Visions of Unity, Memories of Violence: American Civil Religion and the Japanese American Incarceration

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Visions of Unity, Memories of Violence:
American Civil Religion and the Japanese American Incarceration

An Honors Paper for the Department of Religion

By Brigitte Helene McFarland

Bowdoin College, 2018

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List of Abbreviations

CLA – Civil Liberties Act (1988)
CLPEF – Civil Liberties Public Education Fund
CWRIC – Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians
JACL – Japanese American Citizens League
JACS – Japanese American Confinement Sites (Grant Program)
NPS – National Park Service
SERC – Seattle Evacuation Redress Committee
WCCA – Wartime Civil Control Administration
WDC – Western Defense Command
WRA – War Relocation Authority
Introduction

Jane Iwamura, in a 2007 article entitled “Critical Faith: Japanese Americans and the Birth of a New Civil Religion,” posits that efforts to memorialize the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans constitute a distinct civil religion in America.\(^1\) Iwamura argues that “What has emerged from the collective experience of war and internment is a faith that is tied to no particular religious tradition, but that takes racial-ethnic identity as its starting point. Japanese Americans have developed no less than their own brand of civil religion.”\(^2\) In defining a theoretical framework for civil religion Iwamura draws mainly from the work of Robert Bellah, who first forwarded a theory of civil religion in America in 1967. In this piece, “Civil Religion in America,” Bellah aims to call attention to a non-sectarian “religious dimension [of] the whole fabric of American life” informed by “certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share.”\(^3\) The way in which this public religious dimension is

\(^1\) Jane Naomi Iwamura, “Critical Faith: Japanese Americans and the Birth of a New Civil Religion,” *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2007), 939. In the hours following Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor, the Federal Bureau of Investigation arrested about 1,000 Issei (first generation) men in positions of power, and this number grew to about 5,500 in the following weeks. Community leaders, Buddhist priests, businessmen, and Japanese language instructors were taken from their homes, detained at Immigration and Naturalization Services detention centers, and then held at Department of Justice internment camps to await hearings. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which authorized the Secretary of War and designated military commanders to define military zones from which “any or all” persons—regardless of citizenship status—could be excluded. This cleared the way for General John L. DeWitt, head of the Western Defense Command, to act on his firm belief that the Japanese in America posed a significant threat following the December 1941 Pearl Harbor attack and issue a series of Public Proclamations and Civil Exclusion Orders that forcibly and systematically removed all persons of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast of the United States. In 1940, according to U.S. Army estimates, 112,353 persons of Japanese descent were living in California, Washington, and Oregon. The population in these three states represented 89% of the national population of Japanese Americans. This population, and all persons of Japanese descent living in the western half of Arizona, were incarcerated in various stages. Notably, although the government declared the incarceration a “military necessity,” no Japanese Americans in Hawaii—theoretically the site of highest military sensitivity considering the Pearl Harbor attack and the state’s relative proximity to Japan—were incarcerated. Upon release, many incarcerers traveled to Chicago, to the South, and to and other inland areas to resettle. Many also returned to their prior homes with the $25 and one-way transportation granted them by the WRA, often to find their homes and businesses vandalized or foreclosed with belongings stolen.


\(^3\) Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* 134, no. 4 (Fall 2015), 42.
expressed—ritually, symbolically, and rhetorically—is what Bellah calls American civil religion.

Operating with a Durkheimian theory of religion and ritual, Bellah claims that participation in the ritual activity of the American civil religion—on holidays such as Memorial Day and Thanksgiving—not only integrates the family or community into the national cult but also renews their dedication to the American vision as it is articulated in the Declaration of Independence and invoked by various presidents at crucial junctures in American history. This vision, one of liberty, equality, and a flourishing of rights for all people, provides a transcendent goal both for the political process and for the American individual. Acting in accordance with this vision and thus towards this goal is often rhetorically framed in terms of the American citizen and the political system striving to do God’s work on earth. Bellah contends that “God,” here, and the act of invoking God in political speeches and oaths indicates that in America, “ultimate sovereignty has been attributed to God.” Bellah argues against the notion that this invocation of “God”—a word that almost all Americans can accept but that means so many different things to so many different people—is an “empty sign.” On the contrary, Bellah finds that “the separation of church and state has not denied the political realm a religious dimension,” and that the “common elements of religious orientation” shared by most Americans “have played a crucial role in the development of American institutions and still provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere.”

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4 Bellah, “Civil Religion,” 49.
5 Ibid., 43.
6 Ibid.,” 42.
7 Ibid., 41-42.
8 Ibid., 42.
The conviction that God is the implicit and ultimate sovereign of America—alongside popular sovereignty—supplies a transcendent basis for judging and critiquing American policies and actions both at home and abroad. Nonetheless, a key part of this civil religion is faith in God’s special providence for America. Bellah writes that in a civil religious understanding, “[God] is actively interested and involved in history, with a special concern for America…Europe is Egypt; America, the promised land. God has led his people to establish a new sort of social order that shall be a light unto all nations.”

For Iwamura, it is the critical role of the Japanese American memorialization of the incarceration that is paramount and that calls into question Bellah’s claim that American civil religion unifies American citizens and reveals the nation’s divine favor. Iwamura identifies the Japanese American civil religion as a “critical faith,” one which “does not abandon civil religious principles (liberty, equality before the law, due process, and so on), but finds it necessary to reinterpret these ideals in relation to the Japanese American experience and to make known that experience.” This critical process is necessary, Iwamura contends, if Americans are to live up to these principles rather than conceal their past violation. In other words, the critical role of a Japanese American civil religion is necessary if Americans are not to be lulled by the myths that American civil religion works to perpetuate. She writes, to “adopt the larger American civil religious discourse part and parcel…would be to retain a naive understanding and credulous embrace of the same institutions that were used to justify their internment.”

Iwamura’s use of the term civil religion is provocative in that she attributes the driving force for the creation of this civil religion to the marginalization and exclusion of

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9 Bellah, “Civil Religion,” 43.
10 Ibid., 45-46.
12 Ibid., 942.
citizens of a specific racial-ethnic identity. Bellah emphasizes the integrating power of
civil religion—the power to unite citizens in spite of their differing religious
affiliations—and ultimately looks towards even greater unity in the form of a potential
future “civil religion of the world.” Iwamura contends that the Japanese American civil
religion does not reflect or contribute to national solidarity, but rather that “the United
States is home to many civil religions” (emphasis in original), as marginalized
communities often excluded from, or in this case, targeted by, American institutions are
“compelled to develop their own civil religious faith…” Iwamura sees these civil
religions as “related to but distinct” from “national expressions” of American civil
religion. However, she does not elaborate on the ways in which this Japanese American
civil religion is both related to and distinct from an American civil religion.

Although she does not specifically reference this point in her work, Iwamura’s
formulation is anticipated by both Robert Bellah and Michael Walzer. Bellah makes
passing mention of the possibility that there are many civil religions in America, but
neither affirms nor elaborates on this claim. Walzer, in his work On Toleration, presents
civil religion as an important tool in fostering common identity “in immigrant societies
where identities are otherwise so diverse,” such as America. Given this necessity for
civil religion to foster national solidarity, Walzer cautions that “[A] national minority
with a civil religion of its own can still be tolerated, so long as the rites are celebrated

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14 Bellah, “Civil Religion,” 54.
16 Ibid., 960.
17 Ibid., 960.
18 Robert N. Bellah, The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial (New York: The
privately.” Japanese American civil religion with its public and critical rhetoric and rituals calls Walzer’s claim into question. Thus, we arrive at the question inherent in Iwamura’s assertion of a critical Japanese American civil religion: what precisely is the relationship between American civil religion and Japanese American civil religion? Is it the case that American civil religion has tolerated the critical faith of a Japanese American civil religion, or has it subdued and absorbed it?

I agree with Jane Iwamura as to the distinctiveness of Japanese American civil religion and I take up the challenge of elaborating its contours as well as its points of contention and congruence with American civil religion. This elaboration consists of the following elements: The first is the process (often contentious) by which land and space are sacralized in America, and the particular roles of various institutions in this process, most notably the National Park Service. The second is the ritualization that marks the civil religious calendar, specifically the social death and rebirth of the Japanese American community that is afforded by the Days of Remembrance held annually on the February 19th anniversary of the issuing of Executive Order 9066, the executive order that paved the way for the incarceration. The third is my examination of three iterations of the Day of Remembrance over a forty-year period—the first event held in Seattle in 1978, the first national event held in Washington, D.C. in 1998, and a Seattle-area Day of Remembrance held in 2018. I examine multiple iterations of this ritual for two reasons: 1) to illuminate the dynamic relation between Japanese American civil religion and

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20 Walzer, *On Toleration*, 78.
21 Note one scholar describes the Japanese American post-War pilgrimages as “almost sacral” or “almost religious;” see Inouye, *The Long Afterlife of Nikkei Wartime Incarceration*, 121,127.
22 The dedication ceremonies and openings of various memorials at the network of assembly centers and permanent camps most frequently occur in mid-February, as near to this date as convenient.
American civil religion and 2) to highlight the undeniably historical and political
classification of “civil religion.”

My analysis draws on field visits as well as both primary and secondary sources. I
received a Grúa/O’Connell Research Award which allowed me to travel to Seattle to
attend the 2018 Day of Remembrance and visit relevant memorials and Japanese
American community institutions in the area. When home in California over breaks, I
was also able to visit many former sites of incarceration and study and photograph the
memorials marking these sites. I have drawn various materials from Denshō—a Seattle-
based nonprofit devoted to preserving and sharing the stories of the incarceration. These
materials include the Denshō Digital Archive, an extensive online collection of oral
histories, photographs, and documents regarding the experience and history of the
incarceration, as well as their online encyclopedia which provides information on all
aspects of the incarceration. I also obtained material from the Seattle Public Library’s
newspaper archives.

**The Religion of American Civil Religions**

Bellah structures his account of American civil religion around conventional
categories of religion: symbol, ritual, holiday, sacred space, sacrifice and the divine.
However, the weight he assigns to each is strikingly uneven—Bellah stresses Presidential
speeches and the sacrificial blood of soldiers. Moreover, Bellah does not go into detail as
to how the contents of these categories are produced or changed over time. Bellah
additionally points to no institutions that manage or mediate these various aspects of
American civil religion. Because the National Park Service as an institution is so central
to the Japanese American civil religion and because the rhetoric of Japanese American
civil religion contains no references to God, only to seemingly transcendent ideals, I find
Bruce Lincoln’s definition of religion to be helpful in thinking about the religiosity of the Japanese American civil religion. The four parts of Lincoln’s definition of religion are as follows:

(1) A discourse whose concerns transcend the human, temporal, and contingent, and that claims for itself a similarly transcendent status. (2) A set of practices whose goal is to produce a proper world and/or proper human subjects, as defined by a religious discourse to which these practices are connected. (3) A community whose members construct their identity with reference to a religious discourse and its attendant practices. (4) An institution that regulates religious discourse, practices, and community, reproducing them over time and modifying them as necessary, while asserting their eternal validity and transcendent value.23 (emphasis mine)

Lincoln writes that “All four domains—discourse, practice, community, and institution—are necessary parts of anything that can properly be called a ‘religion.’”24 At the same time, he acknowledges that “Each [domain] can be developed and emphasized to differing degrees and can relate to the others in various ways.”25 For example, “Discourse and practice may be closely coordinated, for instance, or badly out of sync…[I]nstitution and community may cooperate closely…or may be locked in power struggles and hold each other in contempt.”26 What is especially helpful about Lincoln’s interpretation of religion is his recognition that religion is not, despite its pretenses, antithetical to history, difference and conflict. In this paper, I illuminate the ways in which these domains function in a Japanese American civil religion, paying attention to the effects of changing historical and political contexts.

Days of Remembrance: Social Death and Rebirth

24 Lincoln, Holy Terrors, 7.
25 Ibid., 7.
26 Ibid., 7.
I chose to focus on the Days of Remembrance for several reasons. First, they have received little scholarly attention. In assessing the religious nature of the remembrance movement, Iwamura and Joanne Doi both focus on pilgrimage to former sites of incarceration. Second, insofar as the Days of Remembrance mark the anniversary of the government order that precipitated the events of the incarceration, these rites direct attention to the government’s unlawful actions and thus retain the distinct and critical character of Japanese American civil religion. Third, the Days of Remembrance provide a window into the shifting relations between Japanese American civil religion and American civil religion. Fourth, the rituals and rhetoric of the various Days of Remembrance focus on death and rebirth. I agree with Iwamura’s contention that the government’s racialized criminalization and seizure of Japanese American citizens, long-term residents, and their properties qualified as a “social death” for the population. I not only augment this claim, but also I argue that the first Day of Remembrance in 1978 constituted a ritual rebirth of the community.

For Iwamura, Japanese American civil religion memorializes “the social death of Japanese Americans —their racial exclusion in the United States—and ritually reaffirm[s] this historical moment and social fact.” In contrast to the way in which Bellah’s civil religious framework accounts for death—in Christian terms of sacrificial death and rebirth, the Japanese American civil religion takes a collective social death as its object of memorialization. Iwamura writes that participation in rituals like pilgrimage

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27 Iwamura’s sacred texts consist of the oral histories of former internees, particularly those presented at the 1981 Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC) hearings. The hearings held from June to December of 1981 led the CWRIC—a bipartisan federal commission established to investigate the circumstances surrounding Executive Order 9066 and its impact on civilians—to conclude that the Japanese American incarceration was a product of “race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership,” eventually leading to the passage of the Civil Liberties Act in 1988, which granted reparations to Japanese Americans who had been interned.

and Days of Remembrance “is an obligation that redeploy memory in the service of the living (including future generations) and can be distinguished from similar American civil religious rituals of memorialization, such as the Gettysburg Address.”

Iwamura here is referencing Bellah’s assertion that the themes of sacrificial death and rebirth entered the civil religion with the Civil War. Bellah writes that, “With the Christian archetype in the background, Lincoln, ‘our martyred president,’ was linked to the war dead, those who ‘gave the last full measure of devotion.’ The theme of sacrifice was indelibly written into the civil religion.” From this development emerged “the most hallowed monument of the civil religion,” Arlington National Cemetery, and the ritual observance of Memorial Day, a central aspect of Bellah’s ritual calendar. In her theorization of a Japanese American civil religion, Iwamura adopts a very different understanding of death. Namely, death and the dead in the Japanese American civil religion are neither viewed in Christian sacrificial terms nor are they viewed in individual terms. Iwamura writes that, “The dead—which here includes a sense of what used to be (Japanese American life before internment) and what they had hoped to become (fully accepted American subjects)—are ever present, but only remain so through continual acts of attention and care.” Nonetheless, memorialization of death remains a key element of both versions of civil religion.

Iwamura’s assertion that the closure of businesses and organizations, seizure of properties, and incarceration suffered by Japanese Americans constitutes a “social death” is well-supported both theoretically and in terms of the rhetoric used to discuss the

31 Ibid., 48.
32 Ibid., 48.
aftermath of the incarceration. Scholarship on social death spans disciplines and the term is used in a multitude of contexts to describe many different phenomena. In a 2015 article in *Contemporary Social Science*, Jana Králová called attention to the ambiguous application of the term, and asserted that social death had three central components: “a loss of social identity, a loss of social connectedness and losses associated with disintegration of the body.”³⁴ Králová contends that true social death is one in which all three of these key facets are “severely compromised,” but I would contend, as do Claudia Card and Lisa Marie Cacho, that although bodily disintegration or physical violence upon the body may certainly be an element of and contribute to social death, it is not a necessary component. Rather, I understand social death as a product of compromised social or interpersonal bonds and claim that persons can be socially dead yet physically unharmed. I take as foundational to my understanding of social death Card’s study of social death and genocide and Cacho’s study of social death and racialized rightlessness.

Card argues that it is social death that “distinguishes genocide from other mass murders. Loss of social vitality [that is, ‘relationships, contemporary and intergenerational, that create an identity that gives meaning to life’] is loss of identity and thereby of meaning for one’s existence.”³⁵ In the context of genocide, Card finds attention to social death valuable in that it points to a more abstract loss of genocide by “tak[ing] our focus off body counts and loss of individual talents, directing us instead to mourn losses of relationships that create community and give meaning to the development of talents.”³⁶ Card notes that controversies over the meaning of “genocide” have led to an unstable and variable definition for the term itself but ultimately argues

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³⁴ Jana Králová, “What is social death?” *Contemporary Social Science* 10, no. 3 (October 2015), 235.
³⁶ Card, “Genocide and Social Death,” 63.
that “What distinguishes genocide is not that it has a different kind of victim, namely, groups…Rather, the kind of harm suffered by individual victims of genocide, in virtue of their group membership, is not captured by other crimes.”37 That is to say, individuals suffer a specific loss when it is their group identity which is the target of violence. This loss manifests in a multitude of ways—loss of intergenerational connections, cultural heritage, and any socially-informed meaning in one’s life. Card’s understanding of social death highlights the less tangible and less individual aspects of community and identity that are lost when violence is targeted at a group as a result of their group identity.

Lisa Marie Cacho’s 2012 work on social death and “racialized rightlessness and the criminalization of the unprotected” also lends credence to the claim that the Japanese American incarceration was tantamount to social death.38 Cacho examines “how human value is made intelligible through racialized, sexualized, spatialized, and state-sanctioned violences.”39 Cacho argues that in a society in which “social value is assigned and denied on racial terms,”40 persons of color are disproportionately and permanently criminalized, leading her to describe them as “ineligible for personhood—as populations subjected to laws but refused the legal means to contest those laws as well as denied both the political legitimacy and the moral credibility necessary to question them.”41 Those ineligible for personhood, Cacho argues, are socially dead. In the case of the incarceration, the racialized rightlessness of Japanese Americans was codified to an extent that it had not been previously—even as land and citizenship rights were denied to first generation

37 Card, “Genocide and Social Death,” 68.
39 Cacho, Social Death, 4.
40 Ibid., 4
41 Ibid., 6.
Japanese immigrants in the prewar years. The incarceration stripped the second
generation, legally American citizens, of their constitutional and civil rights on the basis
of ethnicity. As such, Cacho’s argument makes an explicit link between racially-
motivated, state-sanctioned violence and the social death of Japanese Americans in
WWII.

Finally, it is worth noting that much of the language used by members of the
Japanese American community during remembrance activity as well as scholars of the
incarceration is suggestive of social death. The first iterations of remembrance events—
pilgrimages and Days of Remembrance—that took place in the late 1960s and 70s were
groundbreaking for a community that had been relatively silent regarding the
incarceration since the war. Countless Sansei (third generation) tell stories of not
realizing until their teenage years that when their parents talked about “camp” with other
Japanese Americans it was not in reference to summer camps like the ones they
themselves attended. The incarceration produced a variety of responses from shame to
bitterness that led many to refrain from sharing their experience with their children. As
such, speakers like Jim Matsuoka, one of the leaders of the first Manzanar pilgrimage,
 stated: “When people ask me, ‘How many people are buried in this cemetery?’ I say a
whole generation is buried here. The Nisei Americans lie buried in the sands of
Manzanar.”

