

CAMPU: EPISODE 4

Cameras

VO: Hey, this is Noah. If you like what we're doing, subscribe, share, leave us a review on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you're listening to this. It really does help us out. Thanks so much.

VO: Archie Miyatake's dad had a secret--and it was a good one.

ARCHIE MIYATAKE: I was playing with some friends outside, and then all of a sudden my father told me to go inside the apartment, so I thought I did something wrong, he was gonna bawl me out.



Portrait of Toyo Miyatake by Ansel Adams taken at Manzanar in 1943. ([Public domain](#))

VO: As you might have gathered over the previous episodes, privacy was basically nonexistent at Manzanar, with a one-room apartment to a family and multiple families to a barrack, all watched over by armed guards. So keeping secrets in the first place was... difficult. But the elder Miyatake had done it.

MIYATAKE: I went in the apartment and he told me to sit down. He says, "I got to show you something."

VO: Archie's dad was Toyo Miyatake. Before the war, he'd owned a thriving photography business in L.A.

Learn more about [Toyo Miyatake](#).



A wedding photograph of Mr. and Mrs. Hideo Murata taken at Toyo Miyatake photo studio in Los Angeles, California in 1947. Miyatake was a community photographer in Los Angeles both before and after the war. [Photo](#) courtesy of the Okine Collection, CSU Dominguez Hills Department of Archives and Special Collections.

VO: After Pearl Harbor, the federal government made Japanese Americans turn in any contraband, things like guns and dynamite but also cameras and short-wave radios. Miyatake was allowed to keep at least some of his cameras, but his business was reduced to taking the Japanese American identification photos now required by the government.

VO: When the family was forced to leave, Miyatake had put most of his equipment in storage in Los Angeles--most, but not all of it. Cameras weren't allowed in the camps. Miyatake knew this, so he didn't bring a camera.

VO: He brought a lens.

[theme]

VO: From Densho, I'm Noah Maruyama and this is Campu.

VO: When I say Toyo Miyatake brought a lens into Manzanar, I don't just mean a physical camera lens--although he did bring one of those. But he also brought a unique perspective on the camps. The vast majority of the photos of the camps were taken by people who were not incarcerated. They were by and large white, and hired by the WRA. This isn't a surprise, of course. Even if their cameras had been permitted in the camps, by the time Japanese Americans were incarcerated, most had turned in their cameras to their local police

departments, sold them, hidden them, or given them away.

MIYOKO TSUBOI NAKAGAWA: you were supposed to go to the police station and turn those contrabands I guess they called it in

BILL HIROSHI SHISHIMA: we turned our cameras into the government when we first got relocated in May of 1942

ARTHUR OGAMI: soon after Pearl Harbor

NAKAGAWA: that was the first time I've ever been in a police station

HENRY SAKAMOTO: the FBI agent opened the drawer and found this camera. He says, "You're not supposed to have this." I said, "It's broken," but he took it anyway. [Laughs.]

FRANK KONISHI: my cousin ... he had a real expensive German camera because he was a photographer.... They took all those, but he never got any of those back.

VICTOR IKEDA: all our cameras and radios were all confiscated as contrabands.

GEORGE FUGAMI: if you have a camera, you better hide it

OGAMI: our cameras and any firearms that we had.

BILL WATANABE: So Mr. Ikeda and my two older brothers
decided that they should bury these expensive
cameras

JOE ISHIKAWA: I had a camera I gave to a friend

WATANABE: they marched off ten paces to the east ...
something like that. They had a map.

FUGAMI: So I took my camera

WATANABE: so they dug a big hole, they buried all this
stuff

FUGAMI: --buried it in the ground.

WATANABE: and then after the war they came back and they
marched off ten paces ... and they could never
find it. They dug and they dug and they dug
for days but never found it.

FUGAMI: Crazy, huh? It's gone. [Laughs]

SHISHIMA: So camp pictures are very scarce for us.

VO: But they're a little less scarce for us
because Toyo Miyatake had a hunch that history
would need his lens. That day in the family's
barrack apartment, Archie Miyatake recalls:

MIYATAKE: he says, "As a photographer, I have a
responsibility." I didn't know what he was
talking about. And he says, "Well, you know, I
have to take all the pictures in Manzanar to

keep a record of what's going on here, so this kind of thing will never happen again."

VO: Miyatake wasn't alone in feeling the responsibility to document camp life. Here's Eiichi Edward Sakauye, who was incarcerated at Heart Mountain:

[EIICHI EDWARD SAKAUYE](#): I've been a historian all my life, preserving history of certain area or certain things. So I began to take pictures of activities in the camp, and nobody else did.

[Learn more](#) about the life of Eiichi Edward Sakauye.

