like Okubo, other internees commented ironically on those old western standbys turned into nationalistic symbols, spacious skies and mountain majesties, through the way they framed them. In figure 10, Chiura Obata’s *Regulations*, the fence denies the woman and her children access to the space of the national imaginary, squeezing them into a constricted corner, the strong diagonal emphasizing divisions within the nation, yet they assert their presence by dominating the foreground.¹⁵



11.11 Estelle Ishigo, *Boys with Kite*.

Reproduced courtesy of JARP collection, Department of Special Collections,
Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

If mountains characteristically symbolize freedom in American mythology, here we see sharp, barbed boundaries bifurcating the space, emblems of division, reminding me of the history of barbed wire in the West, of the border fence that extends into the ocean at Tijuana, of Matthew Shepherd's crucifixion on a fence in "The Equality State." Yet some challenge the fence and what it symbolizes, as do the young boys in figure 11, Estelle Ishigo's *Boys with Kite*. In an address at Topaz Art School in 1943, George Matsuboro Hibi claimed a symbolic role for the mountains: "Training in art maintains high ideals among our people, for its object is to prevent their minds from remaining on the plains, to encourage the human spirit to dwell high above the mountains."¹⁶ The fence blocks the boys' aspirations, but like most immigrants, they are ready to climb over the obstacles constructed by racism and nationalism.

Like the guard towers and fences, the camera becomes an instrument of surveillance and control throughout internment literature. Yoshiko Uchida's father had clearly been under surveillance by the FBI before Pearl Harbor, since he was one of the Issei arrested on December 8, 1941, and taken immediately to a prison camp in Montana. As he and others were interviewed about their "loyalties," Uchida tells us, "some were photo-

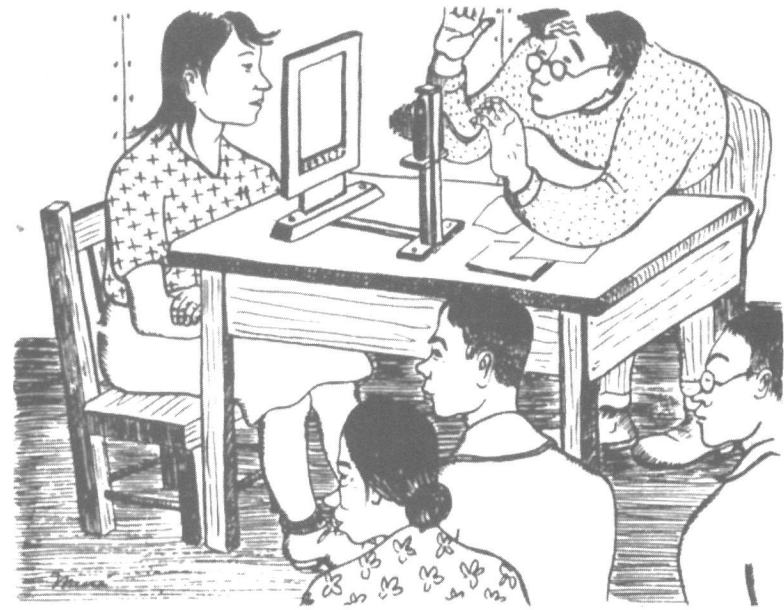
graphed full-face only, while others were photographed in profile as well, and it was immediately rumored that those photographed twice would be detained as hostages." With no accurate information and no control over their own movements, Uchida's family appropriately saw the government as all powerful and attempted to interpret its inexplicable actions: they took as a hopeful sign that he was "one of those who had been photographed only once."¹⁷ Indeed, Dwight Uchida was eventually allowed to join his family at Topaz—but no one knew why he was transferred when others were not.