44 Anthropologist Yasuko Takezawa writes of the first Day of Remembrance

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42 Targeted anti-Japanese immigration restrictions began in 1908 with the “Gentlemen’s Agreement”
between the U.S. and Japan. This arrangement restricted the immigration of Japanese laborers to the U.S.,
still allowing Japanese women married to U.S. residents to immigrate. Animosity towards Japanese
laborers—most in the agricultural sector—was likewise reflected in the Alien Land Laws of 1913 and 1920
that prevented Japanese immigrants from owning land in California. Finally, in 1924 the Johnson-Reed Act
ended all Japanese immigration to the United States.
43 Don T. Nakanishi, “Surviving Democracy’s Mistake: Japanese Americans and the Enduring Legacy of
in Puyallup in 1978 as the event that “burst open the tomb of Japanese American history.”\textsuperscript{45} Karen Inouye cites participants in the first Manzanar pilgrimage discussing what felt like an “exhuming” of history.\textsuperscript{46} These comments all speak to some acknowledgement of a broad, non-personified or individualized death as well as the sense of revivifying the community that came with remembrance activity. The ways in which the sacralizations and rituals of a Japanese American civil religion seek to restore social vitality, and the extent to which they are successful, will be discussed throughout this project.

**The Politics of American Civil Religions**

The relationship between American and Japanese American civil religion defies summation as it shifts depending on the historical and political context. At times, Japanese American civil religion testifies to the particularity and criminality of the events of the incarceration; at other points, it addresses all Americans through the ecumenical speech and rituals of American civil religion. Japanese American civil religion is a critical faith and dissonant practice that demythologizes the myth of American exceptionalism yet has also supplied spaces and occasions for pledging allegiance to it. This dynamic likely reflects, in part, the ambivalence of Japanese Americans—their desire to mark their cultural and historical distinction as well as a desire to feel included in the evocation of one nation of many peoples.

More importantly, the dynamic character of this relationship points to the impossibility of separating religion and politics in America and to Bellah’s inadvertent depoliticization of American civil religion. What Bellah was doing by talking about


American civil religion was bringing religion and politics together, positing a transcendent religion “of the American state.” Yet while Bellah acknowledges that “[i]n no society can religion and politics ignore each other,” Bellah’s fundamental argument is that there is an encompassing national religion beyond sectarian divisions. He claims that the civil religious dimension “provides a transcendent goal for the political process” but surely it is also bound up with that process. Bellah’s emphasis on unity and on a “sacred canopy” that transcends divisions to encompass American society is overplayed to the extent that it obscures the difference, dissidence, and contention in American politics and society. In this way, Bellah’s theory of American civil religion is ironically depoliticized.

Bellah is not alone in emphasizing (and sometimes sermonizing about) the unifying character of American civil religion. In his work American Civil Religion: What Americans Hold Sacred, Peter Gardella analyzes what he identifies as the forms of American civil religion, devoting one chapter to each. Gardella looks at texts—the Mayflower Compact, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution, to name a few—as well as speeches, artifacts like the flag and the great seal, places like Arlington and Gettysburg national cemeteries as well as Jamestown and Boston Common, songs like the Star Spangled Banner and America the Beautiful, and broader concepts like the Four Freedoms and the City on a Hill. Gardella takes as foundational Bellah’s theory of civil religion, but expounds upon it slightly, identifying four values that unify the stories of each artifact and link these stories to one another. These values, in Gardella’s words, are “personal freedom (often called liberty), political democracy, world peace, and

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48 Bellah, “Civil Religion,” 43.
cultural (including religious, racial, ethnic and gender) tolerance.”49 These values, Gardella writes are today “often advanced by political leaders and advocates who ask Americans to kill and to risk their own lives while executing policies of the US government.”50 The way in which Gardella identifies these values is interesting, choosing concepts “denied by no one who claims to speak in the tradition of the United States” yet not expressing a concern either for what people take these values to mean or for what values America could be presumed to hold based on its actions.51 For example, Gardella claims that “Although the United States is a very violent nation, and violence always raises religious issues because it touches the boundary of life and death, violence is not a value of American civil religion like liberty, democracy, peace, and tolerance.”52 Gardella bases this contention in the fact that a few of the articles he identifies as forms of civil religion laud peace and preach against violence.53 Gardella, like Bellah, is careful to preach the gospel of tolerance rather than exclusion, unity rather than dissent.

For scholars John Murphy and Robert Wuthnow, these celebratory and critical modalities represent different versions or forms of American civil religion. In the “priestly version” of American civil religion—Wuthnow’s term—America’s special relationship with God is emphasized.54 This maps on to Murphy’s “conservative version” of American civil religion, “a much more traditional version of civil religion that resists refinement and improvement of America, but focuses more on a renewal of belief in

50 Ibid., 3.
51 Ibid., 3.
52 Ibid., 3.
53 Ibid., 3.
America itself.” In contrast, Wuthnow’s liberal or “prophetic version” of American civil religion tends to “downplay America’s chosenness and its important place in the divine order.” In Murphy’s binary, “This form of civil religion is much more expansive. It calls for the United States to constantly progress and meet the needs and challenges of its citizens as it strives to become a ‘more perfect union.’”

I am not convinced that Japanese American civil religion is simply a prophetic critical variant insofar as it marks the state’s criminal violence towards its own citizens. To do so, I believe, would obscure the persistence and foundational nature of racism and exclusion in America. Nor do I regard the self-critical aspect of American civil religion to be sufficiently robust or inclusive. Rhys Williams, in a 2013 article entitled “Civil Religion and the Cultural Politics of National Identity in Obama’s America” calls attention to the assumptions of American civil religion, which he identifies as a “tribal” civil religion. Williams writes that, “[American civil religion] is not only a universalist, prophetic creed, it is also an expression of tribal identity that ascribes a particular character and purpose to the American people. In particular, this ‘tribal’ civil religion has an often-unstated assumption about the inseparability of religion, race, and national identity—that is, white, Christian, and American.” Williams does well to question the extent to which the theory of American civil religion—emerging, as he claims, as a response to “the potential crisis in social solidarity that was to follow…pluralism”—has a concern for the inclusion of those outside of the “tribe” in the body politic. Williams thus advocates for an understanding of civil religion that keeps “multiple strands of

56 Ibid., xiii-xiv.
57 Ibid., xiii.
political exclusion and cultural inclusion contained within the concept."\textsuperscript{60} Otherwise, Williams argues, civil religion has the potential to be highly divisive: “Civil religious discourse can critique society and call us to be better than we are. But civil religious discourse also works to heighten boundaries, and convinces people that those boundaries are natural and even sacred.”\textsuperscript{61}

In 1992 Marita Sturken articulated similar concerns, probing the political implications of memorializing the incarceration. Sturken asked what the appropriate memory of the incarceration would look like, what kind of memorial the incarceration demanded, and whether or not any memorial could “properly memorialize the event,”\textsuperscript{62} asserting the profound ramifications of remembering the incarceration. Sturken claimed that “To begin to memorialize the camps would mean to open up the question of what constitutes American nationalism and identity. To properly memorialize the camps and their survivors would mean to rethink the myth of America’s actions in World War II, a myth that even now remains resolutely intact.”\textsuperscript{63} This national myth also draws commentary from Caroline Chung Simpson in her work on the incarceration, in which she argues that as a “war against tyranny and oppression,” World War II “often necessitated portraying the United States as a virtual paragon of democratic virtues. But when the internment did emerge as a topic of discussion it threatened to undermine the reputation of U.S. democracy because the internment exposed the arbitrariness of the very enterprise of national history and the myth of exceptionalism that history sustains.”\textsuperscript{64}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[60] Williams, “Cultural Politics,” 254.
\item[61] Ibid., 254.
\item[63] Sturken, “Absent Images,” 704.
\end{footnotes}
In problematizing the dual ideas of America as an exceptional paragon of virtue and America as an agent of state violence in the incarceration of its own citizens, Simpson and Sturken speak to a tension that is raised by Iwamura’s use of Bellah’s civil religious framework, but not fully explained. It is this point of tension that I initially found so intriguing, and which drove me to develop and pursue this project. It was not until I read Sturken’s piece, however, that I was able to understand exactly what made this endeavor so important. What is intriguing is not just that the incarceration threatens America’s national myth, but it is what is at stake when the national myth is uncritically promulgated. Sturken writes:

This narrative of a moral nation forms the central image of American nationalism in the second half of the twentieth century—it is the primary element of what Lauren Berlant has termed the ‘national symbolic,’ the process by which individuals are transformed into ‘subjects of a collectively-held history.’ Full acknowledgment of the memory of the camps would require a refiguring of the definition of the national meaning of ‘America’ and an acknowledgment that winning the war has for decades profoundly hampered any discourse on the question of the national myth…

Broadly, then, this project aims to call into question the national myth and consider the implications of nationalism on history, memory, and identity. I seek to understand, as Simpson well-articulates it, “[H]ow history and memory are negotiated when the need to remember an event challenges the ideals of democratic nationalism and the narrative unity of nation that historical discourses ostensibly provide.”

In the post-9/11 era and in light of regulations such as the 2002-2016 National Security Entry-Exit Registration System, which increased the screening of travelers from predominantly Muslim countries, and President Trump’s “Muslim ban,” Executive Order 13769, the dangers of the national myth to heighten boundaries and assert a certain type

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66 Simpson, Absent Presence, 4.
of Americanness are highly relevant. When the American civil religion’s vision of unity fails to account for populations on the margins and when beliefs in America as exceptional or as a paragon preclude critiques of the nation, the civil religious discourse and expression is in danger of silencing or erasing its non-dominant populations. With this project, I hope to—as the Japanese American civil religion seeks to—link past and present injustices in the hope that illuminating the dangers of the national myth will create space for a sincere reconsideration of what it means to be American.

A Note on Terminology

In 2005 Roger Daniels published an essay entitled “Words Do Matter: A Note on Inappropriate Terminology and the Incarceration of the Japanese Americans.” In this work Daniels notes that “…[T]here has been a long history of using euphemistic language about the wartime atrocity that was wreaked upon the Japanese Americans of the West Coast during and after World War II. Begun with malice aforethought by government officials, politicians, and journalists, it has been continued, largely in thoughtless innocence, by scholars.” Of primary concern is the use of “internment” vs. “incarceration” in this context. Daniels notes that “internment” is “an ordinary aspect of declared war and refer[s] to a legal process, described in United States statutes, to be applied to nationals of a country with which the United States was at war…perhaps eight thousand Japanese nationals had been formally interned by the government during World War II.” Although this wartime internment was “accompanied by a great deal of injustice,” Daniels notes that “it was conducted legally, and those interned got a

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semblance of due process,” additionally noting that the facilities and living conditions of these internment camps were superior to the camps in which West Coast Japanese Americans were incarcerated, in part because the United States had greater pressure here to meet Geneva Convention conditions. In contrast, Daniels argues, “What happened to those West Coast Japanese Americans who were incarcerated in army and WRA concentration camps was simply lawless.” Daniels here uses the term “concentration camp,” which brings us to the next genre of euphemistic language commonly used to discuss the wartime incarceration—the terms used to describe the sites of incarceration such as “relocation center” or “internment camp.” The use of “concentration camp,” Daniels illustrates, was strongly resisted by WRA administrators, especially after the liberation of Nazi death camps, commonly described as “concentration camps.” However, as Jasmine Alinder notes in her work on the incarceration, “In the context of the Holocaust, the term ‘concentration camp’ is itself a euphemism that obscures the murderous designs of death camps such as Auschwitz or Buchenwald.” “Concentration camp,” Alinder argues, applies more accurately to the United States camps. Throughout this project, I will use the term “incarceration” to refer to the wartime imprisonment of West Coast Japanese Americans, and I will use the phrase “concentration camp” to describe the sites of incarceration. When various scholars, novelists, and interviewees use the phrase internment I keep the phrasing as quoted, but in my own words refer to the event as the Japanese American incarceration for the sake of accuracy.

70 Ibid., 193-194.
71 Ibid., 195.
72 Ibid., 200-201.
Chapter One: Contesting Sacred Space

As the seminal theorist of American civil religion, Robert Bellah dominates our understanding of civil religion in America. However, Bellah’s formulation of American civil religion primarily concerns itself with ideology rather than embodied practice or use of space—the role of sacred space in the American civil religion certainly is not central to Bellah’s theory.\(^1\) Indeed, existing theories of civil religion in America are not primarily concerned with either sacred space or with the contestations over these spaces.\(^2\) As regards sacred space in America, Bellah places national cemeteries like Arlington and Gettysburg as well as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier within the American civil religious fold, but he does not go into any discussion of the ways in which Americans interact with these spaces.\(^3\) Furthermore, Bellah does not detail how these spaces are sacralized and maintained in America. He implies that Gettysburg is sanctified by Lincoln’s address there as well as by the interred bodies of sacrificed soldiers (as is the case at Arlington), but he points to no ongoing sanctification nor to any particular agency or institution that would oversee such a process.

Peter Gardella is one of the few scholars of American civil religion writing after Bellah who focuses more closely on sacred space in his discussion of American civil religion. Gardella expands the number of American civil religious spaces to include sites such as Ellis Island, the Boston Common & Freedom Trail, and Jamestown.\(^4\) Notably, the types of stories these sites tell make them easy to include in the civil religious fold because they reinforce the principled and

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2 For instance, Philip Gorski, in his *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion From the Puritans to the Present* (Princeton University Press, 2017) presents American civil religion as largely discursive. He envisions American civil religion as a “narrative that tells us where we came from and where we are headed” (14). He expands upon this claim by describing American civil religion as consisting of a canon of widely known texts, a pantheon of heroes and martyrs, a narrative of the past and future and an archive of texts, personages and stories that may become part of the tradition (31-32).
4 Gardella, *American Civil Religion*. 
triumphalist vision of America. As Karen Inouye writes, “Government-sponsored cultural and political monuments generally tend to be triumphalist, like the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial. Publicly funded and overseen by elected or appointed officials, they are designed to reinforce an interpretive community by establishing a favorable primary narrative people can congregate around.” What does this suggest about the memorialization of the former concentration camps that housed Japanese Americans during World War II?

In *American Sacred Space*, editors David Chidester and Edward Linenthal place memorials at former sites of Japanese American incarceration—specifically, the memorial at the site of the Manzanar concentration camp in Eastern California—within the purview of American civil religion. In their commentary on space and American civil religion, they write:

> American historical experience has fashioned a national, public, or civil religion that has depended heavily on the production of sacred space…It encompasses elements of the patriotic landscape that celebrate the nation, as well as places that mourn abandoned ideals, the National Park Service site of the Manzanar concentration camp for Americans of Japanese ancestry during World War II, for example.

Chidester’s and Linenthal’s binary of sacred spaces of celebration and failure evokes the common distinction in scholarship on American civil religion of its priestly and prophetic modes, respectively. Thus, to Chidester and Linenthal, those monuments which “mourn abandoned ideals”—presumably those expressed in the Constitution and taken as transcendent within the American civil religion—represent physical manifestations of the overarching American civil religion. In contrast, Marita Sturken reads the relationship between these memorials and American civil religion as fundamentally incompatible. Sturken argues that “To begin to memorialize the camps would mean to open up the question of what constitutes American

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5 Inouye, *The Long Afterlife of Nikkei Wartime Incarceration*, 133.
nationalism and identity. To properly memorialize the camps and their survivors would mean to rethink the myth of America’s actions in World War II, a myth that even now [in 1997] remains absolutely intact.” For Sturken, memorializing the camps cannot be envisioned as simply one regrettable episode in America’s ongoing struggle to live up to its constitutional ideals. The incarceration is not an instance of abandoned ideals, but of state violence against its own citizens and long-term residents. How, then, are we to understand the memorialization of Japanese American concentration camps in relation to American civil religion?

I agree that the sacralization of particular spaces is a key feature of American civil religion—American civil religion is not reducible to national holidays or the rhetoric of presidential speeches. I contend that the memorialized former sites of Japanese American incarceration constitute the sacred spaces of a Japanese American civil religion. The relationship between the sacred maps of the American and Japanese American civil religious landscapes is, however, complicated. I reject the claim that the archipelago of Japanese American civil religious sacred sites is merely a mournful complement to a “patriotic landscape,” with both constituting the sacred map of an American civil religion stretching “from sea to shining sea.” Nonetheless, at various points and on certain occasions, they overlap. I suggest, then, that tracing the spaces of this Japanese American civil religion throws into sharp relief that the borders of the nation remain subject to dispute. Drawing from Chidester’s and Linenthal’s theory of sacred space as situational and contested, and highlighting in particular the role of the National Park Service in claiming and signifying America’s sacred spaces, I analyze the shifting contours of Japanese American civil religion.

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8 Chidester & Linenthal, American Sacred Space, 30.
David Chidester and Edward Linenthal identify two basic types of definitions of the sacred: substantial and situational definitions. In the first “substantial” category, “the sacred has been identified as an uncanny, awesome, or powerful manifestation of reality, full of ultimate significance.” The sacred irrupts or manifests without human involvement. Chidester and Linenthal take Mircea Eliade’s work to be emblematic of this approach. The “situational” understanding of the sacred instead recognizes that “nothing is inherently sacred.” The authors write that according to this type of definition, “Not full of meaning, the sacred, from this perspective, is an empty signifier...a sign of difference that can be assigned to virtually anything through the human labor of consecration.” This understanding of the sacred as something produced through human endeavors, the authors argue, originates with Emile Durkheim. In the context of this project especially, the sacred as a situational term is useful in that it illuminates the activity and effort that goes into sacralizing a space. Considering the sacred as a human production is helpful in understanding how the relationship of these sites to the Japanese American population changes after the war.

Chidester and Linenthal’s insistence on the constructed and situational character of sacred space leads them to emphasize that such space is “frequently, if not inherently, contested.” First, they argue that “sacred space is contested for the simple reason that it is spatial.” Relying on the theories of human geographers, especially John Urry, Chidester and Linenthal argue that, as Urry suggests, “the spatial dynamics of conflict can be explained by the

9 Chidester & Linenthal, American Sacred Space, 5.
10 Ibid., 5.
11 Ibid., 5-6.
12 Ibid., 5-6.
13 Ibid., 5.
14 Ibid., 6. Chidester and Linenthal’s argument about the contested nature of sacred space is relevant also to Bellah’s conception of American sacred space, considering the construction of Arlington National Cemetery on the property of Robert E. Lee.
15 Ibid., 18.
fact that no two objects can occupy the same point in space. ‘Hence…space is necessarily limited and there has to be competition and conflict over its organization and control.’

There is no reason, Chidester and Linenthal suggest, that the finiteness of spatial resources should not also introduce conflict into sacred spaces. They write that “conflict has been analyzed by geographers as a necessary feature of spatiality. Therefore, we should not be surprised that sacred space is entangled in competition over scarce spatial resources, including conflicts over the hypothetical resource of spatiality itself.” Chidester and Linenthal acknowledge that the second reason they identify for the contested nature of sacred space is at first glance contradictory to their first point. They argue that “When space or place becomes sacred, spatially scarce resources are transformed into a surplus of signification. As an arena of signs and symbols, a sacred space is…a point of departure for an endless multiplication of meaning…In this respect, a sacred place is not defined by spatial limits; it is open to unlimited claims and counter-claims on its significance.” Infinite possibilities for interpretation necessarily beget competing interpretations. Furthermore, Chidester and Linenthal argue that interpretation is, for this same reason, never fully fixed. They write, “Due to the inherent surplus of signification in ‘the sacred,’ no appropriation can ever be final, no exclusion can be total, and, therefore, conflict over ownership and control of the symbolic surplus remains endemic in sacred space.”

Given that Chidester and Linenthal insist on the contested character of American sacred space, it is surprising that they declare Manzanar a site for mourning the abandoned ideals of America that is nonetheless subsumed into the sacred space of American civil religion. It is likewise surprising that although citizens and long-term residents were imprisoned at Manzanar

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17 Ibid., 18.
18 Ibid., 18.
19 Ibid., 19.
without charges or trial, Chidester and Linenthal speak exclusively of mourned ideals rather than persons, communities and businesses. What Chidester and Linenthal appear to have lost sight of is the violence represented by the camps.