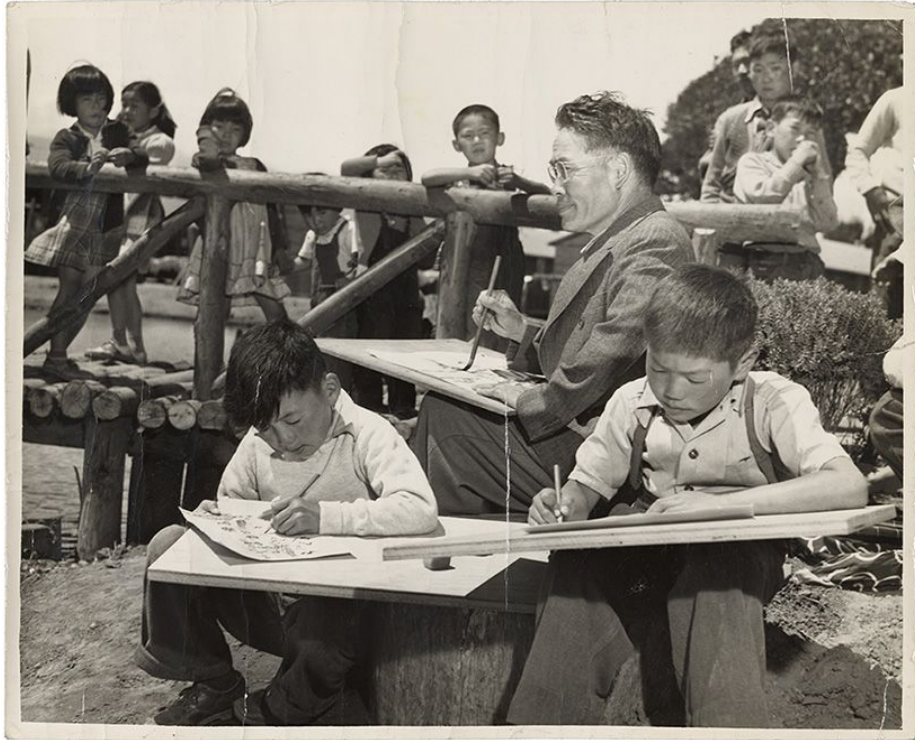
[Watch](#) Sakauye's video footage of life in Heart Mountain.

VO: Unlike Miyatake, Sakauye waited until Spring 1943, when the Western Defense Command lifted its restrictions on cameras in the camps.

[SAKAUYE](#): I asked the project director, Guy Robertson, one day ... I'd like to have my camera back to record some of the history and activities of the camp." ... So immediately, he got in touch with War Relocation Authority, and next day I got a report, says, "You may have your camera and photographic equipment."

VO: But back in 1942, it wasn't clear if or when the incarcerated would get their cameras back. Some decided that if photography wasn't allowed, they'd find other ways to document their experiences. Artists like Mine Okubo and

Chiura Obata used art and taught students to create their own representations.



Chiura Obata teaching a children's art class at Tanforan Assembly Center, 1942. ([Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution](#))

[Check out](#) Mine Okubo's drawings in the Japanese American National Museum collections. [Learn more](#) about Chiura Obata.

VO: Here's Dr. Elena Tajima Creef, author of *Imaging Japanese America: The Visual Construction of Citizenship and the Body*:

CREEF: as far as I know, artists never had the same constraints around what they were allowed to draw or paint or not.

VO: Others wrote poetry, stories, kept diaries. At a time when the federal government was clearly censoring Japanese American representations of the concentration camps, all of these different forms have vital roles to play in the historical record.

CREEF: And as a result, their artistic record is much fuller, much more three dimensional and filled with a full range not just the details of everyday life in camp, but also the emotional status of the internees.

VO: Miyatake wasn't the only incarcerated who found a way to get a camera for himself. Dave Tatsuno, for instance, found sympathy in a fellow "movie man" at Topaz. He'd left his camera with a friend before leaving for camp.

DAVE TATSUNO: the director of the co-operative, the government man, very nice fellow, Walter Honderick, I was standing next to him, and all of a sudden he has a camera, and he was taking shots. I said, "Gee, Walt, I'd give my right arm to have my camera here now," exactly what I said. And normally it's against the law. ... You know what he said? "Dave, where is your camera?" ... "It's in Oakland with a friend of mine." He says, "Why don't you write to him and have it sent to me?" ... One day, he comes to my barrack with a camera, and he says, "Dave, be careful. Don't take it near the fence where the guards are."

VO: But he couldn't exactly carry a camera around camp with him. He needed a way to conceal it.

[TATSUNO](#): Mrs. Day's baby shoes that we used to sell, in our store in San Francisco and later in camp. I put the camera ... right in that little box ... Didn't look like a camera.

VO: Tatsuno took rare film footage of the camps.

[TATSUNO](#): Yeah, I was very, very fortunate to have this camera. Without it, you wouldn't have Topaz.

VO: Tatsuno wasn't the only one experimenting with new photographic technologies in camp, though. Bill Manbo used kodachrome film, which had only been invented in 1935, to take some rare color photos of life at Heart Mountain.

[Learn more](#) about Bill Manbo's photographs of Heart Mountain in *Colors of Confinement* by Eric Muller.

VO: But taking the photos was just half the story. After shooting them, the photographers needed to find ways to develop them. But the incarcerated were nothing if not resourceful.

[BEN TONOOKA](#): in Jerome, a friend of ours was an x-ray technician, so on the weekend we used that darkroom to make prints and stuff.

VO: At Heart Mountain, father-son team George and Frank Hirahara dug a hole underneath their barrack and built a darkroom there.

[See photos](#) taken by George and Frank Hirahara at Heart Mountain.