We can infer Dwight Uchida's experience from figure 12. Because he answered "no, no" to questions 19 and 20 on the "loyalty questionnaire," Kosaka Takaji was sent from Topaz to Tule Lake, by 1943 transformed from an "internment camp" to a prison for those the WRA planned to "repatriate" to Japan. As did Franz Boas in his photographs of American Indian prisoners and Louis Agassiz in photographs of African Americans, WRA officials apparently sought to define identity through measurement. In fact, fear of passing had been a recurrent theme throughout the war. As early as December 22, 1941, *Life* magazine devoted an article to "How to Tell Japs from the Chinese."¹⁸ Their advice was apparently deemed ineffective since one of the most repeated justifications for internment was that white Americans could not "distinguish between loyal and disloyal Japanese"—remarks that read, in context, like polite versions of "they all look alike." Three distinguished lawyers asked by Attorney General Biddle to express their opinions on the constitutionality of evacuation argued in a memorandum in 1942 that "since the Occidental eye cannot readily distinguish one Japanese resident from another, effective surveillance of the movements of particular Japanese residents suspected of disloyalty is extremely difficult if not practically impossible." Yet Germans and Italians did not have to be interned because "the normal Caucasian countenances of such persons enable the average American to recognize particular individuals by distinguishing minor facial characteristics." (The lawyer responsible for this argument, Benjamin V. Cohen, "with tears in his eyes," later showed a colleague "a newspaper picture of a little Japanese American boy leaning out of the evacuation train window and waving an American flag.")¹⁹ In 1943 the WRA was still having difficulty telling Nikkei apart and so took photographs like figure 12 in an effort to obstruct "troublemakers" from "passing" as "loyal Japanese" and to keep track of those repatriated in case they ever attempted to return from Japan.



11.12 Photographer unknown, Kosaka Takaji.
War Relocation Authority, National Archives no. 210-G-16G-20.

Once again, Okubo recognized the implications of such photographic practices and satirized them in her illustrations, anticipating current theoretical writers like Tagg. Figure 13 comes from near the end of her book, as she is photographed before she is allowed to leave the camp. Here Okubo shows the use to which the U.S. government puts photography: as a means of keeping track of those whose place in the body politic is somehow suspect. She draws herself as the object of a mug shot. The framing device resembles an instrument of torture—or perhaps a box into which every face must be disciplined to fit. Of what is she accused? Her narrative caption



11.13 Miné Okubo, Untitled drawing from *Citizen 13660* (page 207).
Reproduced courtesy of Seiko Buckingham.

reads: “After plowing through the red tape, through the madness of packing again, I attended forums on ‘How to Make Friends’ and ‘How to Behave in the Outside World.’ I was photographed.”²⁰ Just in case she didn’t know how to behave in the outside world . . .

Like Miyatake, however, Okubo also turns the gaze around. In figure 14, we watch her watching the spies: “Day and night Caucasian camp police walked their beats within the center. (“Caucasian” was the camp term for non- evacuee workers.) They were on the lookout for contraband and for suspicious actions.”²¹ Here, prisoners behave suspiciously by playing a popular card game, “Go,” which was outlawed by camp officials who considered it gambling. Throughout *Citizen 13660* Uchida challenges the way others saw and represented her: she includes herself in each of her drawings, thus claiming her right to self-representation and providing herself with a sympathetic gaze—and in the worst conditions she never presents herself or others as pitiful. In her drawings she effectively resists “double consciousness,” always looking at herself through her own eyes.



11.14 Miné Okubo, Untitled drawing from *Citizen 13660* (page 60).
Reproduced courtesy of Seiko Buckingham.

As Okubo and Uchida demonstrate, the critique of photographic representations of internment I have developed was anticipated by internees themselves. For instance, early in *Desert Exile*, Uchida comments on the Issei's "great propensity for taking formal photographs to commemorate occasions ranging from birthdays and organizational get-togethers to weddings and even funerals. I suppose this was the only way they could share the event with their families and friends in Japan, but it also resulted in many bulging albums in our households." Images like figure 15 and passages like this one "normalize" the Issei, containing their "difference"—they are still connected to Japan—within the frame of their middle-class American ordinariness. Photos of Uchida in a kimono and playing with her dog, "Laddie," presented together on the same page, reinforce the same duality (fig. 16). These images operate in several ways in *Desert Exile*. As Marianne Hirsch suggests in *Family Frames*, family albums explore the "space of contradiction between the myth of the ideal family and the lived reality of family life," showing us more readily "what we wish our family to be" than "what it is not." In Uchida's family album, the pre-war photographs offer a prelapsarian vision of the Uchida family, underscored by the



11.15 Unknown photographer, *Uchida Family Portrait*.
Reproduced courtesy of Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.