In his 1997 work *Shadowed Ground*, Kenneth Foote focuses on the memorialization of and attitudes toward sites of violence in America, the role of which in American society he contends is “a fiercely contested issue.” Foote’s primary argument about the power of these sites is that “the evidence of violence left behind often pressures people, almost involuntarily, to begin debate over meaning.” The violence of the incarceration may not have entailed bloodshed, but it was undoubtedly violence committed by the state against citizens. Thus, it seems inevitable that reclaiming and memorializing these spaces would necessarily entail contestation as well cooperation with the state.

The sites under consideration here represent only a subset of the facilities maintained by various agencies of the United States government during World War II to detain, intern, and incarcerate various individuals and populations. During the war, the U.S. Army, the Department of Justice, the War Relocation Authority (WRA), and the Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA) operated between them a number of prisons, (legal) internment camps, concentration camps (both transitional and long term), and immigrant detention stations. There was some facility of one of these types in every Western state save Nevada, internment camps and immigrant detention centers as far south as Texas and Florida and as far east as New York and Boston, and additional U.S. Army internment camps in Alaska and Hawaii. Of the more long-term prison facilities—concentration camps, Department of Justice internment camps, and WRA

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“Citizen Isolation Centers” to which incarcerees deemed “refractory” were often sent temporarily before being relocated to the high-security Tule Lake concentration camp—all were located in supreme isolation in the interior of the nation.

The vast majority of Japanese Americans were incarcerated in WRA-operated concentration camps and in “temporary assembly centers”—rapidly converted fairgrounds and racetracks in which Japanese Americans were forced to live from roughly March or April 1942 until as late as October 1942. There were seventeen of these “assembly centers,” more accurately described as temporary concentration camps: thirteen in California, two in Arizona, and one each in Washington and Oregon.²² When construction on the long-term concentration camps was completed, incarcerees were forcibly transferred from the “assembly centers” to one of the ten WRA camps, often on buses or trains with blacked out windows so that the route to and precise location of the camps remained somewhat uncertain. The ten WRA concentration camps were as follows: Tule Lake (CA), Manzanar (CA), Gila River (AZ), Poston (AZ), Granada (CO), Topaz (UT), Minidoka (ID), Heart Mountain (WY), Rohwer (AR), and Jerome (AR).²³ Although the particularities of each site alone could provide fodder for entire studies (and have done so), I will not be able to delve into the specifics of each site. Over the course of this project, I focus primarily on Manzanar in Eastern California and the Puyallup Assembly Center in Washington State, named “Camp Harmony” by military officials. Manzanar and Puyallup were the two sites at which the first highly significant and public remembrance activities took place—the first

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²² In comparison to the ten longer-term WRA concentration camps, relatively little is known about these temporary “Assembly Centers.” The number of assembly centers is differently reported in scholarly accounts of the incarceration, but most sources and maps agree that there were in total seventeen facilities used to temporarily incarcerate Japanese Americans in 1942.

²³ The number of Japanese Americans incarcerated at each site, according to the numbers displayed on the Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism During World War II, are as follows: Tule Lake (18,789), Manzanar (10,046), Gila River (13,348), Poston (17,814), Granada/Amache (7,318), Topaz (8,130), Minidoka (9,397), Heart Mountain (10,767), Rohwer (8,475), Jerome (8,497).

While the nature of remembrance activity at the various sites is highly variable, what is clear is that the former sites of incarceration have tremendous significance for the Japanese American communities to which their history is linked. Pilgrimages to the sites of former camps began as early as 1946. Although the Manzanar Committee began organizing official pilgrimages in 1969, a Buddhist priest and a Christian minister who had been incarcerated at Manzanar had been leading a group to the small collection of graves remaining in the Manzanar cemetery every year on Memorial Day following the closure of the concentration camp. Five of the long-term concentration camps—Granada, Minidoka, Manzanar, Tule Lake, and Heart Mountain—currently have annual pilgrimages.24 Several others—the Santa Anita Assembly Center (CA), Poston, and the Fort Lincoln Department of Justice internment camp near Bismarck, North Dakota—draw less regular pilgrimage activity.25 In their analyses of Japanese American civil religion, Jane Iwamura and Joanne Doi devote the bulk of their analysis to pilgrimages to former sites of incarceration, as “such a pilgrimage for Japanese Americans represents a ‘sacred journey’ that relives and recollects a ‘sacred story of suffering and spirit.’”26

24 These pilgrimages take place over the same weekends each year—Tule Lake on the last weekend of June, Manzanar on the last weekend of April, and Minidoka on the first weekend of July. While these dates have certainly developed profound significance within the participating communities, unlike the Days of Remembrance they do not commemorate the anniversary of any past historical event.


26 Iwamura, “Critical Faith,” 938, quoting Joanne Doi. It must be noted that Iwamura’s discussion of pilgrimage focuses on the Manzanar pilgrimage exclusively, while Joanne Doi focuses on the pilgrimages to Manzanar and Tule Lake—neither piece discusses the entire range of pilgrimages to the various former sites of incarceration. Furthermore, I want to acknowledge the ways in which Iwamura’s language here is evocative of the concept of collective memory. Throughout the course of this analysis I will discuss the collective experience of the 1978 Day of Remembrance and the collective identity it worked to construct, but I hesitate to invoke “collective memory.” In reading the few novels published by Japanese Americans in the immediate postwar years, a major motif that
These pilgrimages center on the remembrance of those who died while incarcerated, the recognition of the injustice of the incarceration and the profound isolation of the camps, and the renewal of the commitment to ensure that such an injustice will never happen again. The pilgrimage event, Iwamura argues, “is at once festival, political forum, and religious ceremony.” Even in the years following the achievement of redress and reparations—initially the most prominent political goals of the pilgrimage—Iwamura argues that “the pilgrimages continue to fulfill an important function. Nisei join their children and grandchildren on these journeys, and the rituals have become intergenerational affairs. As such, they provide the opportunity to share long-suppressed stories and feelings with one another.” Pilgrimage activity derives its power from the ability of Japanese American pilgrims to “inhabit the shadowed ground of internment.” In doing so, Japanese Americans reclaim and sacralize (on an on-going basis) the sites of former concentration camps.

Many former sites of incarceration also bear memorials to their wartime use, and these sites all witnessed commemorative or remembrance activity when these memorials were finished and dedicated. All ten former long-term WRA concentration camps and many of the temporary camps have memorials on site. The Merced Assembly Center in California had ceremonies for both the placement of a California State Historic designation plaque in 1982 and

emerges—especially in John Okada’s 1957 No-No Boy—is the difficulty of communicating in the postwar due to the vast variety in wartime experience. The postwar “silence” suggests that collective identity had to be reconstituted, and that a collective memory did not immediately emerge from the collective experience of the incarceration, nor was any memory of the incarceration maintained through communication during this pre-1978 Day of Remembrance period of relative silence.

Ibid., 938.  
Ibid., 951.  
These dedication ceremonies often take place on February 19th, the anniversary of the signing of Executive Order 9066. The relevance of this date to the Japanese American civil religion will be discussed in the next chapters.
for the significant expansion of this memorial in 2010.³² At the Puyallup Assembly Center in Washington, now the Washington State Fairgrounds, a memorial sculpture created by Japanese American artist George Tsutakawa was dedicated in 1983, then rededicated in 2017 to honor the 75th anniversary of the Seattle Japanese American community’s incarceration at the fairgrounds.³³

Between November 2017 and January 2018 I was able to visit eight of the memorials in California’s Central Valley as well as the memorial at the Washington State Fairgrounds in Puyallup, Washington—formerly “Camp Harmony.”³⁴ All of the California sites were former “assembly centers” in Central and Northern California, and four of these eight were on the sites of still-functioning fairgrounds. The eight former assembly center sites I was able to visit were those at Sacramento, Stockton, Turlock, Merced, Pinedale, Fresno, Salinas, and Tanforan. All of these sites were easily accessible to the public. For the four in fairgrounds—Stockton, Merced, Turlock, and Fresno—the fairground gates were open although there was no formal activity taking place at the site, and parking was easily available. Of those sites that are no longer fairgrounds, the site of the former Sacramento Assembly Center was since razed to construct a housing development, and the site is also bisected by Interstate 80. There is a memorial for the Sacramento site in Walerga Park, a small public park adjacent to I-80 on the site of the former assembly center (see Figures 1&2, Appendix). The Pinedale Assembly Center has likewise been developed over, but a remembrance plaza featuring storyboards and a fountain created by Gerard Tsutakawa, George Tsutakawa’s son, stands in the center of the plaza (Figures 8&9, Appendix).

³² “Merced (detention facility),” Denshō Digital Encyclopedia, Copyright Denshō 2018. http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Merced_(detention_facility)/ For images of the Merced Assembly Center memorial, see Figures 4-7 in the Appendix.
³⁴ For images of the memorials at these sites, see the included Appendix beginning on page 99.
Sherwood Hall, a community center and performance venue, now stands on the site of the former Salinas Assembly Center, and there is a state historical marker and remembrance garden in a publicly accessible green space behind the Sherwood Hall building.

The site at Puyallup was host to the first Day of Remembrance in 1978. In 1983, a memorial sculpture created by Seattle-area Japanese American artist George Tsutakawa was dedicated at the site with the help of Washington State Governor John Spellman and other state representatives wanting to express their support for the redress movement. The fairgrounds that were once converted into “Camp Harmony” are now privately owned by the Washington State Fair. I visited this site in February of 2018, about six months after the memorial had been rededicated and expanded in early September of 2017.

The relative inaccessibility of the Puyallup memorial distinguished this site from the four sites in California that I visited that also remain on fairgrounds. On the day I visited Puyallup, the fairgrounds were being prepared for an upcoming trade of auto parts. The site was closed to the public, and security guards stood at the one open gate to restrict entrance only to those involved in the upcoming event. In contrast, the four sites at former fairgrounds that I visited in California—at Stockton, Merced, Fresno, and Turlock—were open to the public, the memorials theoretically accessible to any individual who desired to visit them. I was only able to access the memorial sculpture at Puyallup after assuring the security staff that I would only be in the fairgrounds for a few minutes to take photos of the memorial, after which the guards at the entrance cleared the prospect of me entering with their head of security. Their head of security escorted me to the memorial. It is worth noting that neither of the two security guards at the entrance—both of whom had worked at the fairgrounds site for multiple years—knew what

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memorial I was referring to even after I showed them a photograph of the sculpture, nor had they heard that the fairgrounds had been used to incarcerate Japanese Americans during the war. The head of security who walked me to the memorial expressed that none of the fairgrounds staff knew what the memorial sculpture was supposed to depict, and expressed that the site largely served as a space for fairgrounds workers to take smoking breaks. He did recall that in September of 2017 several buses of Japanese Americans visited the site, presumably for the rededication of the Tsutakawa memorial which took place at that time.

In a 1983 interview for the Archives of American Art’s Northwest Oral History Project, George Tsutakawa describes the process of designing and installing his memorial sculpture at the State Fairgrounds. Tsutakawa was approached by a committee formed by the Seattle and Puyallup chapters of the JACL who wanted a memorial built and dedicated at Puyallup. Tsutakawa describes a two to three-year process of meeting with this JACL committee over questions of what the memorial should look like and how large it could be based on how much money they would be able to raise. After Tsutakawa drew up designs and discussed them with the committee, he was scheduled to meet before the Fair Association’s board meeting at the fairgrounds’ office. As Tsutakawa recalls, “The members of the fair board and some of the leading citizens of City of Puyallup…and myself and my wife, and one of the representatives from the Puyallup chapter of JACL came and we had a meeting. But it was very surprising to me that during this meeting the—what do you call—the feeling and the climate of the meeting was all anti-Japanese, anti-monument.” Tsutakawa goes on to explain that this was largely because the Washington State Fair was a private entity. He recalled that “their argument was that using

37 “Oral History Interview with George Tsutakawa,” Archives of American Art.
the fairground as assembly point for the Japanese internees in 1942 under the Western command of General [Dewitt] was not their intention. You see, the U.S. Government or the army, Western command, just took that place and used it as assembly point.\textsuperscript{38} When asked by the interviewer if the fair management thought that “putting a monument [on the fairgrounds] would make them appear responsible for something that they hadn't done,” Tsutakawa confirmed that this was their argument.\textsuperscript{39}

At the end of the meeting, the board suggested placing the memorial sculpture in the parking lot, or in a city square—off of fairgrounds property and on public city property. Following this suggestion, Tsutakawa, who believed that the sculpture should be in a “nice landscaped area” and protected from vandalism, pulled out of the project. However, the JACL committee pursued the project, and the fairgrounds board eventually agreed to the construction of a memorial on the actual grounds—it is not clear from Tsutakawa’s account exactly what pushed them to change their stance. He does relate, however, that he changed the design of the memorial to make it “less controversial” following this decision. While his original drawings were “very definitely reminiscent of the hardship [of incarcerated Japanese Americans],” he explains that:

At one point, I wasn't so sure whether I wanted to do this or not, knowing and understanding the feeling of some of the elements in the state here, I didn't want to stir up any more controversy and cause any more hard feelings among these people. So I wanted to make the design more universal and less related to the incident itself—the war, the relocation, the internment, and the hardship that the Japanese people went through.\textsuperscript{40}

Tsutakawa moved away from an explicit invocation of the incarceration, he claims, because he “felt that by repeatedly reminding people of the injustice and the hardship, and the loss to the

\textsuperscript{38}“Oral History Interview with George Tsutakawa,” \textit{Archives of American Art}.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
Japanese people, it was not going to improve anything; you'll just remind them of the bad feeling, hard feelings…I decided it should be a more friendly gesture of all the people gathered and in harmony, and that's what I made.” The memorial at the site is a cylindrical bronze sculpture that depicts silhouettes of men, women, and children with linked hands, with negative space between the forms (see Figure 15). When asked by the interviewer if he understood the memorial as not “specific to Japanese-American relationships at all, but more to any decade or incident,” Tsutakawa responded that beyond a plaque at the site that references the history of the incarceration, the sculpture itself “has no suggestion” of the events the JACL committee hoped it would memorialize.

The plaque that accompanies Tsutakawa’s sculpture states that the sculpture “is dedicated to the memory of over 7,600 people of Japanese ancestry who were imprisoned on the fairgrounds from April to September of 1942,” and additionally includes a quotation from Tsutakawa. The quotation reads: “I wanted to depict people of all races and creeds living in harmony. Then these sad things won’t be happening over and over again” (see Figure 16). Although Tsutakawa expressed in his interview with the Archives of American Art that he actively moved away from reminding the viewer of the incarceration, the plaque nonetheless portrays his intention with the sculpture as more in line with the typical rhetoric of the remembrance movement—invoking the memory of the past for the sake of preventing future injustice.

One final note regarding this memorial concerns Tsutakawa’s use of the word “harmony.” The sculpture itself is named “Harmony,” and based on the information included on the plaque alone, it would appear as though the piece was so named because Tsutakawa aimed to

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41 This description is derived from that provided on the memorial plaque at the site.
depict universal harmony between persons of different cultures. However, the concentration camp at Puyallup was nicknamed “Camp Harmony” by army officials. It seems, based on Tsutakawa’s testimony as it is recorded in his interview, that the term was not deployed ironically as a form of subtle critique, yet it could easily be read to function in that way.

As the case of Puyallup shows, efforts to memorialize these former concentration camps can be contentious. In this case, the controversy and “hard feelings” drove Tsutakawa to create a memorial that was “less controversial,” ultimately resulting in a memorial that aesthetically and thematically had little to do with the hardships of the incarceration, instead depicting a hopeful future beyond the discrimination and conflict of the incarceration and even of its remembrance. Inouye’s analysis of the text on the California State Historic Landmark plaque placed at Manzanar in the 1970s reveals similar controversy over what memorials are allowed to say with regard to state violence and Japanese American victims. She writes that because “The Manzanar Committee…was working to commemorate a shameful episode in American history and…it even went so far as to conclude the proposed inscription in the words not of an apologetic—and thus implicitly benign—government, but of its victims…the committee’s suggested language met with resistance from government officials and bureaucrats.” In both cases, any reference to the hardship or violence of the incarceration is met with resistance, illustrating the difficulty of and contestations over memorializing the experiences of Japanese Americans in this spaces. Those controlling and managing the land—the Washington State Fair, in the case of Puyallup, or the National Park Service, in the case of Manzanar—seek to downplay the state’s victimization

42 Regardless of what was ultimately depicted and memorialized with this sculpture, approximately 1,000 members of the local Japanese American community attended the memorial’s dedication ceremony at Puyallup in 1983, and hundreds traveled to Puyallup in 2017 to recognize the expansion of the landscaping surrounding the memorial.

43 Inouye, The Long Afterlife of Nikkei Wartime Incarceration, 133. The text on the plaque closes with the phrase “Tondemonai!”—“meaning ‘unexpected,’ but also ‘outrageous’ or ‘terrible.’”
of citizens and long-time residents in favor of unifying uplift. While this resistance ultimately altered the fundamental message of Tsutakawa’s memorial, in the case of Manzanar the committee’s fight for the use of “concentration camp” was ultimately successful.

The Tanforan Assembly Center in San Bruno, California was constructed at the Tanforan Racetrack, which burned down in 1964. A shopping center was opened on the site in 1971. At the entrance to the mall there is a marker for the “Tanforan Assembly Center Commemorative Garden” dedicated in September 2007. The “garden” is more closely described as a low stone bench on a small plot of dirt surrounded by large rocks, indistinguishable from other planters around the mall’s entrance (see Figure 13). The memorial is overshadowed by an adjacent large bronze sculpture of Seabiscuit which memorializes the shopping center’s former life as a racetrack. However, in 2016 the Tanforan Assembly Center Memorial Committee based in nearby Richmond, California was awarded $363,839 by the National Park Service’s Japanese American Confinement Sites grant program to construct a memorial on the “assembly center” site in the exterior plaza of the shopping center at the Bay Area Rapid Transit station in San Bruno.44 This memorial will include “a bronze statue, inspired by a Dorothea Lange photograph showing two girls on their way to Tanforan, interpretive panels, a memorial wall listing the names of those held there, and replica horse stalls demonstrating living conditions for some at the former thoroughbred racetrack.”45 This new memorial represents a significant shift in the scale and thoroughness of the Tanforan memorial, the least developed and seemingly the least maintained of the nine memorials I was able to visit. The Japanese American Confinement Sites

45 “FY 2016 Grant Awards,” National Park Service.
grant program that is making possible this new expansion will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

As is evident, the establishment and maintenance of memorials entails ideological battles as well as economic challenges. In addition to the various obstacles to establishing a memorial at Puyallup, the aversion to including the phrase “concentration camp” on the plaque at Manzanar, and the sorry state of the Tanforan memorial, the memorial plaque at the former Sacramento Assembly Center has become so eroded it is illegible (see Figure 2). Moreover, efforts to secure monuments at Mayer, Tulare, and Pomona have failed. In the case of public land, it is the National Park Service that ultimately has the power to decide whether memorialization efforts will be successful and what these sites will say. The Park Service is, then, a premier institution of civil religion in America. It is granted the authority to demarcate sacred space and to construct the patriotic landscape. As such, its role in curating and mediating the American and Japanese American civil religions demands scrutiny.