VO: Sakauye and Miyatake, among others, turned their barracks into darkrooms. Here's [Archie] Miyatake:

[MIYATAKE](#): he set up the place in the apartment where we lived, but he would put it all away by the morning and we wouldn't even know he was doing anything.

[SAKAUYE](#): the windows, we had to look for cardboards, and that was Celotex boards that they lined up the inside, and we went to look for those in the scrap pile, and my brother worked in the, in the woodwork shop, so putting those together, we closed up the windows to make a darkroom.

[ART ISHIDA](#): I made a darkroom in the corner in Tule Lake ... dabbling with the film

VO: While Miyatake and others were finding creative ways to document their experiences in camp, the WRA was rapidly compiling its own photographic record. In Spring 1942, Dorothea Lange--best known for her iconic "Migrant Mother" of a woman and her children during the Great Depression--was hired by the WRA to photograph the forced removal of Japanese Americans.

TATSUNO: just before we were to be evacuated, she came to our home, and Alice met her. Then after that we met her again in camp.



Dave Tatsuno with his son in San Francisco, photographed by Dorothea Lange shortly before the forced removal in 1942. [Photo](#) courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

VO: Lange's photos put the ironies of the forced removal in bold relief: photos of young Japanese American girls saying the Pledge of Allegiance, little boys dressed up in scout uniforms, a son in military uniform helping his mother prepare to leave, a Japanese American World War I veteran being taken away by military police.

CREEF: my critique around Lange is that her photographs of internees really cast them as tragic subjects. And of course, it is a tragic

chapter in American history. There's no doubt about it. My beef is just that her photographs simply frame them as tragic victims of a particular moment in history.

LAURIE SASAKI: Dorothea Lange had taken all these pictures of us leaving. And I sit in front of the pictures and I started to sob. ... Because I thought if I had to give up everything today, what I had... I mean, I couldn't, I don't think that I could do that. ... And it suddenly hit me what my mother had gone through.

VO: Lange's photos show tremendous empathy for the plight of the incarcerated at a moment when much of the country was demanding their incarceration. And Lange, hired to photograph the forced removal, was observing Japanese Americans at a moment when they were most helpless--

CREEF: so again the pathos that her camera records are literally of Japanese and Japanese Americans undergoing the trauma of removal as they're waiting for buses and waiting for trains and they're tagged and they're pulling their children together.

VO: But Japanese Americans weren't tragic in and of themselves, resigned to forced removal and incarceration. Some were actively resisting it, in big ways and small.

VO: Still, the WRA was clearly threatened by Lange's photos. They were impounded by federal censors until the WRA closed in 1946, and remained largely unknown for decades after that. As its censorship of Lange suggests, the WRA encouraged heavily sanitized representations of the camps. Photographers were explicitly forbidden from taking photos of the barbed wire, guard towers, and armed sentries. Instead we see smiling students. Hard-working farmers. Children saying the pledge of allegiance. Families celebrating Thanksgiving in mess halls. These images make up the majority of the WRA's photographs. In film as well, they cast the Japanese American incarcerated as good Americans.

MYER: These people are not prisoners of war.

VO: That's Dillon Myer, WRA director from May 1942 onwards.

MYER: They were not charged with anything except having the wrong ancestor.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that's right. You said two thirds of them are American citizens, didn't you?

VO: Why would the WRA be so interested in reminding the American populace that the people it had just locked up in concentration camps were in fact American citizens? In photographing them as good Americans, when the

whole premise of the incarceration was that they were the exact opposite?

MYER: Even though the War Relocation Authority is responsible for the operation of the relocation centers, we're convinced that they are not good things.

VO: Kind of a strange thing for the director of the agency tasked with running the "relocation centers" to say, right? We asked Dr. Ellen Wu about it. She's the author of *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*.

WU: Americans told themselves, and they told the world that they were fighting a war for the cause of democracy and freedom.



Child incarceratedees participating in a Harvest Festival parade at Gila River concentration camp, November 26, 1942. ([National Archives and Records Administration](#))

VO: For some reason, locking up 120,000 people on the basis of race didn't really mesh with that perception. The government also wanted to protect American citizens who had been taken hostage by the Japanese. Here's Milton S. Eisenhower, who directed the WRA for the first few months of the agency's existence. And yeah, the brother of *that* Eisenhower.

EISENHOWER: we are setting a standard for the rest of the world in the treatment of people who may have loyalties to an enemy nation. We are protecting ourselves without violating the principles of Christian decency. We won't change this fundamental decency no matter what our enemies do. But of course, we hope most earnestly that our example will influence the Axis powers in their treatment of Americans who fall into their hands.

VO: But that doesn't entirely explain why the WRA was so invested in portraying the incarcerated as good Americans. Here's Myer, Eisenhower's successor:

MYER: ...it's not easy to raise good Americans behind barbed wire. The relocation centers seemed necessary last year. But we're finding that under the influence of the conditions in which they live, many of the evacuees are losing something very precious to them, and important to the nation. Their faith in democracy, which is the only way of life they

know, and the nation is losing too, because these people might be--

INTERVIEWER: Well, they might be working at something that will help the country instead of costing the taxpayers money.