11.16 Unknown photographer.
Yoshiko Uchida in Kimono and Yoshiko Uchida with Her Dog, Laddie.
Reproduced courtesy of Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

text, a recurrent motif in internment art. In the early 1940s, for instance, Henry Sugimoto painted several versions of an image he called "My Papa." Using national imagery as ironically and effectively as did Lange, Sugimoto paints in the background a lushly productive truck farm in central California; in the foreground, a man clad in overalls is led away from his crying family by two suited men. Into the prelapsarian pastoral enter the agents of the omnipotent government—and the Nikkei are exiled from Eden. Uchida highlights the contradiction between the myth of the ideal family and the lived reality of family life, but like Sugimoto, she demonstrates that the contradiction is the result of historical, not psychological, forces.²²

As she lost control of her freedom of movement, so did Uchida lose control over her visual self-representation after her family's internment at Tanforan and Topaz. The "reality" of family life is suggested by an unattributed Lange image of an unidentified young woman in a doorway to a stable at Tanforan. As we turn the pages of *Desert Exile*, moving from conventional private photographs to another FSA photograph of a newsstand, the headlines screaming "OUSTER OF ALL JAPS IN CALIFORNIA NEAR," we learn that the family album could not contain the Issei's and Nisei's "difference," and we trace the disjunction between the private story and the public text—in this case a newspaper headline—and recognize how entangled they are, what they reveal. As Jo Spence and Patricia Holland point out, "Family photography can operate at [the] junction between personal memory and social history."²³

Negotiating between the private and the public, writers like Uchida nevertheless use official public documents—photographs, letters, internment orders, proclamations, laws—to authenticate what happened, to provide "proof." My own photographic story demonstrates that Sontag is right when she suggests that photographs can "furnish evidence," particularly of suppressed histories. I was born in 1951 in Salinas, California, in a coastal valley about ninety miles south of San Francisco. If you haven't heard of Salinas, next time you buy head lettuce or cauliflower, look at its wrapper; check out the source of your basket of strawberries. The Salinas Valley produces a substantial portion of the United States' winter vegetables. Salinas is best known for having—some claim—the world's largest rodeo and the world's longest underground river.

In 1941 Salinas had a population of about 15,000; some 2,000 Nikkei lived in the Salinas Valley, the largest ethnic population, many of them successful farmers. Salinas was the home base of the influential Growers

and Shippers Vegetable Association, which had long actively fueled anti-Japanese sentiments and actions. In 1941 they recognized an opportunity to get rid of their competition and sent representatives to Washington to lobby for internment: "We're charged with wanting to get rid of the Japs for selfish reasons," said Austin Anson. "We might as well be honest. We do. It's a question of whether the white man lives on the Pacific Coast or the brown men. They came into this valley to work, and they stayed to take over." The association president, E. M. Seifert Jr., argued that "for the protection of future generations of Californians and Americans, no Japanese, even though he be born in America, should be permitted to own land."²⁴ In 1943 the Salinas Chamber of Commerce conducted a questionnaire of approximately 775 residents. Asked "how many persons [their] vote definitely represents," they claimed to speak for over ten times that number. The central question was, "Do you believe it desirable that Japanese who are considered loyal to the United States be permitted to return to the Pacific Coast states during the war?" The survey includes only one "yes" answer, from attorney George D. Pollack. Not surprisingly, as historian Sandy Lydon says, by "all accounts, for the returning Japanese community, the Salinas Valley was the worst." By 1950 only 162 Nikkei had returned to Salinas.²⁵

Despite winning the "Daughters of the American Revolution" American history award in junior high school in 1965, I was well into my twenties before I found out about the internment of Japanese Americans.

Many years later, in 1997, I was doing primary research on internment in the National Archives. Reading the *Poston, Arizona*, yearbook, I noticed that most of the seniors would have graduated from my own high school, Salinas High, had they not been interned. Looking at their faces, I realized suddenly that they were my father's classmates. He would have graduated with them in 1945, had he not run off to join the Merchant Marines and been sent to Japan as part of the occupation force.

The next day I went to the Library of Congress to look at Farm Security Administration and War Relocation Administration photographs. One folder of Russell Lee's photos was labeled "Salinas." As I looked at the photos, I saw that there had been an assembly camp in Salinas, at the famous rodeo grounds. Lee took numerous photos of the Salinas Armory, where the Nikkei were assembled—and where my 1969 graduation dance was held. Figure 17, one of Lee's shots from May 1942, shows Salinas Valley Nikkei waiting to be bused to the rodeo grounds.