Chidester and Linenthal comment on the role of the National Park Service in sanctioning and managing American sacred space. In discussing what is uniquely “American” about American sacred space, the authors write that one element is that

a distinctive managerial ethos has emerged out of American historical experience to influence the production and preservation of sacred space. Drawing upon a Christian religious ethics of stewardship or custodianship, this management style has especially characterized the sanctification of natural environments and wilderness areas. By placing them under the bureaucratic management of federal agencies—the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service—their enduring sanctity has been secured.46

46 Chidester & Linenthal, *American Sacred Space*, 27. While I am in agreement with Chidester and Linenthal in their evaluation of the National Park Service’s crucial role in producing and preserving American sacred spaces, I question their identification of this “managerial ethos” as peculiarly Christian—the question of stewardship or custodianship as being characteristic of any one religious tradition I would argue is undecidable.
As Chidester and Linenthal note, these services are often used for protective ends in the context of wilderness, and they can be seen to function the same way in the case of former incarceration sites. As sites intentionally isolated and quickly torn down or reappropriated at the end of the war, these spaces were in real danger of being completely erased from the landscape in the postwar period. As such, beginning in the 1980s local JACL chapters as well as groups like the Manzanar Committee and the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation sought protection for these sites by pursuing State and National Historic Landmark or Site Status. Manzanar was the first site to achieve National Historic Landmark Status, in 1985, and Minidoka was the last to achieve a National Historic Site designation in 2008. Of the ten long-term camps, only Jerome in Arkansas has no national designation. There exists a monument at the site, as well as remnants of the concentration camp including concrete slabs, a hospital smokestack, and a reservoir, but the land itself was auctioned off to local farmers after the war, and remains divided under private ownership. Those sites which are designated and protected are through this title understood to have national historical significance, and thus are in a sense included in the American civil religious fold.

The power of the National Park Service to assign meaning to these spaces and to subsume them into the American civil religious fold is significant, but not without limit. Iwamura interprets the National Park Service-funded Manzanar Interpretive Center as an attempt to “bring the Japanese American community back into the civil religious fold.” Iwamura explains, “As Sue Embrey, the longtime Manzanar Committee chair seems to concede: ‘The

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48 Interestingly, although Foote does not explicitly acknowledge the link between civil religion and the National Park Service, he continually refers to the National Park Service in his chapter entitled “Stigmata of National Identity” which “takes up how the American past has been inscribed on landscape,” and is framed as a discussion of American civil religion; see Foote 264.
Interpretive Center is important because it needs to show to the world that America is strong as it makes amends for the wrongs it has committed, and that we will always remember Manzanar because of that.”Embrey’s comments are interesting in that they position the Center as addressing a global audience rather than simply reassuring American citizens that the nation will acknowledge and make amends for the wrongs it commits against its own citizens. Nonetheless, the NPS agenda did not go unchallenged. In a footnote, Iwamura writes: “While the Manzanar Committee works cooperatively with the National Park Service (NPS) to organize the annual pilgrimage, the committee (in its fervent political commitments) and pilgrimage (as a public forum and living expression of memory) serve as a critical counterpoint to the NPS focus,” thus differentiating between the vision of the National Park Service and the Japanese American community as represented by the Manzanar Committee. Indeed, the significance of these spaces continues to shift with changing political contexts. Explaining the significance of a post 9/11 pilgrimage to Manzanar, Embrey linked the past incarceration to a contemporary incarceration also predicated on hysteria and racism: "We need to make sure history doesn't repeat itself. Muslim and Arab Americans are being held at Guantanamo Bay without charge or trial. It reminds us of the Issei who were also held without charge for many years during WWII.” These sacred spaces do not simply educate contemporary audiences about the past, but can serve as a platform for ongoing critique of U.S. domestic and foreign policy, even as the National Park Service management attempts to use these sites to convey globally an image of America as “mak[ing] amends for the wrongs it has committed.”

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51 Ibid., 965.
52 Ibid., 954. Regarding this comparison, it must be noted that only one U.S. citizen was held, for a time, in the Guantanamo Bay facility.
In similar rebuttal of the National Park Service’s curatorial control over Manzanar that also entailed a critique of American racist policies of dispossession, Wendi Yamashita argues that the violence of the incarceration at Manzanar was long preceded by violence against the indigenous population. Indeed, the ability of the government to incarcerate Japanese Americans on these lands was predicated upon the previous seizure of these lands from Native American populations. Yamashita analyzes the joint efforts of the Manzanar Committee and several populations indigenous to California’s Owens Valley, where Manzanar is located, to block the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power’s construction of a 1,200 acre “Solar Ranch” in the Owens Valley four miles east of Manzanar in 2014.53 The solar ranch would be visible from everywhere within the former concentration camp, now the Manzanar Historic Site operated by the National Park Service, altering the site’s viewshed—a vast, uninterrupted, and arid landscape. The Manzanar committee argued that this viewshed importantly contributed to the sense of isolation felt within the camp.54

The experience of the unique environmental factors and weather conditions of the camps is described in many instances as an important aspect of pilgrimage to former sites of incarceration.55 As one example, Warren Furutani and Victor Shibata, who organized the first Manzanar pilgrimage in December of 1969 testified to the impact that experiencing the bitter cold of the Owens Valley at that time of year had on them.56 As Inouye writes, the pilgrimages require that “participants experience in a modest way the hardships originally inflicted by Executive Order 9066.”57 In addition to the experiential aspect, there is also an educational one.

55 See Denshō interviews with Kay Sakai Nakano, Willie K. Ito, and Florence Ohmura Dobashi, among many others.
57 Inouye, The Long Afterlife of Nikkei Wartime Incarceration, 128.
Yamashita writes that “The disruption to Manzanar’s viewshed by the proposed solar ranch project will take away this ability to teach about the fact that Manzanar was chosen as a location for Japanese American incarceration as part of ‘a carefully calculated plan by the U.S. government to instill a feeling of isolation, desolation, and despair in the minds of those incarcerated as a means to control them.’” Thus, the committee found that, because the stark viewshed helped convey the isolation felt at Manzanar during the war years, it was worth protecting.

According to representatives from the Manzanar Committee and Bishop Paiute and Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshone Tribes, construction of the solar ranch would also further “desecrate” the Native lands from which the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) had already taken water for the city of Los Angeles. In her essay, Yamashita includes excerpts from an interview with Harry Williams, an elder in the Bishop Paiute Tribe and an environmental activist, featured in Nanobah Becker’s film Saving Payahüüpü: The Owens Valley Solar Story. Williams describes the destruction of history that the construction of the solar ranch would necessitate and draws parallels between the state’s violence against and confinement of the indigenous and Japanese American populations. Williams implicitly identifies a two-part violence on behalf of the state—an initial theft of property followed by an erasure of history and of competing claims to ownership of said property—and draws a parallel between the treatment of the indigenous and Japanese American communities by explicitly referring to the concentration camps as reservations: “[T]hey interned [Japanese Americans] and put them on reservations hidden away. It was no good to steal all their property and take ‘em out of their

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59 Saving Payahüüpü: The Owens Valley Solar Story, Film, directed by Jon Kinney and Geoffrey Bennett Ulrich (2014; Los Angeles, CA: Graven Image Films, LLC), YouTube Video. All electricity produced by the LADWP’s solar ranch would likewise go directly to the city of Los Angeles.
homes and take all their property and put [them]…in captivity…that [experience] stole their lives like it did to the tribes.”

Williams goes on to discuss the impact of the LADWP’s proposed solar ranch and the second stage of this state violence. In describing the destruction of history that the construction of the solar ranch would necessitate, Williams explains the destruction of the multitude of sacred sites in the valley as follows: “[T]hey’re just going to bulldoze ‘em, grade ‘em all out and ruin it—just kill it, like colonialism does. It destroys your history and rewrites it and if they destroy it then you were never there because there’s no proof of you ever being there.”

Williams here makes clear the parallels between the physical erasure entailed in the LADWP’s project and the historical erasure of colonialism. He implies that the two work together—that following the state’s seizure of or destruction of property, the erasure of any physical mark on the landscape or tangible claim to ownership then facilitates a destruction of history, as “there’s no proof of you ever being there.”

The Owens Valley Solar Ranch controversy elicited reflection from Japanese Americans and indigenous peoples in the Owens Valley who had been, in different ways, confined and dispossessed of their lands and homes by the state. Drawing connections between the state’s “colonial” and “carceral” acts of violence towards indigenous populations and Japanese Americans, respectively, highlights America’s practice of seizing and allocating land to confine and control the marginalized other, and disputes the concept of the nation as a unified whole stretching from “sea to shining sea.”

The likening of the state’s seizure of property to their stealing the lives of Japanese Americans and indigenous populations as well as the comparison between historical and physical

60 Saving Payahüüüpi, Graven Image Films.
61 Ibid.
62 The Owens Valley Solar Ranch controversy resulted in increased communication and joint activism between the Japanese American and indigenous communities in the Owens Valley. Since 2014, a tribal leader has been included in the opening of the Manzanar pilgrimage every year.
erasure is evocative of the concept of social death, first referenced in the introduction to this paper. Yamashita makes this connection explicit in her analysis of Williams’ words. She writes that “[Williams] also makes visible the ways in which the U.S. acquisition of indigenous lands and the taking of Japanese American properties are linked to a destruction of history that leads to physical and social death. This physical and social death is about erasing indigenous claims to land as well as invalidating Japanese American political acts of memory.” Moreover, blocking memorialization at these sites and constructing new developments on these sites such as highways, parks, shopping malls, and solar ranches constitute a renewed threat of social death. Memorialization efforts on behalf of activists within the Japanese American community actively counter this threat of social death by reinscribing these histories upon the landscape.

In 2006, there was a prominent development concerning the role of the National Park Service in preserving the history of the incarceration: Congress established the Japanese American Confinement Sites (JACS) grant program, authorizing up to $38 million “for the preservation and interpretation of U.S. confinement sites where Japanese Americans were detained during World War II.” The National Park Service website for the JACS program stipulates that “Grants are awarded to organizations and entities working to preserve historic Japanese American confinement sites and their history, including: private nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and state, local, and tribal governments, and other public entities” The authorized funding is to be used “to identify, research, evaluate, interpret, protect, restore, repair, and acquire historic confinement sites in order that present and future generations

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63 Yamashita, “The Colonial and the Carceral,” 130. The “political acts of memory” that Yamashita refers to above are the revisitations to former sites of incarceration. The political nature of the ritual activity of the Days of Remembrance and the pilgrimages to various former incarceration sites will be discussed in the next chapter.
65 “Japanese American Confinement Sites,” National Park Service. Grant awards require a “2:1 Federal to non-Federal match ($2 Federal to $1 non-Federal match).”
may learn and gain inspiration from these sites and that these sites will demonstrate the nation’s commitment to equal justice under the law.” The program began appropriations in 2009, and according to a 2018 NBC article, funding levels have been approximately $2 million per year.

This fund is undoubtedly instrumental in preserving these sites and establishing museums and educational tools for conveying the history of the incarceration, but it is worth considering Iwamura’s understanding of the National Park Service’s curatorial control over these sites as an attempt to bring the history of the incarceration into the American civil religious fold at the expense of the Japanese American civil religion’s critical nature. In light of the National Park Service’s increased involvement in the preservation and management of these sites, it is worth asking if anything is lost when the American and Japanese American civil religious claims to land are mediated through the same agency. That the National Park Service communicates its hope that the JACS program “will demonstrate the nation’s commitment to equal justice under the law” is reminiscent of Iwamura’s claim, and represents the nation’s attempt to use the history of the incarceration in the construction of a “favorable narrative.” Nonetheless, the JACS grant program represents the most significant effort on behalf of the government to protect former concentration camps and even pledges funding for the acquisition of additional sites that are not currently managed by Japanese American remembrance organizations. Considering the National Park Service’s previous statement regarding the former site of the Mayer detention center in Arizona that “no federal historic recognition is recommended for this property,” the

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willingness to fund the acquisition of new lands suggests a significant shift in the way the National Park Service is evaluating these sites.

Rhys Williams and Chidester and Linenthal all assert that the future challenges to civil religion in America will be spatial. One underlying rationalization for this claim is that the nation’s borders and the nation state as an entity are less stable and less definable now than when Bellah forwarded his theory. As Williams writes, “The concept of civil religion has always presumed the nation-state. In Bellah’s formulation or in those of his critics, the nation was assumed to be definable, in part because civil religion helped define it.”70 Indeed, we have seen how the National Park Service is able to materially construct reference points for a particular portrayal of American history through its management of the land. Williams writes that the civil religious use of space in defining the nation has been particularly important in America, “often thought to be a nation built on principles and ideals rather than birthright and territorial heritage...civil religion was important to national identity and a valuable resource for societal cohesion as well as a resource for internal critique and social change.”71 This is close to Bellah’s original understanding of the importance of civil religion to an increasingly pluralistic America. However, Williams writes that “the neoliberal moment presents a potential crisis for civil religion—it destabilizes borders, mixes populations, scrambles cultural heritages, and undermines clear presumptions of the authority and boundaries of the nation-state that is civil religion’s ultimate referent.”72 The work of the Japanese American community to memorialize the incarceration, preserving and publicizing a history that disputes the favorable narrative promulgated by the triumphalist monuments of American civil religion, contributes to the

70 Williams, “Cultural Politics,” 253.
71 Ibid., 253.
72 Ibid., 253.
instability of American civil religion in this moment. The spaces of a Japanese American civil religion do not only present an ideological challenge to the American civil religion. These spaces also assert a material challenge to American civil religion and its sacred map. The borders of sacred spaces themselves are disputed as contestations over land result in a series of resignifications of sacred space.

In this chapter, I have discussed spatial memorialization (including pilgrimage, dedication ceremonies and physical markers), as a means of sacralizing the former sites of concentration camps. Together, these sites comprise the Japanese American civil religious landscape. In the next chapter, I examine the ritual calendar or sacred time of the Japanese American civil religion, focusing on the first Day of Remembrance.
Chapter Two: The 1978 Day of Remembrance and the Rebirth of the Japanese American Community

[W]e were told we were being sent to Puyallup, but Puyallup was known simply as the fairground, we had no clear sense of what would be, what would meet us there…That point at which we were loaded on busses and shipped out, I think that was one of the worse points of our experience for us, in that we got the sense of being, as I say, herded like cattle out of our homes and where we felt we had a right to be.¹

-Frank Miyamoto

After we parked the car, as we were walking towards the gathering place, I saw these cowboy trucks and things. I said, ‘That’s what we used to ride in, that’s what you used to do, this and that.’ I just started thinking about all the things and reminded me, and tears started coming out. It was, I think—a sort of healing took place after that, because it reopened old wounds. I think it helped. A lot of people said that was the first time they cried. When they were evacuated, nobody cried. But they were able to think back and cried over it.²

-Barbara Yamaguchi

In Catherine Bell’s 1997 work, Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions, Bell identifies six “basic genres of ritual action”—rites of passage, calendrical rites, rites of exchange and communion, “feasting, fasting, and festivals,” rites of affliction, and political rites.³ Bell contends that these different genres of ritual action serve different purposes. For example, while “rites of passage give order and definition to the bicultural life cycle, so calendrical rites give socially meaningful definitions to the passage of time, creating an ever-renewing cycle of days, months, and years.”⁴ Calendrical rites are of particular interest in the context of civil religion, as an essential component of Robert Bellah’s 1967 theory of American civil religion is his conception of an “annual ritual calendar” for the American civil religion.⁵ In Bellah’s formulation, this ritual calendar is comprised most prominently of Memorial Day and

² Doi, “Bridge to Compassion,” 9-10.
⁴ Bell, Ritual, 102.
⁵ Bellah, “Civil Religion,” 49.
Thanksgiving Day, and is supplemented by the “less overtly religious” Fourth of July, as well as Washington’s and Lincoln’s birthdays and Veterans Day. These days function, Bellah claims, to integrate a smaller subset of the nation—be it the town community in the case of Memorial Day or the family unit in the case of Thanksgiving—into the national cult. Bellah’s exposition of the ways in which these days function to connect smaller populations to the nation as a whole under a unifying vision is expressed only with regards to Memorial Day. Bellah writes that, “Memorial Day observance, especially in the towns and smaller cities of America, is a major event for the whole community involving a rededication to the martyred dead, to the spirit of sacrifice, and to the American vision.” Integrative events like these are crucial to Bellah’s understanding of American civil religion as a unifying force, as moments of national unity that facilitate the extension of the “felt nation” to communities and individuals.

This line of argument, however, has been scrutinized by critics of the theory of American civil religion. José Santiago argues that, “the simple existence of popular worship, public liturgy, and political ritual does not provide any information regarding their function or effects on social integration.” Bryan Turner similarly contends that “[M]ost civil-religion arguments or arguments concerning nationalism are weak theories which point to the presence of certain allegedly common practices and suggest that these have integrative consequences…” In essence, these critics argue that the presence of a national ritual calendar is not enough to create unity. Santiago’s and Turner’s points are well-taken—it is difficult to evaluate the integrative

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6 Bellah, “Civil Religion,” 49.
7 Ibid., 49.
8 Ibid., 49.
11 Santiago, “From ‘Civil Religion,’ to Nationalism,” 400.
power of these events, i.e. to what extent the martyred dead are on the minds of those Americans
taking time off from work on Memorial Day, and to what extent this reminds them of their
inclusion within the American body politic. More relevant to this project, it is difficult to assert
that Memorial Day celebrations reach the majority of the population or similarly impact all
subsets of the population. I suggest that if, as Turner and Santiago suggest, it is the case that
American civil religious holidays do not have the unifying power Bellah attributes to them, this
may be due, in part, to the presence of dissenting or alternative civil religions within America.

Jane Iwamura advocates for an understanding of “the United States [as] home to many
civil religions,”12 (emphasis in original) largely articulated by marginalized communities.13
“[T]he dominant culture,” Iwamura argues, “fails to recognize the ways in which these groups
have developed their own sets of rituals, symbols, and beliefs both from historical experience
and spiritual necessity and markedly their own integrity and resourcefulness.”14 In the context of
a ritual calendar for the American civil religion, I contend that the efficacy of the dates identified
by Bellah in unifying the nation is undermined and diminished by competing ritual calendars for
which the “dominant culture”—and Bellah’s theory—do not account. In this chapter, I analyze
the most important date in the Japanese American civil religion’s annual ritual calendar,
February 19th anniversary of the issuing of Executive Order 9066 (the government action that
stripped Japanese Americans of their civil liberties and fundamental human rights). Although the
February 19th date is consistently utilized for ceremonies to dedicate monuments and memorials
at former sites of incarceration, I will primarily focus on the annual rite of the Day of

13 Bellah (The Broken Covenant, 1975) acknowledges the argument for multiple civil religions within America as “a
rejection of the Anglo-Saxon image of the American” and as a part of “a great effort to retrieve the experience and
history of all the repressed cultures that ‘Americanization’ tried to oblitera,” but he does not elaborate on this point
or comment on the validity of these potential minority civil religions or their relation to the American civil religion.
Remembrance, an event held as near as possible to February 19 each year to observe the signing of the Executive Order. The Days of Remembrance do not necessarily take place in fixed spaces—the location changes with the years and often take place in “secular” sites entirely unrelated to the incarceration. Nonetheless, the events associated with this Day have functioned to build understanding across generations, revitalize the community, and rededicate the community to collective goals and values. Over the course of this project, I will discuss three iterations of this event as it occurred in 1978, 1998, and 2018. In this chapter, I focus on the first Day of Remembrance in 1978.