VO: There it is. The WRA was expensive, especially for a country in the middle of a war. Under Myer, the WRA began to send people away almost as soon as it had opened the centers. But in order to do that, the agency had to convince Americans not to oppose Japanese American "resettlement" in their communities. Maybe Myer genuinely cared about the incarcerated. Or, like Eisenhower, he wanted to show the Japanese just how well the U.S. was treating its prisoners. He may have thought that these "humane" facilities would help distinguish the Allies from their Axis enemies. Or his concern about faith in democracy was a veneer for his conviction that this was a waste of tax dollars, or he thought that this argument would hit home with ordinary Americans, or he was just doing his job. Probably some combination of the above. But regardless of Myer's individual motivations, the WRA was up against a slew of anti-Japanese propaganda coming from all sides. It was in the papers. On the radio. On TV. In cartoons. You may even recognize the name of one of the cartoonists.

BILL HOSOKAWA: Even Dr. Seuss, the Cat in the Hat guy, he was a newspaper cartoonist at that time, and he drew some vicious cartoons.

VO: In one of his comics, Theodor Geisel--later known as Dr. Seuss--depicted Japanese Americans in California, Oregon, and Washington lining up to collect TNT from a shack. The caption reads "Waiting for the Signal from Home." The cartoon endorses the idea that people of Japanese ancestry in the U.S. were loyal to Japan and helping them with the war effort. It plays up racial stereotypes about what Japanese people look like: they're all men with slant eyes and big obsequious smiles on their faces. You know, the bog-standard Asian caricature that'd seem so outdated today if it weren't still being used in, say, the most recent season of South Park. Geisel was not alone in using images to highlight the perceived racial differences of Japanese Americans. In late 1941, *Time Magazine* published a now infamous article that sought to educate Americans who were, quote, "demonstrating a distressing ignorance on the delicate question of how to tell a Chinese from a Jap."



One of Dr. Seuss's anti-Japanese cartoons published during WWII, "Waiting for the Signal From Home." ([Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego](#))

RICHARD KONDA: So they had this picture of this horrible-looking person who is obviously the enemy, and it had a person, a very kind-looking face that person must be Chinese."

VO: And let's not forget that the federal government was not exactly innocent here. Here's Dr. Wu again:

WU: it's like whiplash, you know, you have in 1941 1942, the government is making this blanket decision and saying we can't distinguish between disloyal and loyal Japanese Americans so we're just going to lock them all up. And so you have to get from there to convincing the public to welcome and accept new Japanese

American newcomers. And so there basically was a messaging public relations campaign undertaken by government authorities.

VO: And it wasn't the only one. In 1943, Ansel Adams, a landscape photographer, took a series of photographs documenting life at Manzanar. He wasn't hired by the WRA, but gained access to Manzanar because he was friends with its director, Ralph Merritt.

[MAS OKUI](#): When I first saw him, he frightened me--

KOKETSU: He seemed like a very big man, to me, but of course we were little kids.

[OKUI](#): I thought he was the ugliest man I'd ever seen.

KARLENE KOKETSU: we were waiting for school to start and

[MAS OKUI](#): I remember kind of following him around--

KOKETSU: --this gentleman came and

TSURUTANI: he just looked around.

KOKETSU: and asked if he could take a picture of us and--

[JOYCE OKAZAKI](#): I told him, "I want to face the camera," and he said, "No, you're going to face how I told you."

AYAKO TSURUTANI: he was very friendly.

OKAZAKI: I said, "But my sister's facing the camera."
"No."

TSURUTANI: Just took the picture right away.



This is likely the photo Joyce Okazaki, née Nakamura, recalls. She is looking away, her sister is looking at the camera. ([Library of Congress](#))

OKAZAKI: So there I am with my back to the camera ...
that's how he posed us. [Laughs]

VO: As Joyce Okazaki shows, photographers posed incarcerated to visually construct a photo. This power to construct the image was heightened because Adams was a well-known white photographer, visiting Manzanar by choice. But Adams wasn't alone in "constructing" images in this way.



Joyce Okazaki, née Nakamura, photographed by Ansel Adams at Manzanar in 1943. ([Library of Congress](#))

CREEF: I love the anecdotal story of Dorothea Lange, who's photographing internees on relocation day, barking orders and asking people to move vehicles around to create an even better shot. There's a lot of stage managing that has gone on behind the images of these famous documentary photographers.

VO: That power dynamic was heightened because Adams and Lange were not subject to the incarceration themselves.

TAIRA FUKUSHIMA: that picture which is not typical, that was fixed up ... they knew people from Los Angeles, who used to ship 'em stuff ... And so they made 'em look like it was a pretty nice apartment. ... They didn't have what looks like the average place.

TAIRA FUKUSHIMA: when I looked at that, I said, "This doesn't look like Manzanar to me."

VO: Adams felt that what had happened to Japanese Americans was wrong and he wanted to depict them as--stop me if you've heard this one before--good Americans. Here's Dr. Creef again:

CREEF: he was compelled with some sense of the outrage and injustice of Japanese American citizens who were interned.

VO: He had a personal connection with someone who had been incarcerated.

CREEF: Adams had a Japanese gardener, who was interned and he was so outraged that somebody he considered a friend as well as someone in his employ was taken away that, that he wanted to do something.

VO: Adams viewed the photos he took at Manzanar as some of the most important of his career. And the photos were very controversial when they first came out in 1944.