11.17 Russell Lee, Salinas CA, May 1942.

Japanese Americans waiting for transportation to reception center for evacuees from certain West Coast areas under United States Army war emergency order [inside Salinas Army Building]. Farm Securities Administration Collection, Library of Congress negative no. 72498-D.

That night I called home and asked some questions I had never thought to ask. Yes, my father had had a number of friends who were interned; one had taught him to play bridge. Yes, my mother knew about the rodeo grounds. My much-beloved grandfather had helped to build the barracks there.

As I mentioned, the Salinas Valley is defined by its best-known geographical feature, the world's longest underground river, which provided the title for the only history of Salinas I'd read until I encountered the year-book and Lee's photographs. Only through the intervention of photographs did I finally read of Salinas's long underground history. As Laura Wexler points out, photographs can "expose alternative histories."²⁶

Yet FSA and WRA photographs, including several by Lee, in the photographic archive in the Library of Congress and National Archives, can "furnish evidence" for various stories and storytellers. On that same research trip, I came upon figures 18, 19, 20. As John Berger puts it, photographs are



11.18 Russell Lee, Los Angeles CA, April 1942.

The evacuation of Japanese Americans from West Coast areas under U.S. Army war emergency order. Waving good-bye to friends and relatives who are leaving for Owens Valley. Farm Securities Administration Collection, Library of Congress negative no. 13291-M4.



11.19 Photographer unknown, Arcadia CA, April 1942.

All baggage is inspected before newcomers enter the Santa Anita Park assembly center for evacuees of Japanese ancestry. Official OWI photograph, National Archives, D-5067.



11.20 Photographer unknown, Lone Pine CA, May 1942.

Three Japanese American girls with suitcases who have just arrived by train from Elk Grove and who will be transported by bus from Lone Pine to Manzanar, a War Relocation Authority center where they will remain for the duration of the war. Records of the War Relocation Authority, National Archives no. D-531.

“irrefutable as evidence, but weak in meaning.” What do these images “mean”? As Berger and others point out, titles or captions are often applied to photographs to stabilize meaning. The captions provided by most government-sponsored photographers were neutral, letting the images speak for themselves. For figure 18, for instance, Lee provided these words: “The evacuation of Japanese-Americans from West Coast areas under the U.S. Army war emergency order. Waving good-bye to friends and relatives who are leaving for Owens valley.”²⁷ While even this understated caption points to the contradictions the photograph tacitly records between smiling faces in the foreground, in line with the disinterested symbol of power, and the somber faces in the background, apparently less cheerful about “waving good-bye to friends and relatives,” Uchida and other internee writers offer much more explicit captions to dispute interpretations of the photographic record.

Internee writers use photographs to confront their readers with “reality,” but at the same time they undermine the authority of such public representations. In *Nisei Daughter*, Monica Sone exposes the “truth” captured by photographs: “Newspaper photographers with flash-bulb cameras pushed busily through the crowd. One of them rushed up to our bus, and asked a young couple and their little boy to step out and stand by the door for a shot. They were reluctant, but the photographers were persistent and at length they got out of the bus and posed, grinning widely to cover their embarrassment. We saw the picture in the newspaper shortly after and the caption underneath it read, ‘Japs good-natured about evacuation.’” The photographer is manipulative, but the author of the caption, ignorant of cultural differences, supremely confident of his ability to imagine the emotions of others, and certainly aware of what would sell papers, provides an interpretation so patently absurd that Sone lets it speak for itself. While an onlooker herself, she feels no need to describe the reality of the young couple’s feelings. Yet implicitly she suggests how photographs often cannot record the discrepancies between the public face and private self. In another version of the same scene, this time from the inside, Mitsuye Yamada makes that point more explicit in a poem called “Evacuation”: “As we boarded the bus / bags on both sides . . . / the *Seattle Times* / photographer said / Smile! / so obediently I smiled / and the caption the next day / read: / Note smiling faces / a lesson to Tokyo.”²⁸