Interestingly, the first Day of Remembrance took place not on the February 19th anniversary of Executive Order 9066, but on November 25, 1978, over Thanksgiving weekend. (The date for the event was switched to February 19th the following year.) In this first year, the impact that holding the event on February 19th would have was recognized, and organizer Henry Miyatake pushed for this date. However, Miyatake remarked in an interview with Denshō that the primary architect of the event, Frank Chin, argued that “‘We can't wait that long. There's a election coming on.’ And we got to bring this to the forefront. Just the subject itself, we got to bring this to the attention of the individuals.” In this sense, the first Day of Remembrance had an explicitly political intention. The intention was to push the Congressional candidates for Washington’s 7th district to publicly announce their commitment to Japanese American redress. The event was organized by the Seattle Evacuation Redress Committee (SERC), an ad

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17 “Henry Miyatake Interview,” Denshō Digital Archive. It is unclear from the context in this interview if Chin is referring here to government officials, Japanese Americans, the American public generally, or some combination of these groups.
18 Ibid.
hoc committee of the Seattle chapter of the Japanese American Citizen’s League (JACL). SERC was very active in the 1970s, driving the redress movement in Seattle. By the end of 1973, the committee had formulated a proposal for individual reparations payments to those affected by exclusion orders during World War II, primarily authored by Henry Miyatake. This proposal, commonly known as the Seattle Plan, was likely the first proposal for individual reparations.\textsuperscript{19} SERC additionally focused on the repeal of Executive Order 9066, finding success in 1976 when President Gerald Ford rescinded the order on its February 19th anniversary. The Day of Remembrance in 1978, however, was arguably the most consequential event in this early redress movement.

The profound impact of the event, as Yasuko Takezawa argues, is attributable to the event’s unusual format as a reenactment of the forced evacuation to the Puyallup fairgrounds in 1942.\textsuperscript{20} The day’s program was primarily planned by Chinese American playwright Frank Chin. Chin teamed up with a former Sansei actor, Frank Abe, and approached SERC with the idea to stage a reenactment of the evacuation at a time when SERC was contemplating “some kind of ‘dramatic action’”\textsuperscript{21} to take advantage of the momentum and attention the redress movement had achieved and received. Posters were distributed that mimicked the format of the Civilian Exclusion Orders posted throughout communities in 1942 that informed Japanese American families of their exclusion from their neighborhoods and mandated that they report to their listed Civil Control Station. The event posters were printed over replicas of these notices,\textsuperscript{22} and additionally read: “To all persons of Japanese ancestry and Friends, The Memory of One

\textsuperscript{20} Takezawa, Breaking the Silence, 44.
\textsuperscript{22} Takezawa, Breaking the Silence, 1.
Hundred Twenty Thousand Three Hundred and Thirteen Issei, Nisei, Sansei and others of Japanese ancestry request the pleasure of your company for a Day of Remembrance.”

The collective memory of the incarceration is made active here, presented as an embodied force with the power to invite participation in this rite. Participants gathered at Sick’s Stadium in Seattle over Thanksgiving weekend, a holiday that Bellah identifies as one of the primary American civil religious calendrical rites. At Sick’s Stadium, participants were given mock identification tags, like those with which they had been forced to label both themselves and their luggage throughout the evacuation process. Families wrote their wartime identification numbers on their tags and wore them throughout the proceedings. The participants then reenacted the process of caravanning to Puyallup, driving approximately 300 cars and buses escorted by military trucks.

Once they arrived at the former incarceration site, they entered the fairgrounds through barbed wire.

The detailed adherence to reenactment was largely attributable to Frank Chin’s vision. In his account of Seattle’s redress movement, Robert Shimabukuro writes that Chin, Abe, and Asian American Theater Workshop member Kathy Wong “…treated the Day of Remembrance (DOR), as they called it, as an elaborate play to be produced.”

Henry Miyatake said of working with Chin on the Day of Remembrance, “Frank felt that it was all coming together in a way. Frank is like a screenwriter. He wants to write a script, and he wants everybody to follow the script. And here he's doing the direction of this whole process.”

In a sense, the 1978 Day of Remembrance presents itself as a highly interactive and participant-dependent form of political theater. Theories of political theater advocate for an understanding of “theater’s relevance to the

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24 Ibid., 2.
26 “Henry Miyatake Interview,” *Denshō Digital Archive.*
social sphere—as a forum for public debate, a gauge of national aspirations, an enactment of social critique, and a space for imagining alternatives.”27 Chin, Abe, and Wong brought their backgrounds in theater to, in essence, stage a public performance of the evacuation and incarceration, and in doing so were able to demonstrate the reality of the incarceration and the aliveness of its memory to the media and to the public.

The explicitly theatrical nature of this ritual makes a performance model of analyzing ritual particularly useful here, and furthermore illustrates the potential affinity of religious ritual and theatrical performance. As Bell writes, performance models “suggest active rather than passive roles for ritual participants who reinterpret value-laden symbols as they communicate them.”28 In retrieving identification tags and re-inscribing family numbers onto these tags, in re-assembling and re-boarding army trucks and buses to caravan to Puyallup, participants in the 1978 Day of Remembrance exercised a great deal of agency in their interactions with the symbols of their incarceration, and in doing so were able to re-forg[e] associations with these symbols. Considering this ritual as a political endeavor within the redress movement, the 1978 Day of Remembrance additionally functioned as a platform for critique and social change. The performance of the evacuation and incarceration process represents a seizure of history by the Seattle Japanese American community in their attempt to reckon with their past and influence the trajectory of their future. Bell would identify this type of ritual behavior as “ritual as a performative medium for social change,” which, she argues, “emphasizes human creativity and physicality: ritual does not mold people; people fashion rituals that mold their world.”29

28 Bell, Ritual, 73.
29 Ibid., 73.
1978 Day of Remembrance presents a striking example of a re-interpretation of symbols by participants in an attempt to “mold their world” past, present, and future.

Frank Chin, Frank Abe, and Kathy Wong also brought the very important element of publicity to the redress movement and Day of Remembrance. Chin came to Seattle initially to research and write a story on redress for *Seattle Weekly*. While in Seattle, Chin was asked by a producer of ABC’s primetime journalism program, 20/20, if he had any ideas for a story for a “slow Thanksgiving weekend.” Chin pitched the idea first to ABC, then to SERC, and began planning the “elaborate play” with Frank Abe and Kathy Wong immediately. Robert Shimabukuro describes the 47-day planning period of the first Day of Remembrance as somewhat hectic due to the fact that “This production had no script, no confirmed site, and a really iffy live audience.” Shimabukuro argues that the success of the event relied upon Chin’s energy, the SERC’s organizational experience, and the possibility of getting a story about redress and the incarceration on a nationally televised program. According to Henry Miyatake, on the day of the event, “all the three TV stations covered it. They gave it primetime display. And the TV production people were there in full force. I mean, they must have used six cameras. And they covered the event, the program, down at Puyallup very carefully.”

Press coverage before and after the event was likewise thorough. Shimabukuro writes that, “In the days leading up to the Day of Remembrance, the newspapers in Seattle, Tacoma, Auburn, Bellevue, and local neighborhoods ran major articles on the event…The press coverage was no accident. Frank Chin, Frank Abe, and Kathy Wong had put a lot of effort into the press

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30 Shimabukuro, *Born in Seattle*, 42.
31 Ibid., 42.
32 Ibid., 42.
33 “Henry Miyatake Interview,” *Denshō Digital Archive*. 
kits.”34 On November 12, 1978, the Seattle Times ran two pieces on the upcoming Day of Remembrance. The first was simply a brief and informative notice informing readers of the Day of Remembrance at Puyallup “to mark the forcible detention of 7,200 local [Seattle-area] Japanese-Americans during World War II,”35 and providing details regarding the times at which one could expect the caravan to leave Sick’s Stadium and arrive in Seattle, and what one could expect at Puyallup—“A program of speakers and entertainment.”36 Other than the caravan, the provocative nature of this event as a reenactment is not mentioned. That is not to say that the coverage in the Seattle Times softened the intention of or logic behind the event. In another piece run on the same day written by Shosuke Sasaki, one of the key members of the SERC whom Frank Chin allegedly referred to as “the conscience of the group,”37 Sasaki explains the redress effort in very direct terms. Sasaki writes, “It is time that Americans of Japanese ancestry repudiate the pseudo-American doctrine, promoted by white racists and apparently believed by some Nisei, that there is one kind of Americanism for whites and another kind for non-whites.”38 Rather than ascribing to the form of Americanism deemed appropriate for them by the white majority, Sasaki advocates that redress is the necessary avenue toward inclusion:

No amount of docile submission to white officials or “demonstrations of loyalty” to the United States by Nisei ever can disprove the false accusations in the minds of most white Americans. That can be done only when the government of the United States publicly declares that the wartime uprooting and imprisonment of Japanese Americans was totally without justification, and awards the victims proper and reasonable redress.39

The day after the Day of Remembrance, the Seattle Times ran several lengthier pieces on the Day of Remembrance and the injustice of the incarceration, including many photos from the event.

34 Shimabukuro, Born in Seattle, 46-47.
37 Shimabukuro, Born in Seattle.
39 Sasaki, “Nikkei deserve redress now.”
One such piece interviewed Gordon Hirabayashi and sought to portray his perspective on the redress movement. Hirabayashi, a Japanese American professor of sociology who had spoken at the Day of Remembrance, was well known as one of three men who had resisted the curfew and exclusion orders and challenged the constitutionality of the incarceration at the level of the Supreme Court. Hirabayashi laments that “even today some Japanese-Americans are reluctant ‘to rock the boat and shake attention toward us,’” claiming that “We’ll get catcalls…but all citizenship activity confronts this.” That Hirabayashi assumes that an attempt at inclusion and equal consideration within the American citizenry will be met with resistance is telling of the way that this nation—the civil religion of which Bellah describes as a “tradition of openness, tolerance, and ethical commitment”—has in reality treated him. This calls into question the proclaimed values of the nation within which the Japanese American community seeks inclusion with their activism. Hirabayashi’s critique of the nation is even more visible in the context of the 1998 Day of Remembrance, and will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.

Another Seattle Times piece profiles three women incarcerated at Puyallup who returned for the Day of Remembrance in 1978. One of these women, Dorothy Morisaki, tells her family’s story of separation and the degrading circumstances into which they were forced by the conditions of the incarceration. The article opens by stating that “The vision of a tiny baby being passed between strands of a barbed-wire fence is a memory that will never leave Dorothy Morisaki,” and the image is certainly a striking one. Morisaki explains that her pregnant sister had been allowed to remain in a hospital to give birth to her baby at the time of the evacuation, and upon arriving to the camp later, was assigned to live in a different area. Morisaki remembers

41 Bellah & Hammond, Varieties of Civil Religion, xiv.
that, “‘My mother wanted to hold her grandchild but that guard wouldn’t open the gate. We had to pass this little baby between the wires.’ … ‘This is what I remember. It was so degrading, so humiliating,’ she said.”43 The event thus brought to light many intimate details of the incarceration as well as contemporary opinions from prominent activists regarding the redress movement, garnering exactly the type of press coverage and attention the organizers wanted.

Yasuko Takezawa argues that it was due to the press coverage that “[The Day of Remembrance] left a strong impression not only on the more than two thousand participants but throughout the local Japanese American community and in other such communities across the nation.”44 Subsequent Day of Remembrance events on February 19th, 1979 in Los Angeles, Portland, and San Francisco, Takezawa argues, were inspired by “[t]he publicity and the direct persuasion of the Seattle redress committee.”45 In 1979, Seattle Times articles addressing “remembrance” and “Japanese Americans” appear with much greater frequency, and advertisements and discussions of public remembrance events, as well as profiles and research-based pieces on institutions and individuals within the Japanese American community are easy to locate from 1978 onwards. The language surrounding the incarceration in these pieces varies. In 1978, the incarceration is often referred to as “wartime detention,” but in 1978 as well a Seattle Times editor’s note accompanying Shosuke Sasaki’s piece uses the term “incarceration.” In 1979, a piece written by Japanese American attorney Ron Mamiya uses “imprisonment” and “concentration camps” in reference to the incarceration. The majority of pieces relevant to remembrance in 1979, however, use “internment” and “internment camp.”46

43 Broom, “The roof fell in.”
44 Takezawa, Breaking the Silence, 44.
45 Ibid., 45.
46 Although I included a note on terminology—“incarceration” vs. “internment”—it is difficult to draw any conclusions about critique or complacency about the language this early in the redress movement. Daniels notes that because the WRA so tightly controlled all publicized discourse surrounding the incarceration and promulgated
Takezawa’s most striking claim about the first Day of Remembrance in 1978 is that it “burst open the tomb of Japanese American history.” That is to say, this event “broke the silence” following the incarceration and opened pathways of dialogue between generations, between Japanese American communities, and between Japanese Americans and their government. Takezawa attributes the success of the first Day of Remembrance in commemorating the incarceration and “breaking the silence” to “the cultural reconstruction of the past.” Here Takezawa relies on the work of sociologist S.N. Eisenstadt, who theorizes (in Takezawa’s words) that, “intellectuals in modern societies reconstruct traditions to formulate collective identity and to integrate emerging groups within a common institutional framework. He argues that certain traditional symbols are transposed to create new central symbols and that the members of the group or society...accept these symbols ‘as the major collective referents of their personal identity.’” In the context of Japanese American redress and remembrance, Takezawa argues that “certain symbols, derived from past experience” such as barbed wire, most prominently, are employed “to link personal identity to collective identity.” The reenactive nature of the Day of Remembrance—through its use of evacuation-style posters, mock identification tags, military trucks, and barbed wire—effectively invoked specific symbols of the incarceration that, taken together, serve to reconstruct the past. According to Takezawa, to encounter these symbols years later enabled participants in the Day of Remembrance to form a collective identity based on the past experience of incarceration at Puyallup. These symbols, previously evoking the destruction and incarceration of the Japanese American community, are such a prolific amount of propaganda surrounding the incarceration, their language—“internment,” “detainment,” “relocation”—was commonly used outside and within the Japanese American community for many years following the incarceration.

47 Takezawa, Breaking the Silence, 196.
48 Ibid., 196.
49 Ibid., 15-16.
50 Ibid., 16, 196.
re-worked here to reconstruct a collective identity and build unity, and in that sense are
reclaimed and reversed by the 1978 Day of Remembrance. Takezawa writes,

It was through ritualized reconstruction employing powerful symbols that the memories of the experiences were brought to the surface and then made the basis of collective identity. It is in this process that Japanese Americans were able to realize and confirm that their bitterness and suffering were collective. The sense of suffering, which previously dominated the subconscious core of the individual identity, thus became the core of the Japanese American collective identity.51

It is the use of symbols, in part, that lends this reconstruction its ritualistic nature. As Catherine Bell writes, “Activities that generate and express the sacral significance of key symbols like the flag [here, barbed wire is a good example of an equivalent symbol] are often considered to be ritual-like.”52 According to Bell, this is because “with regard to objects as sacred symbols, their sacrality is the way in which the object is more than the mere sum of its parts and points to something beyond itself, thereby evoking and expressing values and attitudes associated with larger, more abstract, and relatively transcendent ideas.”53 Here, the 1978 organizers deployed former artifacts of the incarceration as symbols to evoke a sense of collective experience and identity. Symbols like barbed wire, identification tags, and army trucks were used to critique the unlawful incarceration by the state by highlighting the dehumanizing and forceful nature of the evacuation process. Organizers were able to “generate and express” the meaning of these and evoke the memories that accompanied them through this reenactment. Takezawa’s argument here about the central importance of symbols is well-supported by the testimonies of participants in the 1978 Day of Remembrance.

51 Takezawa, Breaking the Silence, 196.
52 Bell, Ritual, 156.
53 Ibid., 157.
Poet Lawson Inada wrote of 1978 in Puyallup that “It was the largest gathering of Japanese Americans since the camps.” Organizer Henry Miyatake thought that one of the greatest successes of the first Day of Remembrance was that it was able to bring Seattle’s Japanese American community together. Miyatake remarked in his interview with Denshō that in doing so, the event cut across different identifying groups within the community: “It's not just JACL, or Nisei vets, or one of the churches…everybody was there. So it was a collective experience for everybody.” This was particularly important, Miyatake claims, because of the way in which the government had divided the community through the incarceration. Miyatake said, “[T]he government did a lot of things to us that separated us as groups of individuals, the Isseis from the Niseis… And it separated the community itself, separated the families. And the parents wouldn't talk about this whole experience…But it enabled them to at least come together and see the stuff, and people talk about it openly and discuss the issues.” In this sense, the Day of Remembrance in 1978 began the process of repairing the damage the government had done to the Japanese American community through the incarceration by reopening lines of communication and affording a sense of a Japanese American community.

Barbara Yamaguchi’s reaction to the first Day of Remembrance quoted at the very beginning of this chapter illustrates the emotional release triggered by these symbols of the incarceration. This release, she believes, initiated a healing delayed by at least 30 years. Similar discussions of healing and of being liberated to reckon with the past after the first Day of Remembrance are found in many accounts as participants comment on their family’s history.

55 “Henry Miyatake Interview,” *Denshō Digital Archive*.
56 Ibid.
57 See page 47.
being “[brought] to life.” Frank Chin recalled Shosuke Sasaki’s reaction to the Day of Remembrance after they had returned to Seattle: “I haven’t set foot on those premises since the days it was Camp Harmony. And, much to my surprise, all the horrible feelings and memories I expected to assail me there were of no matter. Standing there by the grandstand, alone with Henry [Miyatake] tonight, I found to be the strangest elation…” Sasaki goes on to elaborate, “It wasn’t until I was standing there tonight that I really felt released from camp. I think it was because I went there of my own free will.” Sasaki’s comment illustrates that although some chose not to attend the Day of Remembrance at Puyallup because they had been forced into the fairgrounds once and did not want to return, for others, the return to Puyallup in this form constituted an emotionally liberating reclamation of agency.

The “breaking open” of the Day of Remembrance—this new freedom to heal and confront the past—especially impacted familial and intergenerational relationships. Many participants from older and younger generations alike describe the day as one that opened lines of communication within family units. Miyatake was surprised by this development, as he had always communicated with his children about his own experience. In his interview with Denshō, however, Miyatake commented that Frank Chin “knew that this would be a earthshaking event for the families that participated.” Miyatake describes the conversations he heard after the Day of Remembrance:

[I]t was a tremendous success on getting the community together…some of the people would say, ‘That was the first time I ever talked to my children about the camps, when we were driving on the caravan down to Puyallup’…And for them it was a kind of a…

58 Doi, “Bridge to Compassion,” 10.
59 Shimabukuro, Born in Seattle, 43.
60 Ibid., 43.
61 Takezawa, Breaking the Silence, 164.
grand opening for the kids to get at least exposed to this information—and the fact that the parents were even now talking about it…there were a lot of stories about that.63

For the younger generations that had not experienced the incarceration, the symbols of the reenactment could still be powerful. Doi includes David Hayama’s reflection on interacting with his father who had been incarcerated at the Day of Remembrance. Hayama stated that:

What impressed me the most was that my father was there and he is a very quiet man, a very solitary man. I went up and got a name tag for him, and it really meant something to me to acknowledge to him that I understand what you went through…I guess that really did, when I think about [it], bring to life that this was a tragic moment in the history of Japanese Americans, for my parents and grandparents.64

The context of the Day of Remembrance enabled Hayama to exchange a meaningful moment with his father even without speaking. The space for the younger generation to express interest or understanding towards their parents was perhaps new to many, yet important for dialogue. Cherry Kinoshita, who attended in 1978, explained that she never spoke to her son about her experience because he didn’t ask her, “and you don't force this kind of thing on a person.”65 In attending the Day of Remembrance, members of the younger generation like Hayama were able to share “momentous interaction[s]” with their families and were also able to identify their own and their families’ positions within a greater Japanese American narrative. Hayama’s reaction to the Day of Remembrance reveals the power of the event and its symbolism in constructing a sense of collective identity by providing individuals with a shared experience. Takezawa writes that, “This ritualistic event also created the sense of ‘togetherness’ among the participants, and for the first time since the war as many as two thousand Japanese Americans, with their non-Japanese friends, gathered at one place to share a common experience.”66 As participants re-

63 “Henry Miyatake Interview,” Denshō Digital Archive.
64 Doi, “Bridge to Compassion,” 10.
66 Takezawa, Breaking the Silence, 163.
encountered the artifacts of the incarceration in a new way—as symbols in this community rite—their participation forged a collective memory associated with these symbols that was previously unattainable. Prior to the first Day of Remembrance, the community’s social death meant that individuals were alone in their memories, of which they rarely spoke.