CREEF: And his collection *Born Free and Equal* is a harsh critique was not particularly well received and was published in 1944.

VO: But despite his good intentions, his photos fell short of depicting the real experiences of the incarcerated.

FUKUSHIMA: And so I thought I'd mention that everything in a picture is not necessarily true.

VO: Adams took a lot of posed portraits of smiling incarcerated.



Corporal Jimmie Shohara, photographed by Ansel Adams in Manzanar. ([Library of Congress](#))

CREEF: the extreme close up is one that just fascinated me because they almost look especially with the vantage point of time like archetypes, and the archetype is loyal, which is a subtitle for *Born Free and Equal: Portraits of the Loyal Japanese American Citizens*.



Japanese American U.S. Naval cadet nurse Kay Fukuda, photographed by Ansel Adams at Manzanar. ([Library of Congress](#))

VO: Creef also notes that a disproportionate number of these photos were of women.

CREEF: all the women and all the school girls are so incredibly squeaky clean and sanitized and and, and bright. And they visually challenge a war time framing of the Japanese Americans as suspicious, as enemy.

VO: But sometimes, this makes the camp experience look, well, happy. Unsurprisingly, Lange didn't agree with Adams' depiction of the incarcerated. Despite having initially encouraged him to visit Manzanar, she later said, quote, "He never 'got it'... never understood what was wrong with the internment." Lange was a documentary photographer. Adams was not--he was primarily a landscape photographer. And that shows in his photos.



Photo of Manzanar by Ansel Adams taken in 1943. Original caption: "Bird's-eye view of grounds from guard tower; view west, showing buildings, roads, and Sierra Nevada mountains in background." ([Library of Congress](#))

CREEF: looking at Manzanar, looking at internment camp life through a long distance lens where the bodies of internees are literally dwarfed as they disappear into the really beautiful, well-irrigated and plowed farmland that they're cultivating, but they disappear into the backdrop of land and earth and mountain.

VO: Here's Dr. Thy Phu, author of *Picturing Model Citizens: Civility in Asian American Visual Culture*.

PHU: this concern with landscape aestheticizes to the point of erasing the real experience of Japanese Americans and the harshness of the land.

PHU: What was striking to me in this was kind of the erasure of the labor, the immense amounts of labor that went into it.

PHU: It's almost as though in order to earn the right of citizenship, which they were still nevertheless denied, they had to prove their capacity to be productive.



Benji Iguchi driving a tractor in a field at Manzanar. ([Library of Congress](#))

VO: The idea that Asians could prove their belonging by being good workers would later become a fundamental tenet to the "model minority myth." The myth is often attributed to one William Petersen.

VO: In 1966, Petersen wrote a *New York Times* piece entitled "Success Story, Japanese-American Style." But more than twenty years earlier, the concepts underlying the myth are evident in the WRA's photographic representation of the camps.

WU: I absolutely think that the incarceration experience laid the foundation for the emergence of a new way of thinking about Asian Americans as a so-called model minority.

VO: Most Americans have heard of the model minority myth. But what is it exactly?

WU: the model minority myth is a racial stereotype. ... that Asians have a kind of model culture where they really prize family values, respect for their elders,

PHU: --resilience and productivity-

WU: working in the defense industries, or let's say in food production.

PHU: --agricultural efficiency--

WU: a reverence for education,

PHU: success

WU: good neighbors, good citizens

CREEF: the most patriotic

WU: quiet

CREEF: uber-citizens of the nation

WU: they wanted to assimilate and blend into American society.

CREEF: their various sacrifices as soldiers and as internees

WU: so they didn't really make waves and make trouble.

CREEF: who have complied with Executive Order 9066 in their incarceration

PHU: these characteristics can be seen through kind of the visual depiction of Japanese Americans at the camps themselves.

VO: That was Dr. Phu. The place where she sees the model minority myth emerging in Japanese American incarceration...

PHU: --a whole set of photographs by a number of photographers, that instead paid attention to kind of the lushness or the productiveness with which the internees were able to coax vegetables and other goods from this land.

VO: The WRA's thinking was this: If Japanese Americans proved their capacity to be productive, then all the bad things that people were saying about them--that they carry diseases, have lots of babies, can't assimilate, are going to take over the West Coast--all of that would be proven wrong.

WU: Before World War II, ... immigrants and their children from Asia, they were thought of as threatening, as un-American, as fundamentally alien to American society--

VO: This threat is known as yellow peril. And actually, it's inseparable from the model minority myth. With COVID-19, we've seen firsthand how one can easily give way to the other.

WU: the model minority and the yellow peril, they are in some ways two sides of that same like racist coin. And I think what connects them is the idea that really Asians are just there's something in there deep inside that is just just too different. You're never really, you know, one of us ... even if you seem super assimilated and successful.

VO: But it was an easy narrative for Japanese Americans to buy into, one that many got caught up in, even helped create.

RANDY SENZAKI: I think the problem is they're holding onto this idea that there is a model minority, that if you make enough money and you can move to the suburbs and buy your Lexus with the twenty grand you got from reparations and redress or whatever ... that somehow you've bought your rights to being an American in this society and you don't have to deal with it anymore.

VO: Beneath the surface of the model minority myth was extensive trauma.