Internment texts are filled with passages and imagery calling our attention to differences between representations from without and from within—whether in images or words—to the erasure of private subjectivity in public exposures. In *Desert Exile*, Uchida describes “a friend” who told her “that the Army had come to take films of her mess hall, removing the Japanese cooks and replacing them with white cooks for the occasion. She was so infuriated by this deception that she refused to go to her mess hall to eat while the films were being made.” This scene recalls an earlier anecdote that records her self-consciousness about her erasure from groups associated with nationalistic identity. She is the only Japanese American girl in a “Girl Reserve” unit at her junior high school when a photographer comes to take a picture for the local newspaper: “The photographer casually tried to ease me out of the picture, but one of my white friends just as stubbornly insisted on keeping me in. I think I was finally included, but the realization of what the photographer was trying to do hurt me more than I ever admitted to anyone.” Her use of photographs in her text and her editorial com-

ments on them illustrate how, in Alan Trachtenberg's words, photographs "shift and slide in meaning": "They may seem to offer solid evidence that objects and people exist, but do they guarantee what such things mean? The lesson of the photograph, as early photographers came quickly to learn, was that meanings are not fixed, that values cannot be taken for granted, that what an image shows depends on how and where and when, and by whom, it is seen."²⁹ Exposing the ways the public record misrepresented and erased their bodies and their feelings, Sone, Yamada, Uchida, and Okubo let us know that seeing should not be believing and does not necessarily lead to understanding.

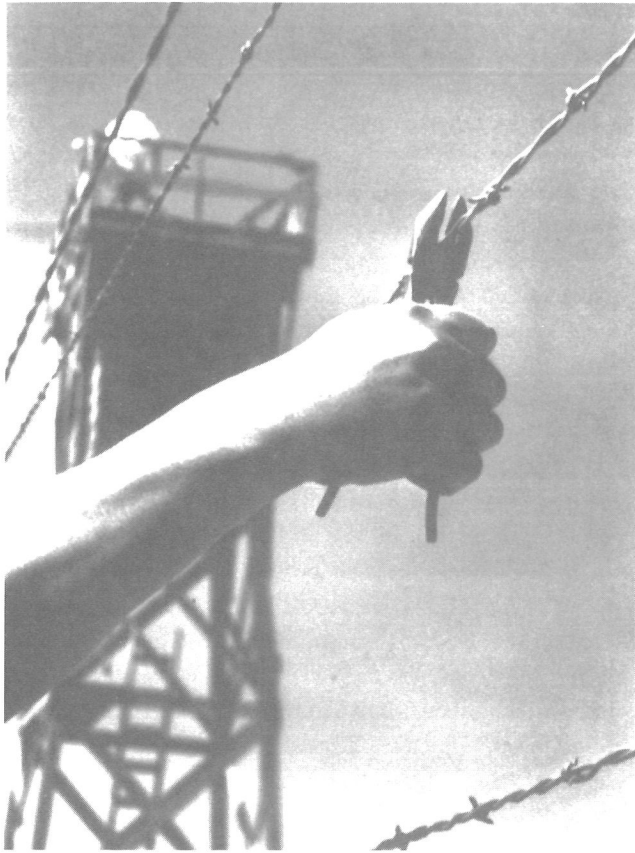
In many ways, they seek to show us what the images mean to them. With their sensitivity to doubled points of view, from outside and inside, internment writers also recognize the power of photographs as repositories of memory. Anthony Lee suggests that "we should see the needs and desires of the less represented as structuring absences [that] appear in the fissures, emphases, [and] ellipses" of the photograph. As in my story about Salinas's unspoken history, photographs sometimes seem to speak through silence. In *Obasan*, the narrator has "no words" from her mother, who vanished in a trip to Japan just before the war began, only "old photographs" from which she pieces together her past. Wakako Yamauchi, who worked as a photo processor to support her writing after she left the camps, sees in "old photographs of the mass evacuation . . . the mirror of our tragedy." To avoid what DuBois describes as "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, . . . measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity," many "remain silent about our camp experience," she suggests, to "ask that you not indulge us with pity, neither then nor now. The fact of our survival is proof of our valor. And that is enough."³⁰

Internees often left their history underground. Years after living at Manzanar, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston associated even a photographer with "evidence" of what had happened to her. "In 1966," she writes, "I met a Caucasian woman who had worked for one year as a photographer at Manzanar. I could scarcely speak to her. I desperately wanted to, but all my questions stuck in my throat. This time it was not the pain of memory. It was simply her validation that all those things had taken place." Like Yamauchi, Houston remained silent about her camp experience for many years. Only when she turned to an "old 1944 yearbook put together at Manzanar High School" could she face the past and begin to tell her story. "It documented the entire camp scene," she says, "the graduating seniors, the guard towers,

the Judo pavilion, the creeks I used to wade in, my family's barracks. As the photos brought that world back, I began to dredge up feelings that had lain submerged since the forties. I began to make connections I had previously been afraid to see."³¹