Joanne Doi does well to contextualize the first Day of Remembrance within the redress movement while noting the emotional impact of the event. While Doi identifies the 1978 Day of Remembrance as a catalyst and turning point in the movement for redress, she claims that the event derived this power from its emotional impact. Doi contends that through the Day of Remembrance and similar events, “the community garnered the emotional commitment to engage in the campaign for redress,” as the event provided a space for intergenerational dialogue and allowed Japanese Americans to “inhabit the shadowed ground of internment.” The very first Day of Remembrance, Doi claims, “highlighted the essence of the redress movement which was ‘the healing of wounds through confronting the injustice,’ and not simply about monetary payment.” Doi argues that the Days of Remembrance (and pilgrimages) “continue to this day in response to the continued spiritual need for the healing of the wounds of both persons and communities.” The tradition has indeed continued for 40 years since 1978, and the memory of the injustice of the incarceration continues to be reinvoked annually on the anniversary of the Executive Order.

At the same time, some expressed negative opinions about this first event. Shimabukuro notes that to organizers within the SERC, it seemed that backlash came primarily from Japanese Americans “fearful of once again triggering anti-Japanese emotions.” Shimabukuro includes a

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67 Doi, “Bridge to Compassion,” 10.
68 Ibid., 10.
69 Ibid., 10.
testimony from one organizer, Aki Kurose, who commented that “I had one friend saying, ‘I’m not going to go. Why should we all gather there?’ And she said, ‘They’ll say, ‘This is a Jap invasion.’” And so there were some that were fearful of a reunion.”71 Others simply did not want to return to the site where they had formerly been incarcerated. One woman, Kathy Hashimoto, recounts her uncle’s response to her invitation that he join her and her mother at the event: “He looked at me like I was crazy. ‘Are you kidding me? I went to Puyallup once. I never want to see that place again.’”72 On a larger scale, political divisions remained between organizations within the Japanese American community. Following the 1978 Day of Remembrance, tensions between the Seattle chapter of the JACL and the national leadership of the JACL increased when the national leadership decided to pursue legislation that would investigate the incarceration rather than seek individual reparations payments, as SERC and the Seattle JACL had sought to do for several years.73

One aspect of the first Day of Remembrance that deserves being called to attention here is the boldly critical nature of this first event. To reproduce down to the details the process of forced evacuation within a community that had in many respects remained silent about the trauma of incarceration for decades was an unprecedented endeavor. Initially, however, the event was envisioned as even more provocative—Frank Abe wrote that, “Early on, Chin suggested a protest where we’d chain ourselves to the fence at Puyallup,” but “Henry [Miyatake] wouldn’t go for it…the whole event was planned not as a protest but as a family event…how can you picket a potluck? It was a very conscious, strategic decision.”74 Indeed, after the event Frank

71 Shimabukuro, Born in Seattle, 46.
72 Takezawa, Breaking the Silence, 164.
74 Shimabukuro, Born in Seattle, 43.
Chin noted that “The atmosphere was more picnic than political and the feeling all around was downright affectionate.”\textsuperscript{75} The radical bent of the Seattle area activists is furthermore visible beyond this first Day of Remembrance. Several articles from 1979 report on a planned Day of Remembrance to Minidoka, where most Seattle area Japanese Americans had been incarcerated, that was in part organized by Frank Chin. The event was cancelled due to an internal rift over plans to construct and burn down a replica of the Minidoka guard tower. The group of Seattle-area Japanese Americans intending to travel to Minidoka planned to “build and burn a 25-foot-tall guard tower, identical to those used by armed guards at the camp from 1942 to 1946 when West Coast Japanese-Americans were detained there.”\textsuperscript{76} This demonstration, again invoking a powerful symbol of the state’s oppression during the wartime incarceration, explicitly rebukes the state’s narrative of the “military necessity” of the incarceration and asserts a counter narrative that emphasizes and rebukes the state’s violence. However, in the case of the Minidoka demonstration, the \textit{Seattle Times} reports that “criticism by Idaho Japanese-Americans and the national Japanese-American Citizens League” stemming from fears “that the symbolic burning of a guard tower would be too militant and aggressive, and might invite bitterness” prevented such an explicit critique.\textsuperscript{77} In both cases—Puyallup in 1978 and Minidoka in 1979—radical ideas were rejected for the sake of constituting shared memory and identity and eventually securing redress. Dr. Minoru Masuda, who had been incarcerated at Minidoka and planned to take part in the demonstration that summer, commented that this visit to Minidoka would help participants to “make final peace with the evacuation,” and said of the Japanese American residents in Idaho and the JACL, “What they want is to be good, quiet, obedient Americans who don’t put

\textsuperscript{75} Shimabukuro, \textit{Born in Seattle}, 48.
\textsuperscript{77} Schulz, “Group Delays Visit.”
themselves out front in a demonstration.” Masuda’s perspective here is reminiscent of Hirabayashi’s claim that “all citizenship activity confronts [resistance].” What is evident is a rift between those within the community who were willing to vocalize this reality and combat the resistance, and those who were not.

As was noted previously, the Day of Remembrance has changed significantly over time with regards to its structure and focus. As such, it would be useful to summarize the essential characteristics of the first Day of Remembrance in Puyallup in 1978 before moving on to discuss the first national Day of Remembrance in Washington, D.C. 20 years later. The Puyallup Day of Remembrance was oriented toward reconstituting family and community ties, and through these efforts, toward political change. Although Frank Chin described the atmosphere as “more picnic than political,” it was precisely because the event succeeded in bringing out shared emotions and constructing a collective identity. The event was crucial in garnering publicity for the redress movement and inspiring similar processes of remembrance in other communities. This first Day of Remembrance repaired family ties, community ties, and served as a linkage between Japanese American communities on the West Coast.

The Day of Remembrance as it was performed in 1978 stands out within the tradition of these ceremonies, and indeed within a Japanese American civil religion in its entirety for its unmatched deployment of and reinterpretation of the symbols of state violence and oppression. The use of these symbols reconstituted Japanese American individual and collective memories. In doing so, it afforded the community a social rebirth and mobilization as a political body. I find Takezawa’s claim that the 1978 Day of Remembrance “burst open the tomb of Japanese American history” to be the most accurate explanation of the significance of the event. An event

78 Schulz, “Group Delays Visit.”
like the 1978 Day of Remembrance that leaned on the power of theater and performance to bring participants face to face with painful symbols from the past was necessary to create the space for incarcerees to create new significance for these symbols and in doing so, begin to reshape the world in which they lived.
Chapter Three: Oppression and Iconization: Negotiations of National Identity at The First National Day of Remembrance

This whole day is underlining the importance of not only the pledge but the will and commitment of people to live by certain standards...this day should be remembered like the 4th of July for us in terms of what America means to us. And if we could make that a living pledge, this country will be great.1
- Gordon Hirabayashi

We have 120,000 Americans who are ethnic Japanese who were interned during World War II without due process...and really this day belongs to them because they say what is great about America in the sense that they were willing to persevere and they were willing to suffer the humiliation of incarceration because of their race and it’s my hope that this day will be remembered and that we’ll continue it every year.2
- Representative Robert T. Matsui

Ten years after the first Day of Remembrance at Puyallup, redress was achieved in the form of the 1988 Civil Liberties Act in which the government issued a formal apology for the incarceration, awarded each surviving incarceree $20,000 in reparations payment, and established a fund for the purpose of educating the public about the incarceration. Ten years after the passage of the Civil Liberties Act, the educational fund established by the act, the Civil Liberties Public Education Fund, organized the first national Day of Remembrance in Washington, D.C. This event represents the next iteration of the Day of Remembrance ceremony that I will closely analyze to discern the change in the ceremony over time. Director and producer Gayle Yamada recorded the ceremony and produced a film, “Day of Remembrance: The First National Ceremony,” from which I derive most of my information about this event. A formal event in an indoor auditorium in Washington, D.C. with a full program of speakers, including politicians, intellectuals, and activists, this iteration of the February 19th ceremony was a far cry from the 1978 reenactment at the Puyallup fairgrounds. Nonetheless, the political and

1 Gayle Yamada, Day of Remembrance: The First National Ceremony, Film, directed by Gayle Yamada (1999; El Macera, CA: Bridge Media, Incorporated), VHS.
2 Yamada, Day of Remembrance: The First National Ceremony.
religious nature of the event should not be understated. The first Day of Remembrance at Puyallup was both politically oriented and community oriented, asking that members of both the government and the Japanese American community remember the incarceration. Through this rite, the Japanese American community was afforded a social rebirth that allowed them to emerge as a political body. At the national Day of Remembrance in 1998, the Civil Liberties Public Education Fund (CLPEF) as a representative of this body called for not only its own community members but also the American public to remember the incarceration. In addition to physically situating the event in the American civil religious sacred center of the nation, the event called for national attention through the use of three nationally-broadcast public service announcements produced by Gayle Yamada. These PSAs, screened at the event, will be discussed later in this chapter.

In this chapter, I primarily focus on the rhetoric of this 1998 event as it pertains to participants’ conceptions of and critiques of America and their role and position as citizens after incarceration and the securing of redress. Voices within and beyond the Japanese American community as presented at this event speak to the ways in which Japanese Americans at the time negotiated their place in the nation as a political body and community. With the 1998 ceremony’s explicitly national orientation came a great deal of discussion about the values and benefits of America and American society, as well as discussions of where Japanese Americans and the history of the incarceration stood in relation to the nation. Yamada’s recording of this event captures a multitude of voices speaking to the afterlife of the incarceration, the duties of Japanese Americans in remembering the incarceration, and the meaning of America. Captured in the recording of this event are the strains of dissent and divergent opinions within the remembrance movement. I evaluate the rhetoric and critical nature of this event to illuminate
continuities and changes between this 1998 iteration and the first Day of Remembrance in 1978. Tracking the variation between the 1978 and 1998 Days of Remembrance as iterations of the same calendrical rite reveals sacred time as lifted out yet nonetheless subject to the influence and impact of politics and historical context. I turn now to a discussion of the event itself, and the agency organizing this Day of Remembrance, the Civil Liberties Public Education Fund.

That the 1998 Day of Remembrance called upon the American public to remember the incarceration was in keeping with the intent of the CLPEF as described in the language of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. The CLPEF was one of two government agencies, along with the Office of Redress Administration, established by the act. Dale Minami, chair of the board at the time of the national Day of Remembrance, describes the purpose of the CLPEF as follows:

“…[T]o sponsor research and public educational activities so the events surrounding the exclusion, the forced removal, and internment of civilians and permanent residents of Japanese ancestry will be remembered, and so the causes and circumstances of this and similar events may be illuminated.”3 The Denshō encyclopedia entry for this agency emphasizes its role in public education—while the Office of Redress Administration managed financial reparations to individual incarcerees, the CLPEF managed funds allocated to finance educational projects including research fellowships on topics related to the incarceration, the establishment of monuments and landmarks, and events like the national Day of Remembrance, intended “to call national attention to this landmark event [the signing of Executive Order 9066].”4

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3 Yamada, Day of Remembrance: The First National Ceremony.
4 “Civil Liberties Public Education Fund,” Denshō Digital Encyclopedia, Copyright Denshō 2018. http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Civil_Liberties_Public_Education_Fund/ Among CLPEF grant recipients were the Manzanar Committee and the National Japanese American Memorial Foundation, entities involved with the management and creation of two sites under the purview of the National Park Service.
Situated as it was in the nation’s capital, the national orientation of the 1998 Day of Remembrance was not only utilized to call upon the American public in its entirety but also lent the event a certain political significance. As such, it is worthwhile to revisit Catherine Bell’s basic genres of ritual action at this juncture. As an iteration of the calendrical rite in question, the Days of Remembrance, the 1998 event is unique in that it was sponsored, organized, and executed by the CLPEF, a government agency. In this sense, the 1998 national ceremony spans genres of ritual action as a calendrical rite and, arguably, a political rite. Political rituals, according to Bell, “comprise those ceremonial practices that specifically construct, display, and promote the power of political institutions…or the political interests of distinct constituencies and subgroups.”\(^5\) As suggested by this excerpt, Bell’s discussion of political rites focuses on the use of ritual to display and build power and to re-emphasize and solidify the political platforms or perspectives of specific groups. The CLPEF, created in 1988 as a product of securing redress, represents a prominent Japanese American political agency, the likes of which did not exist before the social revitalization and reconstitution of the community in 1978.

Bell contends that, “In general, political rites define power in a two-dimensional way: first, they use symbols and symbolic action to depict a group of people as a coherent and ordered community based on shared values and goals; second, they demonstrate the legitimacy of these values and goals by establishing their iconicity with the perceived value and order of the cosmos.”\(^6\) The extent to which the CLPEF’s 1998 Day of Remembrance resembles Bell’s formulation of a political ritual is striking. The emphasis on the community’s responsibility to “let it not happen again” suggests that, as a population that experienced incarceration in America,

\(^5\) Bell, *Ritual*, 128.
\(^6\) Ibid., 129. Recalling Bruce Lincoln’s definition of religion, in which he understands religious authority to derive from claims on the part of a transcendent status and an assertion of transcendent value, this second part of Bell’s definition of political rites appears to get at the religious dimension of these rites.
the Japanese American community has moral authority to call out discrimination against and violence towards other marginalized groups in America. Furthermore, the location, rhetoric and symbols conveyed a “coherent and ordered community.” However, the variations in individuals’ conceptions of the purpose and duty of the event are legible upon close viewing.7

The event took place on February 19, 1998 at the Smithsonian Institution. Chair of the Civil Liberties Public Education Fund (CLPEF) board Dale Minami opened the ceremony. In his opening remarks, Minami spatially and temporally oriented participants with regard to the tradition of the Days of Remembrance. Minami stated that, “This evening’s event is not a unique event. The legacy began in 1978 when dedicated individuals and Japanese American community organizations organized in producing the first Day of Remembrance in Seattle, Washington. Since then, February 19th has become the official Day of Remembrance in local Japanese American communities.”8 Minami recognizes the origination of this ceremony among a smaller, specific subset of the Japanese American community, and acknowledges the ongoing practice in dispersed communities throughout the United States. At the same time, he establishes the current 1998 moment as a part of a tradition stretching back 20 years. Minami invokes the presence of other Days of Remembrance nationwide in his opening remarks: “We are pleased to join with Day of Remembrance celebrations taking place in local communities across the nation in remembering this historical day.”9 The national ceremony is not portrayed as a substitution for local observances or as a next step in the progress of local observances towards a centralized ceremony, but rather as concurrent with localized observances. In closing the event, a symbolic candle-lighting ceremony evokes the ten WRA concentration camps, again situating this

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7 Yamada, Day of Remembrance: The First National Ceremony.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
remembrance ceremony in the context of the Japanese American civil religious landscape. However, even as this national Day of Remembrance is explicitly situated within a tradition of Days of Remembrance in the United States, the 1998 ceremony is distinguished by virtue of its position as the first “national” iteration of this event. This moniker heavily informs the rhetoric, thematic focus, and implications of the ceremony.

The theme of the 1998 Day of Remembrance was “Personal Justice Denied: An Issue for All Americans.” The desire for the attention and recognition of “all Americans” or the American public is referenced at many points when speakers at the 1998 Day of Remembrance are framing the purpose of the event. Minami states that the theme “calls upon the American public to reflect on the consequences of the signing of Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942 which stripped an entire population of American citizens and resident aliens of their civil liberties solely on account of their ancestry.” As it is presented by Minami, part of the intent of having an event at the national level was to gain a national level of attention. In an interview before the event, Minami states that the event is intended to “…Tell a national audience why it is important to remember the lessons of the Japanese internment…in order to impress upon the American people why civil rights are so important and so fragile that we must be vigilant at all times, and we must be prepared to defend them for not just ourselves, but for all people.”

After his initial remarks, Dale Minami asked board member Kelly Kuwayama to lead everyone in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. The decision to recite the Pledge is striking for many reasons. The Pledge of Allegiance—specifically, the compulsion to recite it—has been controversial in and of itself, especially following the 1954 addition of the phrase “under God.”

10 Yamada, Day of Remembrance: The First National Ceremony.
11 Ibid.
12 Although the way in which the film is edited makes it difficult to discern with certainty, it looks as though most if not all members of the audience rose for the Pledge, and a multitude of voices reciting the Pledge are audible.
Furthermore, Peter Gardella identifies the Pledge of Allegiance as a tool of the American civil religion in unifying and holding together American citizens. However, most significantly, the act of the formerly incarcerated and their friends and family pledging allegiance to America while gathered to remember that the state unlawfully incarcerated them on the basis of race, unfounded assertions of espionage, and suspicions of disloyalty is profoundly ironic. The Pledge of Allegiance in this context is immediately evocative of loyalty tests like the Application for Leave Clearance, commonly known as the “loyalty questionnaire” which was distributed in the camps. The infamous final two questions on these questionnaires asked Japanese Americans if they were (1) willing to forswear allegiance to the Japanese emperor and “swear unqualified allegiance to the United States,” and (2) if Nisei men were willing to serve in the United States military. From the results of this questionnaire, incarcerees were labeled “loyal” or “disloyal” and relocated accordingly—“disloyals” to the high security WRA camp at Tule Lake, and those deemed loyal to other camps or cleared to resettle outside of the Western Defense Command. Answers to the questionnaire could follow Japanese Americans beyond the camps. When the government closed the camps and Japanese Americans were once again forced to uproot and move, resettlement was particularly difficult for those men labeled “no-no boys” who answered in the negative for both questions. These men were “largely shunned by a Japanese American community that emphasized loyalty and military service after the war…castigated by the Japanese American community and the broader public as being disloyal traitors to the United States.”