MICHIKO FRANCES CHIKAHISA: Those of us who were working with people in the community knew that there

were a lot of problems with drugs, drop out from school, families that were broken up.

[SENZAKI](#): There's a legacy, and the pain of that experience that's still being played out through the Sansei and the Yonsei generation, and it's still there.

VO: By the 1960s, the model minority myth was being exploited for a new purpose: to fight against the Black Freedom Movement.

WU: if African Americans were now thought of as these troublemakers, the people who were the activists of the Black freedom movement, then Asian Americans, in many ways were considered like their opposites, right they seem to be doing just fine ... recovering from the traumas of war time, not by rabble rousing in the streets, you know, and doing sit-ins and protests. But seemingly anyway, not rocking the boat and getting along with everybody.

VO: The comparison ignores the vastly different experiences of Asian Americans and African Americans in this country.

PHU: the model minority myth is used as a term to discipline and punish other racialized groups within the US.

VO: And while it's not as overt, we can see the comparison between Japanese Americans and other underrepresented populations emerging

during World War II--in how WRA photographers depicted American Indians. In episode 3, we discussed Poston, Gila River, and Leupp, which were located on American Indian reservations.

PHU: the official story is that somehow this would be mutually beneficial that Japanese Americans and American Indians would work together to make the land a better place.

VO: Underlying that narrative were assumptions about Japanese Americans being exceptional farmers and American Indians "sitting" on undeveloped land. One WRA photo depicts Mrs. Ruby Snyder, a Chemehuevi member of the Colorado River Indian Community, as saying "I hear that the Japanese are wonderful farmers. I would like to go down to see how they grow things."

VO: The caption adds, "Undeveloped land will be irrigated for growing crops in the War Relocation Center for evacuees of Japanese ancestry living on the Colorado Indian Reservation"--suggesting that the Mohave and Chemehuevi weren't using that land. But that's not true. They just weren't using it in ways deemed appropriate by the Office of Indian Affairs.



WRA photo of Ruby Snyder, a Chemehuevi member of the Colorado River Indian Community. To build Poston concentration camp, the government took 71,000 acres from the Colorado River Indian Reservation — a decision that was opposed by the Tribal Council on the grounds that they did not wish to participate in an injustice.
([National Archives and Records Administration](#))

PHU: This introduction of Japanese Americans as somehow being superior caretakers of the land who can demonstrate their greater capacity to farm ellides the very material deprivations that had been suffered as a long standing result of the Bureau of Indian Affairs policy.

VO: But this implied comparison--a comparison that's foundational to the model minority myth--suggests that if Japanese Americans could make it after all they went through, why couldn't anyone else?

WU: the model minority concept upholds or reproduces this mythology of American life. And that mythology basically says that if you work hard enough, you'll succeed.

VO: The cases are not at all comparable. Even Asian Americans don't have one common history in this country. Applied across a whole continent, the model minority myth erases the vastly different experiences--and needs--of our different communities.

WU: throwing everybody into one box, and then slapping a label on it, and just assuming that everybody in that box is more or less alike--it's a huge disservice to any kind of group you can think of.

VO: Southeast Asian refugee communities are still coping with residual trauma from the Vietnam War and other forms of U.S. imperialism in Asia. Sometimes Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders--dealing with the ongoing colonization of their lands--are also lumped in. That's not all.

WU: There are ... a significant percentage of Asian Americans who are without papers, right or without authorization and that leaves them vulnerable to other kinds of problems, especially with the government.

VO: There are vast segments of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community that struggle

with lower rates of high school and college graduation, and higher rates of poverty and incarceration--and their needs are invisible because of statistics that lump all Asians together. But the model minority myth has a firm hold in American pop culture. The Asian student who excels at math and science. The Asian immigrants who work in Silicon Valley. The winners of the Spelling Bee.

WU: I think why it's so powerful is because it's about a non-white group specifically.

VO: By collapsing all "people of color" into one group, by validating and upholding the comparison, the model minority myth makes it possible to sweep something else under the rug too:

WU: the deck is stacked so that white people do have systemic advantages that are passed along from generation to generation. And these advantages allow them to accrue more wealth, have access to more opportunities, and certainly protect them from dangers, such as everyday police violence.

VO: Of course, the image of the quiet, accommodating Japanese Americans who passively accepted their forced removal isn't actually true. As Toyo Miyatake and the incarcerated photographers show, photos have also documented Japanese American resistance. Here's Dr. Wu again:

WU: there were Japanese American zoot suiters and it was not something I'd heard of, I had been learning about African American and Mexican American zoot suiters. You know, the kids during World War Two who had a very stylish way of dressing with the long coats and the big pants and the big hats and the watches and the chains and they love jazz and jitterbugging.

[Read](#) **Dr. Wu's work on Nikkei zoot suiters.**

WU: War Relocation Authority administrators and other folks who were trying to resettle Japanese Americans from the camps to Chicago and other places in the Midwest and the East Coast, I think, because they really stood out. And at that time, what authorities really wanted was for Japanese American resettlers to really do the model minority thing, put their head down, blend in, not make trouble. And eventually, really, literally, the goal was that they would fade into the white middle class.