Through its "documentation" of the "entire camp scene," the yearbook calls forth memories, feelings, connections, subjective responses that flow beneath the surface of the photographs. Houston richly suggests these subjective responses, and the understanding she comes to, through descriptions of the photographs that led her to see the connections she "had previously been afraid to see." She mentions several images from the yearbooks, but three seem especially suggestive. The first is overtly political and activist: just as the camps closed, "the high school produced a second yearbook, *Valediction 1945*, summing up its years in camp. The introduction shows a page-wide photo of a forearm and hand squeezing pliers around a length of taut barbed wire strung beneath one of the towers" (fig. 21). Houston lets the political message speak for itself, but her descriptions of the images on the final pages of the 1943–44 yearbook, both taken by Toyo Miyatake, elliptically convey the subjective connections and ambiguities she finds in her past. "Finally," she says, there are "two large blowups, the first of a high tower with a searchlight against a Sierra backdrop." This is figure 8, Miyatake's "Watchtower," which I've already discussed as an image of oppressive surveillance by the all-powerful government; along with the fences, the watchtower served as a major symbol of the Nikkei's imprisonment. Yet the image Houston describes in most detail presents an "alternative history" of camp life. "It was a two-page endsheet, showing a wide path that curves among rows of elm trees. White stones border the path. Two dogs are following an old woman in gardening clothes as she strolls along. She is in the middle distance, small beneath the trees, beneath the snowy peaks. It is winter. All the elms are bare. The scene is both stark and comforting. This path leads toward one edge of camp, but the wire is out of sight, or out of focus. The tiny woman seems very much at ease. She and her tiny dogs seem almost swallowed by the landscape, or floating in it" (fig. 22).³²

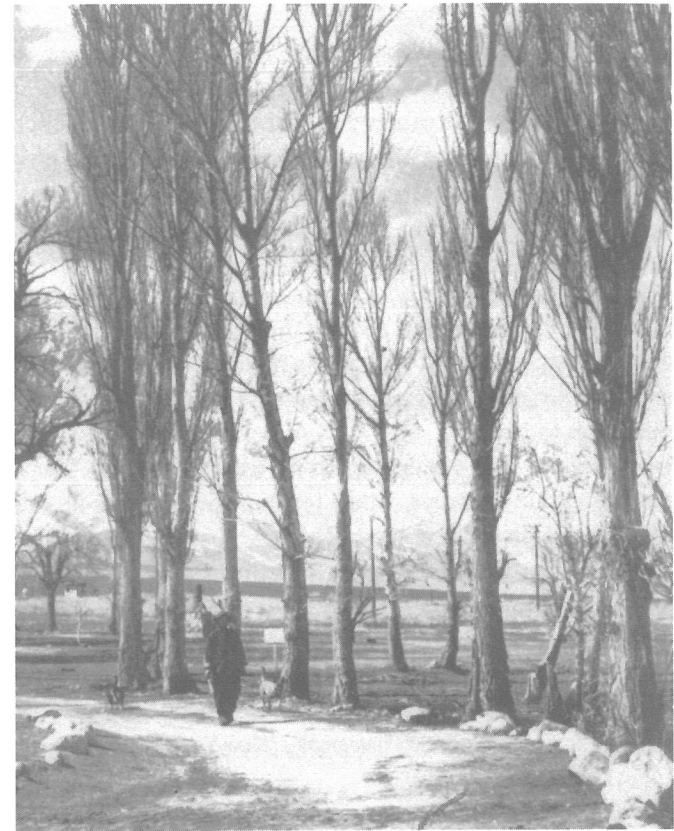
In Houston's reading of this final image, "both stark and comforting," Toyo Miyatake focuses not on the "wire" but on a woman in a private moment of reflection, "very much at ease." He does not expose her, violate her privacy, but he does reveal to Houston—and she to me—her powerful self-possession. Speaking through silence to Miyatake and then to Houston,



11.21 Toyo Miyatake, Pliers cutting wire at Manzanar.
Reproduced in *Our World*, ed. Diane Honda.
Reproduced courtesy of the Miyatake Family.

who makes me see with her eyes, the “tiny woman” makes a big claim for the right to self-definition.