Beyond the irony of the Pledge being recited in this context, its use is also worth considering in understanding, as Iwamura formulated, the ways in which a Japanese American civil religion is “related to but distinct” from national expressions of civil religious faith. Interestingly, one of the primary ways in which federal courts argued that a compulsory recitation of the Pledge in a public setting—primarily, in public schools—did not violate the Establishment Clause of the Constitution in spite of the “under God” phrase was through the concept of “ceremonial deism.”15 Ceremonial deism is a legal term used to describe “nominally religious statements and practices” that “have lost through rote repetition any significant religious content.”16 In her opinion in the 2004 case Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdow, Justice O’Connor wrote that these references “are not minor trespasses upon the Establishment Clause to which I turn a blind eye. Instead, their history, character, and context prevent them from being constitutional violations at all.” Proponents of this concept count among these statements the national motto—“In God we trust”—as well as the “under God” phrase in the Pledge of Allegiance.17 Interestingly, Bellah in his seminal essay on civil religion in America rebuts this exact type of argument, criticizing the notion that political references to God

15 Sandra Day O’Connor invoked this term in her 2004 concurrence in Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdow, arguing that “government can, in a discrete category of cases, acknowledge or refer to the divine without offending the Constitution. This category of ‘ceremonial deism’ most clearly encompasses such things as the national motto (‘In God We Trust’), religious references in traditional patriotic songs such as ‘The Star-Spangled Banner,’ [etc.]” Unlike the first two notable challenges to the Pledge, this case came after the 1954 addition of “under God” to the Pledge. The Supreme Court first heard a challenge to the compulsory recitation of the pledge in the 1940 case of Minersville v. Gobitis, in which the court said that a public school could force students who were Jehovah's Witnesses to salute the flag and say the pledge. In Justice Frankfurter’s majority opinion, compliance with reciting the pledge was described as “obedience to a general law not aimed at the promotion or restriction of religious beliefs.” However, in 1943, the Court changed its course in West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette, where the majority said that “the Free Speech clause of the First Amendment prohibits public schools from forcing students to salute the American flag and say the Pledge of Allegiance.” Justice Robert Jackson said in his opinion that “no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein.”


are empty. He writes, “[W]e know enough about the function of ceremony and ritual in various societies to make us suspicious of dismissing something as unimportant because it is ‘only a ritual.’”18 While the invocation of ceremonial deism attempts to remove the religious character of phrases referencing God so as to make them inoffensive to the Constitution, Bellah’s interpretation of these very same phrases is that they indicate that in America, sovereignty belongs to God. Bellah writes, “In American political theory, sovereignty rests, of course, with the people, but implicitly, and often explicitly, the ultimate sovereignty has been attributed to God. This is the meaning of the motto ‘In God we trust,’ as well as the inclusion of the phrase ‘under God’ in the pledge to the flag.”19 While Bellah flags the theological and political implications of these references to God, Peter Gardella asserts the practical importance of the Pledge of Allegiance to American civil religion: “We [Americans] have no native culture to hold us together, but we do have civil religion. We pledge allegiance, affirm our values, etc. and we need civil religion very much to fill the void in our culture.”20 Pledging allegiance to the flag and “to the republic”—“one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all”—is easily legible as a political ritual within Bell’s framework of these rites as “us[ing] symbols and symbolic action to depict a group of people as a coherent and ordered community based on shared values and goals” and “demonstrat[ing] the legitimacy of these values and goals by establishing their iconicity with the perceived value and order of the cosmos.”21 The Pledge draws upon the symbolism of the flag and portrays the nation as an indivisible, unified whole, attributing to it values of universal liberty and justice and placing it under God’s special providence. In considering the Japanese Americans at the 1998 Day of Remembrance as a

19 Ibid., 42.
20 Wilsey, “Interview with Peter Gardella.”
21 Bell, Ritual, 129.
population that was singled out, forcefully separated from their fellow citizens, stripped of all rights of citizens and incarcerated in concentration camps, their pledging allegiance to an “indivisible” nation is discordant. Nonetheless, it evidences various attempts to subsume the Japanese American civil religion within the broader fold of American civil religion.

As referenced at the outset of this chapter, in an interview before the event, Gordon Hirabayashi stated that: “This whole day is underlining the importance of not only the pledge but the will and commitment of people to live by certain standards...this day should be remembered like the 4th of July for us in terms of what America means to us. And if we could make that a living pledge, this country will be great” (emphasis mine). While Hirabayashi here is not necessarily or explicitly speaking about the Pledge of Allegiance—potentially instead an abstract pledge to uphold certain values of tolerance, equality, and justice in America, or pledges by government officials on the topic of the incarceration to never forget the event—the choice of language and the point he makes here is striking. Hirabayashi in essence deems a pledge alone to be insufficient without supplementary action, or “will and commitment” to enact the values upheld by such a pledge. Most significantly, Hirabayashi here states that America will be great if this pledge becomes lived rather than merely spoken or asserted. Where many other speakers at this event and beyond assert the continued greatness of America in their remembrance of the incarceration, Hirabayashi’s words stand out as a stronger critique of America’s past. This likely reflects his resistance to the exclusion orders and his legal challenge of the constitutionality of the incarceration. Hirabayashi’s critique, however, still calls upon the nation to rededicate itself to the ideals of America, and thus utilizes the typical language of American civil religion.

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22 Yamada, Day of Remembrance: The First National Ceremony.
This quotation of Hirabayashi’s is taken from a series of interviews with certain key figures as they arrived at the Smithsonian Institute that Yamada uses to open her film. All of those interviewed are speaking to the same topics—the importance of the Day of Remembrance, their hopes for the ceremony, and the relevance of the ceremony to the nation as a whole. These testimonies highlight the ways in which individuals were negotiating how the history of the incarceration fit in with the nation and its proclaimed values, and seeking to understand their own responsibilities to the remembrance movement as activists, scholars, and politicians.

George Takei, emcee for the evening, is also interviewed before the event, and like Hirabayashi, takes time to comment on the principles of America. Takei says: “I think it’s a day that should resonate for all Americans that are concerned about the strength and resilience of the principles for which this country stands. I think it’s a date that should teach us some lessons. And with those lessons we strengthen and re-energize the ideas and principles of America”23 (emphasis mine). Takei here contests the understanding of America’s principles as inviolable, suggesting instead that the incarceration called into question the “strength and resilience” of these principles. Takei is hopeful, however, and positions a remembrance of and reflection upon the incarceration as a means to fortify and “re-energize” America’s principles. Takei positions remembrance as an opportunity for Americans to rededicate themselves to the nation’s principles. Thus, Hirabayashi and Takei both invoke national goals and values in their contextualization of the redress movement, and in this sense take as foundational the rhetoric of American civil religion.

Another interviewee, Congressman Robert T. Matsui (D-CA) takes this American civil religious rhetoric even farther, portraying Japanese Americans as a model (because self-

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23 Yamada, *Day of Remembrance: The First National Ceremony*. 
sacrificial) minority. Matsui’s comments are the most troubling presented in Yamada’s film. Matsui asserts that “this day”—February 19th, as a Day of Remembrance—belongs to those who had been incarcerated “because they say what is great about America in the sense that they were willing to persevere and they were willing to suffer the humiliation of incarceration because of their race…” Matsui here locates America’s greatness in those incarcerated Japanese Americans, portraying their story as one of perseverance and “willingness to suffer” for, it is implied, the good of the nation. As regards Matsui’s comments, I am in agreement with Don Nakanishi—a member of the CLPEF board who did not speak at the 1998 Day of Remembrance—when he contends that narratives framing Japanese Americans as “a minority that has risen above even prejudiced criticism” is “an updated version of the notion that the Internment tested the character and determination of Japanese Americans.” For Nakanishi, such narratives “continuously worked at loggerheads with efforts by Japanese Americans to not only grapple with the unfinished business of the Internment, but also to redefine their group status and experiences in American society.” In other words, casting formerly incarcerated Japanese Americans as a “model minority” within America—as model citizens who sacrificed for the nation—obscures and complicates Japanese American efforts to interpret their own position in relation to the nation state. Furthermore, this logic positions the incarceration as a loyalty or character test of sorts that provided Japanese Americans with the opportunity to prove themselves as citizens, to prove their worthiness, and to prove their willingness to sacrifice in order to be counted as citizens. Nakanishi writes that, “Like earlier interpretations, the success story thesis treated the Internment as past history,” and thus suggests that this type of narrative

24 Yamada, Day of Remembrance: The First National Ceremony.
26 Ibid., 23.
actively impedes the Japanese American community’s efforts to both reflect on their own position within the nation and to continue to fight for their own civil liberties and those of others. While Matsui praises Japanese American activism and perseverance and advocates that the Day of Remembrance continues to be practiced every year, he retains an understanding of America’s greatness that coexists in one sentence with an acknowledgement of the nation’s history of race-based violence and disenfranchisement.

Interestingly, Matsui’s comments here have implications reminiscent of Bellah’s discussion of civil religion and pluralism in *The Broken Covenant* (1975). Bellah devotes a chapter in this work to the discussion of the position of the group, “particularly groups that differed significantly from the majority of the early colonists,” in the “developing pattern of symbol and myth in America.”27 In this section, Bellah develops a formulation in which a “transvaluation of roles…turns the despised and oppressed [those racially or ethnically othered and excluded from society] into symbols of salvation and rebirth,” writing that this shift “is an indication of new cultural directions, perhaps of a deep cultural revolution.”28 In this framework, the inclusion of the formerly excluded into the body politic affords salvation for the nation. Thus, even within Bellah’s attempt at addressing pluralism and fitting the minority group into the American “pattern of symbol and myth,” he maintains a construction of center—the original white Anglo-Saxon Protestant settler—versus margins—everyone else—and maintains a hierarchical binary between these groups. In this troubling conclusion, the dominant majority are redeemed through their inclusion of those on the margins, with those on the margins becoming icons of personal and national salvation. When Matsui takes the racially-discriminated-against Japanese American incarceree as symbol of what is great about America, he ascribes to this

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28 Ibid., 106.
complex of salvation that furthermore relegates the incarceration to a “finished” event of the past.

The competing visions of America presented by those interviewed at the 1998 Day of Remembrance in Yamada’s film—as already great versus aspiring to greatness—are likewise evidenced by letters from government officials presented at the ceremony. In the course of the evening’s program, two letters from national politicians were read—the first from President Bill Clinton, and the second from Congresswoman Maxine Waters. The disparate ways in which these two letters discuss the incarceration and its memorialization are exemplary of the different conceptions of America and America’s relation to Japanese Americans that exist within the activist community and remembrance movement. President Clinton’s letter was read first by Doris Matsui, who had been incarcerated in Poston and in 1998 was serving as deputy special assistant to the president. President Clinton’s comments on the memorialization of the incarceration in his letter read:

Warm greetings to everyone gathered in our nation’s capital to observe the national Day of Remembrance sponsored by the Civil Liberties Public Education Fund to ensure that our nation understands and learns from one of our most tragic mistakes. We must never forget the forced internment of thousands of Japanese Americans during World War II. This solemn occasion reminds all Americans of a sad chapter in our history and helps us to continue the process of reconciliation and healing… You are helping us acknowledge the mistakes of the past so that together, we can build a better and brighter future for us all.29

President Clinton in his strongest denunciation refers to the incarceration as merely as a “mistake,” then as “a sad chapter in our history.” Clinton’s words are hopeful, casting the incarceration as a mere error of the past that must be remembered in the effort to “build a brighter and better future for us all.” However, Clinton leaves unstated the ways in which and the extent to which America has been involved in a long “process of reconciliation and healing.”

29 Yamada, Day of Remembrance: The First National Ceremony.
Calls for individual reparations originated in Japanese American communities as early as 1970 and did not obtain congressional approval until 1988. When the Civil Liberties Act (CLA) was finally passed in 1988 the nation offered an apology and reparations payments, but these $20,000 sums were more symbolic than compensatory considering the severe economic, psychological, and emotional impact of the incarceration. Estimating the true value of the losses of Japanese Americans as a result of the incarceration has been a difficult endeavor in part because most essential financial records were no longer available after the war. By 1948, the Department of Justice found that “the Internal Revenue Service had already destroyed most of the 1939 to 1942 income tax returns of evacuees--the most comprehensive set of federal financial records.”

Furthermore, as the JACL argued in 1954, “In the stress and tension of 1942, when one did not know how long he would be detained or whether he would ever be allowed to return, it would be unreasonable to expect that emotion-charged men and women would have chosen to pack books and records instead of the food, the medicines, and the clothing which they took with them…”

However, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC), which heard the testimonies that eventually resulted in the passage of the Civil Liberties Act in 1998, commissioned an independent firm to estimate total economic losses in 1983, and the figure provided by their estimate was “as high as 6.2 billion,” approximately four times the sum that the government eventually paid in individual reparations.

Moreover, the CLA’s apology, issued over 40 years after the government closed the last camp, came when tens of thousands of those incarcerated had already passed away. The first

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31 Personal Justice Denied, 118-119.
reparations payments were not issued until 1990, with a total of 82,219 individuals receiving redress payment as compared to the approximately 120,000 who had been incarcerated. Furthermore, the Civil Liberties Act initially authorized $50 million for the CLPEF, but “as a result of intense lobbying [on the part of other federal programs competing for the same pool of funds] from 1988 to 1992, only $5 million was finally appropriated in 1994.” From this account, it is difficult to extract a perception of the government as an equal partner to the Japanese American community in a process of reconciliation and healing, and to do so obscures the struggle of these communities to secure government reparations and recognition.

Immediately following Matsui’s reading of President Clinton’s letter, Dale Minami read a letter from Congresswoman Maxine Waters. In 1998, Waters represented California’s 35th congressional district and chaired the Congressional Black Caucus. Waters’ letter begins with a brief overview of the facts of the incarceration, followed by her most condemning words:

As a result of this official government act [Executive Order 9066], thousands of patriotic Japanese American families were condemned to harsh concentration camps across the Western United States, Japanese Americans lost their homes, farms, and businesses, and most fundamentally their human rights. Their years of incarceration always must be remembered as one of the country’s most shameful acts. Unfortunately, official racial discrimination has been an integral part of most of our nation’s history. Slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and the genocide of Native Americans have fundamentally defined and shaped America. In this sense, the incarceration of Japanese Americans was a grave but not surprising continuation of this nation’s racial injustice. Like the battle for freedom, equality, and full democracy by African Americans, the fight for redress and reparations by Japanese Americans is a struggle to redeem the soul of America from the brutality of its past.

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The Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Balanced Budget Act of 1985 and Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Reaffirmation Act of 1987 placed the first spending constraints on the national budget and limited the pool of federal monies from which the reparations payments and funding for the CLPEF drew (Hatamiya 1993).

There is much in Waters’ letter that warrants attention. First, Waters explicitly attributes to government action the fundamental loss of human rights that Japanese Americans experienced as a part of the incarceration. In comparison, the entirety of President Clinton’s letter, much of which is quoted above, makes no mention of the government nor of its involvement in or culpability for the incarceration. Second, in Waters’ words, the incarceration was a “shameful act” rather than as in Clinton’s phrasing a “tragic mistake.” Also relevant here is Waters’ use of “incarceration” in comparison to Clinton’s “internment.” As discussed in my introduction, Roger Daniels notes that the language used to describe the incarceration plays a crucial role in the “down-playing of the negative aspects of the wartime experience,” which Daniels identifies as a “corollary of what can be called American secular triumphalism.”\(^36\) While Waters’ “incarceration” and “concentration camp” combat the triumphalist narrative, Clinton’s “internment” does little to challenge it.

The third notable difference between the two statements, however, lies in the way in which the incarceration itself is evaluated. To Waters, the incarceration was neither a “mistake” nor a “sad chapter,” but “a grave but not surprising continuation of this nation’s racial injustice.” The incarceration was not a tragic mistake but was rather part and parcel of America’s history of racism (or white supremacy). Whereas Clinton treats this episode as anomalous, Waters sees it as continuous with American history. Waters’ critique, Karen Leong and Myla Carpio would argue, is rare among those critiques of the nation in that it takes as “foundational [the] acts of colonization and genocide” rather than “the founding document of the U.S. Constitution.”\(^37\)

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36 Daniels, “Words Do Matter,” 204.
Waters’ letter, like Clinton’s, ends on a hopeful note. However, the language is much less euphemistic. While Clinton characterizes the work of Japanese American activists as helpful in acknowledging past mistakes in the name of a bright future, Waters describes this community’s work as “a struggle to redeem the soul of America from the brutality of its past.” To Waters, the “soul” of America was lost to past violence, and it will be a “battle” and a “struggle” to redeem it. Waters’ phrasing thus highlights the contentious nature of memorialization and the human effort required to redeem the nation by remembering the incarceration. Clinton, on the other hand, describes remembrance activity not as a “battle” but as a “process of reconciliation and healing,” implying unity, cooperation, and ultimate resolution.

One point of consistency across Clinton’s and Waters’ letters is their acknowledgement of the importance of memorialization. This emphasis, made evident in the hopeful closure to both letters, indicates a belief in the potential for positive change that highlights a paradox evident in the endeavor to remember the incarceration. Here, and throughout the remembrance movement, remembering the nation’s failure and the injustice of the incarceration is positioned as work that will forge inclusion, justice, and an opportunity for America to successfully carry out its promises of toleration and equality. Both politicians position the memorialization as possibly affording redemption, which is in keeping with the narrative of American civil religion.

In considering the Days of Remembrance as public rituals, one aspect of the 1998 Day of Remembrance which must be discussed is the use of media to publicize the event. As with the 1978 Day of Remembrance, much of the outreach was done through the use of media, but in the later event this was accomplished through the use of nationally-broadcast public service announcements. Concurrent with the 1998 Day of Remembrance and screened at the event were three national public service announcements about the Day of Remembrance produced by Gayle
Yamada and aired in cities across the nation. Before Yamada’s public service announcements were screened, she took to the stage to describe her vision for the three clips: one 15-seconds, one 30-seconds, and one 60-seconds long. Yamada said:

[T]he Civil Liberties Public Education Fund asked [Diane Fukami and I] to help create some kind of legacy for [the CLPEF]. What better way we thought, than to use the power of the media to remind Americans of a terrible wrong and of an apology? When I thought of the message we wanted to deliver to millions of Americans, I thought of the pain of a people that was focused for me on my father’s experiences during the war at Manzanar and on my mother’s, who was incarcerated at Heart Mountain. I wanted to make the television public service announcement very painful and very personal for everyone who saw it.38

Yamada’s understanding of what can be learned from the incarceration is informed by her family’s experiences, the takeaway from which is “the pain of a people” as well as the personal pain of individuals. To make her PSAs striking to the American public, Yamada attempts to communicate the pain and, more importantly, the personal nature of this pain—arguably harder to ignore than more vague statements about the experience of a collective group. According to Yamada’s testimony at the Day of Remembrance, the public service announcements were playing “in cities all over the country, from San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Cleveland, Honolulu, Wyoming, Tennessee, and of course…right here in Washington, D.C.”39

Yamada’s three public service announcements follow a similar format. Each utilizes a series of black and white photographs of the camps—primarily those taken by Ansel Adams and Dorothea Lange at Manzanar, as well as Toyo Miyatake’s famous “Boys Behind Barbed Wire” photograph—that emphasize the camps’ desolation and prominently feature barbed wire. Also featured in each public service announcement is an image of a guard tower with two armed guards standing atop it. Text in each PSA advertises a “Day of Remembrance, February 19th.” In

38 Yamada, Day of Remembrance: The First National Ceremony.
39 Ibid.
the longer two public service announcements, George Takei narrates. The script of the 30-second public service announcement is as follows:

It was called wartime military necessity. 120,000 of us incarcerated by a presidential order. Americans of Japanese ancestry behind barbed wire, with armed guards. There were no charges, no trial, only imprisonment. It happened during World War II. We must never forget this time when Americans were denied their constitutional rights because of fear, racism, hysteria. It must never happen again to any American.

This narrative calls attention to the injustice of the incarceration by emphasizing the lack of due process and specifically highlighting the denial of “constitutional rights because of fear, racism, [and] hysteria.” The public service announcement is personal in that it features many close-cropped images of Japanese Americans in camp, yet the narration itself speaks of the collective group. The 60-second PSA, in contrast, features George Takei—visible on the screen this time, not solely narrating—telling his story of being incarcerated. Standing in a desolate scrub desert, he begins: “I learned to read in a place like this. To write, play baseball. I was four years old. They gave me the number 12832-C. Prisons like this were home to 120,000 of us during World War II.” The rest of the narration closely maps onto that of the 30-second public service announcement, but this account stands out among the three public service announcements as highly personal. The imagery of a child learning to read and write—meaningful life events associated with home and family—is juxtaposed with the desolate imagery of the camp’s setting to paint an unsettling picture. In this way, Yamada conveys the exact type of personal pain she intended to.