VO: But just because the WRA had a certain narrative for Japanese Americans doesn't mean that its individual photographers always saw things the same way. Robert Ross was hired in 1944 as an assistant reports officer at Tule Lake. Part of his job was taking photos of the segregation center. He documented the abuses happening in the Tule Lake stockade and

smuggled the photos out to Wayne Collins, a lawyer who was advocating for the release of the stockade prisoners. The scenes he depicts are brutal. Guards dragging incarcerated by their arms. People trying to speak--to say goodbye to--loved ones through a fence. Blurred images taken in haste and secrecy.



Inside the Tule Lake stockade, a jail within a jail built to detain incarcerated considered "troublemakers" by the administration. Photo by Robert Ross, [courtesy of the National Park Service](#).

VO: The Heart Mountain draft resisters, who we talked about in Episode 3, also understood the importance of documenting these things. There's a photo--a shot taken in a Wyoming courtroom in June 1944--that depicts 63 young men seated in rows, craning their faces to make sure that they could see the camera.

DAVE KAWAMOTO: Let's see, I don't remember the photographer, but he had this panoramic camera so he took the picture.

MITS KOSHIYAMA: since we were young guys, we wanted to sit in the front row and see what all the action was, you know.

DAVE KAWAMOTO: he says, "Don't hide your face. Keep it so we can take your face," so everybody had to dodge around, keep the face in the camera.

VO: Takashi Hoshizaki had a feeling that this photo was going to be important.

TAKASHI HOSHIZAKI: It was very strange because I was in the back row and then as the guy got ready somehow something flashed in my mind that said, you know, this picture might be famous about fifty years from now, and so I stood up and looked at the camera.

VO: Some of the resisters have their arms crossed and gaze fearlessly at the camera. Some look down, hands in their laps. Some cross their legs; some sit with both feet firmly on the ground. Some are hidden by the head of the person in front of them or by a shadow; some peer over those heads. Some laugh, some smile mechanically, others look serious, still others like deer in headlights. They're wearing button-down shirts and sweaters and blazers and letterman jackets. They look a

little lopsided, as if the camera wasn't quite straight.



The first day of the trial of the 63 Heart Mountain draft resisters in Federal District Court, Cheyenne, Wyoming. June 12, 1944. [Photo](#) courtesy of the Frank Abe Collection, Densho.

[Break]

VO: The moment a lens focuses, a shutter clicks, a photo appears on paper in a chemical bath--these can be moments of resistance. Toyo Miyatake knew this. But a lens without a camera is just a lens. Miyatake planned to build his camera at Manzanar.

[MIYATAKE](#): So he went to his suitcase and took out some lenses and some film holders and put it on the table.

VO: And he was enlisting Archie to help him out.

[MIYATAKE](#): So he says, "I'm going to have a camera made..."

[MIYATAKE](#): He found the carpenter and ... he gave the measurements ... so he could put the film holder in the back of the camera ... And then for focusing the lens ... there was an auto mechanic ... so he asked him if he could make something so he could make the lens go in and out. ... and he got an idea of using a drain pipe. ... so what he did was he got the drain pipe and also the round ring that goes around it ... so he could screw in the pipe in and out so my father could focus the image. ... It was amazing.

VO: But then he needed to get film. But for that story, we have go back to the 1920s, to a hardware store that had hired him to take merchandise photos. They'd decided to start an in-house photo department and would no longer need Miyatake's services.

[Learn more](#) about the camera Toyo Miyatake built at Manzanar.

[ARCHIE MIYATAKE](#): so my father, instead of ignoring them, he went to help them set up the photo department.

VO: Even though it meant a loss of revenue for him. As it turns out, this hardware company now had a contract with the WRA. And the man they sent out to fill the WRA's orders was the same man Toyo Miyatake had worked with to build the photo department all those years ago.

MIYATAKE: So when my father found that out he right away asked if he would get something for him, and this man was very cooperative because my father helped him so much making this photo department, so he said, "Sure, anytime you want anything let me know."

VO: But getting film wasn't so easy--even outside of camp.

MIYATAKE: --because it was already rationed to each studio--

VO: But, again, Toyo Miyatake had a guy.

MIYATAKE: Well, this man was nice enough to take little bit from all the other studio business that he had and give it to my father, and so that's how my father was able to get the film--

VO: And then, the film had to be smuggled into camp.

MIYATAKE: ...he told my father he will have his coat hanging in the hallway when he takes order

from the WRA people, so he will have it in his pocket, ... and whenever a thing was delivered too big, he would leave his trunk of the car ajar--

VO: But Miyatake couldn't just walk into the administrative offices in camp.

MIYATAKE: The only way my father could get these things was to have one of the policemen--and these policemen were all Japanese internees--he knew a few of them, so he would ask them ... go to the administration building and there's a coat hanging in the hallway, "There's things in there for me..."

VO: Did I say this was a secret? So maybe Toyo Miyatake's camera wasn't a very well kept secret.

ARCHIE MIYATAKE: a lot of the people knew that it was illegal, so when they had picture taken they would keep it quiet so they could have a picture. ... So that way he was able to keep it a secret.

VO: In 1943, Ralph Merritt, the guy who invited Ansel Adams to Manzanar, gave Toyo Miyatake permission to open his own photo studio at Manzanar. But, Merritt had one important caveat:

MIYATAKE: the camp director says, "You know, you can't open a studio because you're a Japanese and

we're still in California and Japanese are not allowed to take photographs, so you have to hire a Caucasian to click the shutter. If that's okay with you then you can open your studio."