For Houston, photographs do indeed furnish evidence, but they prompt emotional responses and personal understanding rather than provide historical documentation. Through readings of these three photographs, she claims multiple positions of power, connecting the political and the personal: the power to turn the searchlight around, back on a reprehensible and illegal governmental act; the power to cut through the literal and symbolic barriers of racism; and the power to reject being represented as a



11.22 Toyo Miyatake, Woman walking dogs.
Reproduced in *Our World*, ed. Diane Honda.
Reproduced courtesy of the Miyatake Family.

stereotypical object of pity or a victim. Their meaning, she seems to suggest, is hers to claim.

Aware that the meaning of photographs is created collaboratively, in a particular and ever-changing historical moment, Nikkei writers and artists develop photographic absences and offer alternative archives; describe photographs as duplicitous documents, revealing and concealing; gaze at them and critique them; reproduce them and resist them; re-frame and re-caption them in their own interpretations and words. They know that photographs can tell a story, many stories; they question whose stories

they tell—and insist upon telling their own. Adding their captions and images to the national album produces a more capacious historical archive where no single photograph carries the weight of too much symbolic meaning, where Lange's vision of Manzanar is complicated and enhanced by Miyatake's.

Notes

1. Joy Kogawa, *Obasan* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 85, 111; Miné Okubo, *Citizen 13660* (1946; reprint, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), ix; Yoshiko Uchida, *The Invisible Thread* (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Julian Messner, 1991). The painting appears in a group of illustrations between pages 52 and 53.
2. I have struggled with terminology to describe the "camps." I consider them concentration camps, where innocent people were illegally imprisoned, without due process, but because that term is so thoroughly associated with the Holocaust, it is sometimes misleading, as it would be had I used it in my title. I have most often used the term "internment camps" or "camps" because that is the term used by the writers I discuss, but I have attempted to use strong verbs—"imprisoned" rather than "detained," for instance—to make clear what was really happening there. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Delta, 1977), 5, 23.
3. Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 12.
4. These three images are courtesy of the Library of Congress, as are figure 5 by Lange and figure 17 by Lee.
5. Anthony W. Lee, *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 8; Gary Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 151.
6. John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 12.
7. Sontag, *On Photography*, 17; Martha A. Sandweiss, "Views and Reviews: Western Art and Western History," in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, ed. William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin (New York: Norton, 1992), 195; and Martha A. Sandweiss, "Undecisive Moments: The Narrative Tradition in Western Photography," in *Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Martha A. Sandweiss (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 98.

8. Lucy Lippard, introduction to *Partial Recall*, ed. Lucy Lippard (New York: New Press, 1992), 35; Ansel Adams, *Born Free and Equal: The Story of Loyal Japanese-Americans* (New York: U.S. Camera, 1944), 43. Namura is identified by John Armor and Peter Wright in *Manzanar*, a history of the camp, accompanied by a collection of Adams's photographs, and with commentary by John Hersey (New York: Times Books, 1988), 37. Adams did not renew his copyright on *Born Free and Equal* and gave his images to the Library of Congress. The number for this image is A35 Tol 4M45B 303235.
9. Armor and Wright, "The Photographers of Manzanar," *Manzanar*, xviii.
10. Armor and Wright, "The Photographers of Manzanar," xx. *City in the Desert* appears on xix. In *Born Free and Equal*, it appears on 26–27 (Library of Congress number A351 Tol 3M04BX 303235).
11. Miyatake's *Watchtower* originally appeared in the 1944–45 Manzanar High School yearbook, *Valediction 1945*. It also appears near the end of the unpaginated reprint of the 1943–1944 *Manzanar, Our World*, along with other images from the 1944–45 yearbook and informational updates. The reprint was edited by Diane Yotsuya Honda, a high-school yearbook teacher. Copies are available directly from her at 8765 North Sierra Vista, Fresno CA 93720. I thank the family of Toyo Miyatake for permission to reproduce his photographs.
12. W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), in *The Oxford W. E. B. DuBois Reader*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 102.
13. *Our Guard in the Watchtower* reproduced courtesy of UCLA Special Collections; Deborah Gesensway and Mindy Roseman, *Beyond Words: Images from America's Concentration Camps* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 119–20. Even today most Americans do not realize that the WRA created separate "prison camps" for men suspected of espionage; one was located at Santa Fe. Takamura was eventually transferred to Manzanar. After the war, he returned to his job at RKO studios, publicly welcomed back by the president, and worked there another twenty-five years.
14. Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), 74. Because *Farewell* is a memoir about Jeanne's experience, I refer to her as the author for economy's sake.