Notably, the 60-second public service announcement ends with a clip of a group of schoolchildren reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Text overlaid reads “Day of Remembrance, February 19th.” It is unclear here how Yamada intends the portrayal of the Pledge of Allegiance to be taken. The Pledge can be read in this context as a signifier of some degree of ambivalence with regard to Japanese Americans asserting their inclusion within a nation that discriminated
against and imprisoned them. Yamada could also be emphasizing the violent racism that was brought to bear on Japanese Americans by highlighting the vulnerability and loyalty of children in contrast to the depictions of a sinister Japanese American enemy during the war.

The difference between the 1978 and 1998 Days of Remembrance is striking. Whereas the radicality of the 1970s saw plans to destroy symbols of the state such as the guard tower at Minidoka, the 1998 Day of Remembrance opens with a Pledge of Allegiance to the nation as symbolized by the flag. Here, the ritual remembrance of the incarceration includes a celebration of rather than a reappropriation and redeployment of symbols of the state. Moreover, the symbols of the state invoked have shifted from symbols of the state’s racial discrimination and violence—identification tags, barbed wire, army trucks—to the flag, which Gardella claims “sacramentally contains the land, people, government, and spirit of the United States.”

Yamada’s recording of the first national Day of Remembrance ceremony effectively captures the ways in which many prominent figures in the national Japanese American community understand themselves, their activism, and the Japanese American community in relation to the nation. Other than Maxine Waters and, to a lesser extent, Gordon Hirabayashi, no speakers at the 1998 Day of Remembrance forward an understanding of the nation as fundamentally violent or discriminatory. While the change in the level of critique from 1978 to 1998 is striking, the historical and political contexts of the two events must be considered in a comparison of the critical nature of these events. The 1998 Day of Remembrance came a decade after the long campaign for redress and individual reparations had culminated in success with the 1988 Civil Liberties Act. In 1978, the Japanese American community was asserting itself publicly for the very first time and constructing a collective identity and memory that worked to

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40 Gardella, American Civil Religion, 81.
socially revitalize the community. That the incarceration was collectively remembered was not a given in 1978 as it had come to be in 1998, and thus the more radical reenactment was perhaps essential at this time. Nonetheless, the nationalization of the Day of Remembrance ritual in 1998 reflects a continued grappling with the significance of patriotism and Americanness to the Japanese American community. In 1998, the relation between Japanese Americans and the nation was still not settled and was very much still subject to interpretation.
Concluding Thoughts and the Japanese American Civil Religion Today

On February 19, 2018, I attended the Day of Remembrance ceremony in Seattle, Washington. The theme of the 2018 event, organized by Denshō, was “Our History, Our Responsibility.” Tom Ikeda, Denshō founder, described Denshō’s intention with the event as one of community formation between Japanese Americans and American Muslims. Ikeda said that the event was about “connecting, and talking about each other and what’s going on in the country…What we [Denshō] really want to do is connect these communities—the Japanese American community with the Muslim community.” The basis for this connection, according to Ikeda, comes “from a place of love and caring and shared suffering.” The particular shared suffering that Ikeda refers to is the “cruel reality” experienced by Japanese Americans during the incarceration and by Muslim Americans since 9/11, of “be[ing] an immigrant who has sacrificed so much for a life in a country that sees you as the enemy because of your race or religion.” The rhetoric of the event focused more accurately not just on the experience of being labeled an enemy on the basis of race, but on being so labeled even in spite of clear demonstrations of American patriotism—namely, through patriotic service.

Khizr Khan, constitutional rights lawyer and Gold Star parent, was the keynote speaker for the event.¹ Ikeda described his rationale for selecting Khan in terms of this connection based in a common experience of America. Ikeda states that seeing Khizr and his wife Ghazala Khan address the Democratic National Convention made him think of what his grandparents might

¹ Khizr and Ghazala Khan received international attention after giving a speech at the Democratic National Convention on July 28, 2016 which focused on their son, Humayun Khan, killed in 2004 in the Iraq War, and criticized presidential nominee Donald Trump. Khizr Khan criticized Trump’s proposed ban on the immigration of Muslims to the U.S., and famously offered Donald Trump his copy of the U.S. Constitution. Khan also said in this speech, “Have you ever been to Arlington Cemetery? Go look at the graves of brave patriots who died defending the United States of America. You will see all faiths, genders, and ethnicities. You have sacrificed nothing—and no one.”
have thought 72 years prior when they received the American flag for the death of their eldest son killed in combat in World War II. Ikeda said,

I also thought how difficult it must have been for my grandparents to have to accept the flag while on a dusty field in an American concentration camp in Idaho, incarcerated because they were suspected of not being loyal enough to the country their son fought and died for… It must have taken so much strength and conviction for them to have been treated so badly and sacrificed so much.

The advertisement for the 2018 Day of Remembrance in Seattle utilized an image of precisely this scene, which Ikeda claimed captured the “underlying feeling” of the connection between Muslim and Japanese Americans in this current moment. At the 2018 Day of Remembrance, this connection was largely asserted through discussions of patriotism in the face of discrimination.

On this occasion, however, patriotism was specifically tied to sacrifice. Khizr Khan’s keynote speech rarely strayed from the topic of military service. Khan emphasized the exceptional patriotism of Japanese Americans who fought in World War II despite the nation’s prejudice and despite their own incarceration and that of their families. To this end, Khan quoted Japanese American Senator Daniel Inouye: “When given a chance, Japanese Americans proved, with much blood spilled, that their courage and patriotism were beyond question, and that Americanism was not a matter of skin color or ethnicity. In fighting for justice abroad, Japanese Americans were also fighting injustice at home.” Khan’s speech emphasized the remembrance of Japanese American veterans above all. Khan goes on to say that “Because of the patriotic sacrifices of all those who served … others, including Muslims today, all Americans today, gain courage and inspiration to have faith in the democratic values of our nation. You have, by your example, by your sacrifice, by your families’ sacrifice, you have taught us well. You have taught this nation well. Thank you for your contribution to our nation.” Similar to Bellah’s formulation of the once oppressed as “icons of salvation,” Khan positions the sacrifice of Japanese
Americans as redeeming, arguing that their sacrifice inspires others to have faith in America’s values. This is typical of the rhetoric of military sacrifice, but Khan here seems to assert that precisely because Japanese Americans sacrificed in spite of their incarceration and the nation’s racism, their sacrifice is more powerful.

The rhetoric of this event appears to map on well with the opinions expressed at the 1998 Day of Remembrance which draw upon the inviolable nature of America’s principles and take as foundational the language of American civil religion. However, as a result of the current political climate, the 2018 Day of Remembrance also has a critical role that is, in a way, more particular and overt than any previous iteration of the Days of Remembrance examined in this paper.

Introducing Khizr Khan, Varisha Khan, communications coordinator for the Washington state Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-WA), a co-presenter of the Day of Remembrance, recounted that: “During the 2016 presidential race, Khizr and Ghazala Khan gave an impassioned speech at the Democratic National Convention. Khizr criticized Donald Trump, who is now our president, famously asking him: ‘Let me ask you, have you even read the United States Constitution? I will gladly lend you my copy.’” Even with the political orientation of both of the previous Days of Remembrance examined in this paper, neither explicitly drew upon or referenced any critique of a standing member of the current political system—much less the president—by name. The choice of Khizr Khan as a keynote speaker speaks to the politicization of the Days of Remembrance. Furthermore, concerns over “the state of the nation” are continually invoked, with Varisha Khan calling attention to specific policies—the Muslim ban, increased deportations, attempts to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, and the proposed border wall between the U.S. and Mexico—that she finds to be concerningly reminiscent of the post-9/11 period.
The post-9/11 period has seen a new role emerge in the Japanese American civil religion, that of providing a platform for other marginalized groups—prominently, Muslim Americans—and speaking out against discrimination on their behalf. The Manzanar pilgrimage in 2002, 2003, and 2005 focused thematically on solidarity with Muslim Americans and issues of racial profiling. In September of 2017, the JACL submitted amicus curiae briefs in *Trump v. International Refugee Assistance Program and Trump v. the State of Hawaii*, Supreme Court cases concerning the constitutionality of Trump’s “travel bans”—Executive Order 13,769 and Proclamation No. 9645, respectively. In 2018 in Seattle, this explicit critique of particular actions of the government cast the state in sharp contrast to the “superpatriotic” description of Japanese Americans and Muslim Americans in the armed services.

As discussed in the context of the national Day of Remembrance, Japanese American interpretations of patriotism and Americanness in 1998 were still unsettled, and this ambivalence came across in the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance as well as in the commentary from various individuals as they attempted to define their relationship and the community’s relationship to the nation as a whole. Here, the rhetoric of American civil religion is in tension with the more critical perspective embodied in Maxine Waters’ letter to the CLPEF. At the 2018 Day of Remembrance, patriotism was essentially conflated with military service, with much more emphasis placed on the service of the all-Japanese 100th Infantry Battalion and 442nd Regimental Combat Unit. However, other scholars—notably, Chris Iijima—call attention to “those heroic ‘others’—Japanese American draft resisters who refused to fight for the United

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States until their families were freed from the camps.” These men, and other resisters, Iijima points out, “also sacrificed for hallowed democratic principles.” References to this type of sacrifice, however, are largely absent from the rhetoric of the 2018 Day of Remembrance, as they were from Congressional debates over the passage of the 1988 Civil Liberties Act. Indeed, it was not until 2002 that the JACL apologized for its condemnation and poor treatment of draft resisters during the war.

These questions of patriotism and the acceptance of the rhetoric of American civil religion get at one of the chief questions underlying this project—the question of the precise relationship between American and Japanese American civil religion. This question is difficult to answer, in part, because dominant theories of American civil religion place focus primarily on the discursive and overemphasize unity, while the Japanese American civil religion highlights material as well as ideological concerns of civil religion, illuminating strains of dissent within the body politic and calling attention to the nation’s practices of exclusion. To illuminate such contestations and to dispute the national myth of tolerance and just action challenges and critiques a vision of national unity. The Japanese American civil religion, emerging from a collective experience of racial violence, intolerance, and disenfranchisement, illuminates gaps in Bellah’s theory of American civil religion. Bellah fails to acknowledge the implications of persistent marginalization, racism, and exclusion for his theory of American civil religion. Bellah asserts that the nation endures “times of trial” during which it is tested, and from which new values within the American civil religion emerge. For example, Bellah interprets the Civil War

5 Ibid., 399.
6 In Iijima’s work, he highlights the paradox of the Congressional debates surrounding the passage of the CLA in that they praised the acquiescent responses to incarceration and ignored the active dissent and resistance to incarceration while officially acknowledging the injustice and unlawfulness of the incarceration and Executive Order.
as a test of, as Lincoln said in 1861, “whether [this] nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure.” In these times of trial, America’s adherence to its values of liberty, equality, and a flourishing of rights for all people is taken as foundational. The nation’s commitment to these values is not questioned. What is questioned instead is whether a nation that does commit to these values, that represents the quintessential democratic experiment, can survive. From the Civil War, Bellah contends, “a new theme of death, sacrifice, and rebirth enters the civil religion [as] symbolized in the life and death of Lincoln.” What is more relevant about the Civil War to this project, and what Bellah does not consider, is what the war reveals in the civil religion about the lasting impact of slavery and the willingness of the nation to include the formerly enslaved in the body politic. Bellah’s “time of trial” does not extend beyond the years of the Civil War to address the continuing racism, disenfranchisement, and violence aimed at excluding from American society the black population.

Bellah, writing after the incarceration as well as in the early years of the redress movement, does not mention the incarceration in his discussions of civil religion and American history. Those who do use American civil religious rhetoric to discuss the incarceration in relation to American principles often fall back on the “success story” narrative of the sacrifice and redemption of a model minority. The incarceration is framed as an event that ultimately strengthened the nation, and presents an opportunity for the rededication to and renewal of the nation’s values. This narrative ignores the century of racism preceding the incarceration which entailed exclusionary immigration acts and denials of citizenship on the basis of Japanese ancestry. Ascribing to the rhetoric of American civil religion and adhering to the “national myth”

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7 Bellah, "Civil Religion," 47.
8 Ibid., 47-48.
9 This is the case with the comments of Bill Clinton, Robert Matsui, and George Takei in Chapter 3.
of America as a paragon of virtue treats the incarceration as a chapter of American history and obscures the continued impact of racism and exclusion on the Japanese American community.

This approach, however, is in line with Bellah’s work. Dominant theorists of American civil religion—Bellah, Gardella, and Gorski—are careful to preach tolerance and unity over exclusion and dissent. This should not be surprising—these scholars, as white elites, benefit from the myth of America as self-correcting and just. Indeed, in reading Bellah’s work it becomes clear that not only is much of his focus on ideological questions of faith, but also much of his work addresses his own faith in the vision of America as he constructs it. In this sense Bellah is not just a theorist but also an advocate of American civil religion. It is this faith in and advocacy for this particular vision of America that drives Bellah to focus on the discursive and ideological. To do otherwise—to give attention to disputes over claims to and the meaning of sacred space or to rituals marking past and ongoing racialized violence, as the Japanese American civil religion demands—would be to fracture Bellah’s own formulation of transcendent unity.

Bellah’s theory of American civil religion, intended to bring together religion and politics, called attention to the religious dimensions of political discourse. Yet in asserting a religion of the state that transcends sectarian and political divisions, Bellah’s work also depoliticized civil religion, removing from the category any presence of dissent or conflict. These elite formulations of civil religion—those which focus on presidential prophecy or the martyred soldier—facilitate this depoliticization. The Japanese American civil religion represents a repoliticization of the category. While the Japanese American civil religion emphasizes and takes as transcendent certain values—equality, tolerance, and a remembrance of the past for the sake of preventing future injustice—this set of ideals does not constitute a placeholder for unity. Moreover, the responsibility for the upholding of these ideals is placed squarely on the shoulders
of the participants in the Japanese American civil religion. Where Bellah relies on God as a transcendent placeholder for unity, able to call the nation into account should Americans forget their values, the Japanese American civil religion places this responsibility, and thus, sovereignty with the people. However, rather than emphasizing and reinstating unity, this population takes as its responsibility the calling of the nation into account for transgressions of its proclaimed principles. As Iwamura contended, critique is foundational to the Japanese American civil religion.

The Japanese American civil religion reveals the persistence and violence of racial discrimination, endemic disputes over the possession and meaning of land, and the ideological and budgetary power of governmental institutions. The Japanese American civil religion thus draws attention to the unsettled and constantly contested borders and visions of the nation. The political nature of the Japanese American civil religion challenges an understanding of religions as homogenous units free from difference, dissidence, and contention. At the same time, the Japanese American civil religion highlights the foundational importance of space and land to religion, challenging any largely ideological conception of religion and instead making a case for an understanding of religion in society as something which takes up physical space. I contend that theories of religion should make room for and accept the presence of dissent in all domains—in the institutions, discourse, practices, and communities—of a religion. Moreover, boundaries of sacred time and space must be understood to be flexible and dynamic, subject to the influences of politics and historical context.

Bellah’s formulation of American civil religion has always positioned pluralism as a potential challenge to social solidarity in America. The possibility of multiple civil religions emerging from this pluralistic society likewise presents a challenge to future work on American
civil religion. As illustrated, rival civil religions in America may present formidable ideological and spatial challenges to American civil religion. The possibility of multiple civil religions in America that serve to undermine American civil religion and its vision of unity then begs the question: is American civil religion still a useful concept? While the extent to which American civil religion has any real integrative power may be debated at length, the institutions and rhetoric of American civil religion undoubtedly remain powerful.

Future studies of civil religion in America must take into account not only the internal (to the United States) contestations over sacred space and the interpretations thereof, but also the increasing instability of the national border—the authority and boundaries of which Rhys Williams claimed was American civil religion’s “ultimate referent.”

In considering the reliance of American civil religion on the conception of the definable nation-state, theories of civil religion must be wary and critical of the role of American civil religion in ideologically constructing this border. At its most dangerous, the national myth in American civil religious rhetoric has a very real power to lend authority to policies of exclusion and to heighten division in the name of preserving the nation’s border.

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10 Marvin & Ingle, “Blood Sacrifice and the Nation.”
Appendix: Images of Assembly Center Memorials

Sacramento

Figure 1. Plaza at Walerga Park, CA, the site of the former Sacramento Assembly Center. The State Historic designation plaque sits at the far end of the plaza, and Interstate 80 lies just at the end of the park.

Figure 2. Memorial plaque at Walerga Park, CA, site of the former Sacramento Assembly Center. The plaque was placed and designated in 1987, and the lettering has since faded to be essentially illegible.
Figure 3. California State Historic Landmark plaque at the San Joaquin County Fairgrounds, formerly the Stockton Assembly Center. The Stockton Assembly Center memorial is under California State Historical Landmark No. 934, as are all other California assembly centers that successfully secured a State Historical Landmark designation. This memorial plaque sits to the right of an entry booth at the opening gates to the fairgrounds.
Figure 4. The Merced Assembly Center memorial at the Merced County Fairgrounds. The memorial features storyboards, a sculpture, benches, a list of the names of those incarcerated, and a garden.

Figure 5. Sculpture at the Merced Assembly Center memorial. The sculpture features a child sitting atop a pile of suitcases with identification tags issued in the evacuation.
Figure 6. Garden at the Merced Assembly Center memorial.

Figure 7. Path through the Merced Assembly Center memorial garden.
Figure 8. Gerard Tsutakawa fountain at the site of the former Pinedale Assembly Center in Fresno, CA. The site of the former Pinedale Assembly Center has been developed into a commercial area, but this remembrance plaza was finished and dedicated at the site on February 16, 2009.

Figure 9. Plaque describing Gerard Tsutakawa’s memorial fountain at the site of the former Pinedale Assembly Center.
Figure 10. California State Historical Landmark plaque at the former Pinedale Assembly Center site. This plaque and the plaque at the site of the former Fresno Assembly Center (see below) share the exact same language, likely because they both lie within Fresno city limits and these memorializations were funded and organized by the same groups.
Figure 11. California State Historical Landmark plaque at the former Fresno Assembly Center. This memorial lies within the Fresno County Fairgrounds, and is situated within a larger plaza that includes storyboards, the names of those incarcerated, a fountain, and replicated Civilian Exclusion Orders (see Figure 12 below). As noted above, the wording of this plaque is identical to that of the nearby Pinedale memorial.
Figure 12. Replicated Civilian Exclusion Orders at the Fresno Assembly Center memorial. There are in total four of these signs posted at each corner of the memorial plaza in the Fresno County Fairgrounds. At the time of the evacuation, these orders were hung around cities and Japanese American communities much like this, affixed to streetlights and other available surfaces, alerting the Japanese American community to their impending evacuation. The replication of this historical event is reminiscent of the reenactment and reappropriation of symbols at the Puyallup Day of Remembrance in 1978.
Figure 13. Commemorative Garden at the former site of the Tanforan Assembly Center. The garden sits in a small raised plot of land at the entrance to the Shops at Tanforan, a high end mall in San Bruno California that was developed on the former site of the Tanforan Racetrack, where Japanese Americans (most from California’s Bay Area) were incarcerated in 1942.

Figure 14. Memorial plaque at the Tanforan Assembly Center. Notably, this plaque is not a state historical or state-sponsored plaque, but was funded and designated by former incarcerees and their descendants, as noted in the bottom lines of text.
Figure 15. George Tsutakawa’s memorial, “Harmony,” at the Washington State Fairgrounds, where Japanese Americans mostly from the Puget Sound area and Alaska were incarcerated in 1942.
Figure 16. Plaque describing George Tsutakawa’s “Harmony” memorial at the Washington State Fairgrounds.
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