VO: Eventually, the WRA allowed Japanese Americans to buy cameras and take photos in camp. But that didn't always change things.

CREEF: even after the ban on cameras is lifted. Given how expensive camera equipment, developing equipment costs, especially during the war years, it's not like suddenly internees are ordering camera equipment and documenting their lives.

VO: It did mean Toyo Miyatake could have his cameras sent to him.

CREEF: given the sort of the more primitive technology of his lunchbox camera, I think he had limited options and what he could photograph and how much technical control he could have over exposures.

CREEF: I tried to track down the actual photographs he took with the famous lunchbox camera. And in my research, what I found is the scenes that he actually photographed are pretty innocuous. Scenic images ... and they're, they're extremely benign. It's the photographs that he was able to take after 1943 when he was able to get his professional equipment

sent to him that his work as a camp photographer really takes off.

VO: Photos of majorettes. Of ladies getting their hair done, baseball games, class photos.

CREEF: I love the representation of the mundane everyday. Because for me, they are reminders of humanity. Humanity and also dignity. and I think that that disappears from the big photo archives of camp life.

VO: But Miyatake also didn't shy away from depicting the realities of living behind barbed wire--even though technically taking photos of the guard towers and the fence was prohibited. In one of his photos, three boys--maybe 10 or 11 years old--peer across the barbed wire fence.

CREEF: this photo it's, it's stunning, maybe one of the most stunning photos from this period of history for its inclusion of the mountains in the back, the guard tower, the sentry tower in the upper right hand corner, and the four strands of barbed wire that divide the photographer from the three boys. The three boys are not looking at Miyatake either. They're looking through the fence out into the distance.

VO: The thing that strikes me looking at that photo of the boys gazing wistfully past the fence is that the boys are standing on the

same side of the fence as the guard tower, the mountains--not the camp--in the background. The photo is titled "Three Boys Behind Barbed Wire" but actually they were on the outside looking in. That knowledge bends the premise of the photo: are they looking out at freedom, or looking in at the camp that changed the trajectories of so many lives? The ambiguity of the photo speaks to memory itself. That some part of the incarcerated continued to hold onto the fence after they'd left it behind. But also: in order to take this photo, the boys had to have crossed the fence.

CREEF: by the time this photo was taken, rules are are certainly much more lax. This would not have been taken in 1942 or even early 43.

VO: Again, Miyatake didn't totally flaunt the rules--he just found ways to bend them.

CREEF: he becomes sort of a documentary photographer of everyday life, the mundane every day, in ways that Adams' archive is really limited based on a couple of visits early on in, in during the camp years. And Lange's archive is even more limited for photographing a very specific early moment.

VO: Maybe this is the power of Miyatake's photos, of women getting their hair done juxtaposed with little boys behind barbed wire. Unlike Adams and Lange both, the tragedy is folded into everyday life in Miyatake's work. And

let's not forget that even in his most mundane, benign photos, we can find an act of resistance.

CREEF: the symbol of Japanese Americans who demanded the right to record and render their experience visible and to create a mark--

VO: That symbol isn't any one photo that he took at Manzanar. It's the lens that he brought to camp.

VO: You've been listening to Campu. Please take the time to subscribe, like, share, review--on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you're tuning in; we love reading the reviews and hearing your feedback! Or hey, just pass the word along. And a big, big thank you to everyone who's helped out so far! Visit densho.org/campu for additional resources and this episode's transcript.

VO: Campu is produced by Hana and Noah Maruyama. The series is brought to you by Densho. Their mission is to preserve and share the history of the WWII incarceration of Japanese Americans to promote equity and justice today. Follow them on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram at @DenshoProject. Support for Campu comes from the Atsuhiko and Ina Goodwin Tateuchi Foundation. Special thanks to Natasha Varner, Brian Niiya, Andrea Simenstad, Elena Tajima Creef, Thy Phu, and Ellen Wu for their assistance with this episode. This episode

included excerpts from 25 Densho oral histories as well as interviews conducted by Frank Abe for his film *Conscience and the Constitution*. The names of the narrators featured in this episode are: Archie Miyatake, MIYOKO TSUBOI NAKAGAWA, BILL HIROSHI SHISHIMA, ARTHUR OGAMI, HENRY SAKAMOTO, FRANK KONISHI, VICTOR IKEDA, GEORGE FUGAMI, BILL WATANABE, JOE ISHIKAWA, EIICHI EDWARD SAKAUYE, DAVE TATSUNO, BEN TONOOKA, ART ISHIDA, LAURIE SASAKI, KARLENE KOKETSU, MAS OKUI, AYAKO TSURUTANI, TAIRA FUKUSHIMA, JOYCE OKAZAKI, RANDY SENZAKI, MICHIKO FRANCES CHIKAHISA, DAVE KAWAMOTO, MITS KOSHIYAMA, TAKASHI HOSHIZAKI. Thanks for listening.

Editor's Note: we forgot to mention the names of BILL HOSOKAWA and RICHARD KONDA whose interviews were also featured in this episode. Our apologies.