15. Quoted in Gesensway and Roseman, *Beyond Words*, 66; I reproduce Obata's *Regulations* courtesy of the Obata family. For more Obata images, see *Topaz Moon: Chiura Obata's Art of the Internment*, ed. Kimi Kodani Hill (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2000).
16. *Boys with Kite* reproduced courtesy of UCLA Special Collections. Ishigo was a Caucasian married to a Nikkei; she petitioned the government to be interned with him at Heart Mountain; the privately published *Lone Heart Mountain* contains her writings and sketches about life there. Quoted in Hill, *Topaz Moon*, 70.
17. Yoshiko Uchida, *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 50–51.
18. Courtesy National Archives, photo no. 210-G-16G-20 (WRA Collection); the fullest exploration of the horrific events at Tule Lake is in Michi Nishiru Weglyn, *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976). Audrie Girdner and Anne Loftis, *The Great Betrayal: The Evacuation of the Japanese-Americans During World War II* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1969), 11. Girdner and Loftis continue, "The faces portrayed were those of a benevolent Chinese public servant, Ong Wen-hao, and a Japanese warrior, General Hideki Tojo. After discussing physiological differences, the article concluded, 'An often sounder clue is facial expression, shaped by cultural, not anthropological, factors. Chinese wear rational calm of tolerant realists. Japs, like General Tojo, show humorless intensity of ruthless mystics.' Little wonder that some Japanese were reported to be wearing 'I am Chinese' buttons" (11).
19. Although this point was repeatedly made, this particular quote comes from Los Angeles county manager Wayne R. Allen, justifying "the dismissal of all county workers of Japanese descent," quoted in Peter Irons, *Justice at War: The Story of the Japanese Internment Cases* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 40–41, 54, 55.
20. Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 207.
21. Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 60.
22. Uchida, *Desert Exile*, 19, 36 (family photo), 37 (Kimono and Laddie); Uchida images reproduced courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 8. Sugimoto did many versions of this painting. One appears in Gesensway and Roseman, *Beyond Words*, 31.

23. Uchida, *Desert Exile*, 54; quoted in Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 13.
24. Quoted in Morton Grodzins, *Americans Betrayed: Politics and the Japanese Evacuation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 27; quoted in Girdner and Loftis, *The Great Betrayal*, 104.
25. Document labeled "Salinas. Chamber of Commerce. Survey of Attitudes of Salinas Citizens toward Japanese-Americans During World War II" (R.979.476, Special Collections, John Steinbeck Library, Salinas, California); Sandy Lydon, *The Japanese in the Monterey Bay Region: A Brief History* (Capitola CA: Capitola Books, 1997), 27.
26. Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 5.
27. John Berger, *Another Way of Telling* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), 92. The caption is attached to the photograph in the Library of Congress. According to James Curtis, Roy Striker, head of FSA photographic division, "had his photographers follow contemporary social science techniques in captioning their images. Subjects photographed, like citizens interviewed, remained anonymous" (*Mind's Eye, Mind's Truth: FSA Photography Reconsidered* [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989], 49).
28. Monica Sone, *Nisei Daughter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1953), 170–71; Mitsuye Yamada, *Camp Notes and Other Poems*, 2nd ed. (Latham NY: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, 1992), 13.
29. Uchida, *Desert Exile*, 92, 41; Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 19–20.
30. Lee, *Picturing Chinatown*, 287; Kogawa, *Obasan*, 218; Wakako Yamauchi, preface to a poetry reading, quoted in Dorothy Ritsuko McDonald and Katherine Newman, "Relocation and Dislocation: The Writings of Hisaye Yamamoto and Wakako Yamauchi," in *Seventeen Syllables*, ed. King-Kok Cheung (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 130.
31. Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 134, ix.
32. Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, 97, 74–75.