

## Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	
<i>Bruce Embrey, Co-chair, Manzanar Committee</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xv
<i>A Note on Editing</i>	xix
<i>Prelude</i>	3
<i>Introduction</i>	16

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### **PART 1: ESSAYS** 21

<i>Doho: The Japanese American “Communist” Press, 1937–42</i>	
<i>Ronald C. Larson and Arthur A. Hansen</i>	26
<i>The Manzanar “Riot”: An Ethnic Perspective</i>	
<i>Arthur A. Hansen and David A. Hacker</i>	74

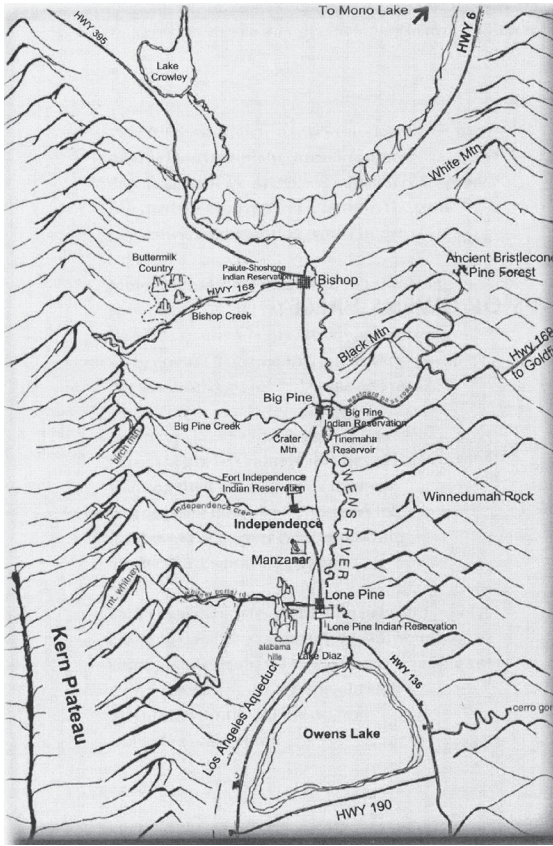
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### **PART 2: ORAL HISTORIES** 135

<i>Progressive: An Interview with Sue Kunitomi Embrey</i>	138
<i>Thinker: An Interview with Togo W. Tanaka</i>	161
<i>Advocate: An Interview with Karl G. Yoneda</i>	185
<i>Partisan: An Interview with Elaine Black Yoneda</i>	235
<i>Martyr: An Interview with Harry Y. Ueno</i>	284
<i>Coda</i>	293
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	295
<i>Selected Bibliography</i>	297
<i>Index</i>	301

## Introduction

Manzanar was the first of ten detention centers created for “national security” by the US government in 1942, following Japan’s bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and the entrance of the United States into World War II. Incarcerated in these camps were more than 120,000 US-resident Japanese Americans, approximately one-third of whom were law-abiding Japanese aliens (Issei) denied US citizenship and two-thirds US citizens (preponderantly second-generation Nisei, but also some third-generation Sansei and even a few fourth-generation Yonsei). Located inside the West Coast military zones in eastern California’s Inyo County, 212 miles north of Los Angeles and nearly equidistant between the Owens Valley towns of Lone Pine and Independence on US Route 395, the Manzanar site had been home for centuries to the Paiute and Shoshone Indians. They were displaced by homesteaders, who in turn sold out to developer George Chaffey in the early 1900s. Chaffey planted fruit trees, subdivided the property into small ranches, and marketed it as Manzanar (Spanish for “apple orchard”). By 1930, the orchard owners had sold the land to the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.



**FIGURE 5.** Map of Owens Valley, adapted from Julian Steward, “Ethnography of the Owens Valley Paiute,” *American Archaeology and Ethnology* 33, no. 3 (1933): insert between pages 324 and 325. Courtesy Lawrence de Graaf Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

The Manzanar camp was established initially by the US Army as an “assembly center” and managed by the Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA) as the Owens Valley Reception Center from March 21 through May 31, 1942. On June 1, 1942, Manzanar became the only one of fifteen total “assembly centers” to be constituted as a “relocation center” administered by the War Relocation Authority (WRA), and it was renamed the Manzanar War Relocation Center. As a WCCA unit, Manzanar had one project director (Clayton Triggs). In its “relocation center” phase, which extended to its shut-down on November 21, 1945, Manzanar’s directors were Roy Nash and Ralph P. Merritt, along with two acting directors, Harvey N. Coverley and Solon T. Kimball (extending until November 24, 1942). The overwhelming majority of

the camp's peak population of 10,121 (nearly equally divided between male and female with one-quarter of them school-age children) derived primarily from prewar Japanese American communities in Los Angeles County, particularly the city of Los Angeles, which was the prewar population, commercial, and sociocultural capital of mainland Japanese America.

Situated in the rain shadow of the imposing Sierra Nevada range at the base of 14,375-foot Mount Williamson on some 6,000 acres of land leased from the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, Manzanar experienced a harsh climate of extreme temperature, high winds, and severe dust storms. The camp proper consisted of a 550-acre rectangle dominated by thirty-six blocks of 504 tar-paper residential barracks for the incarcerated population, most of whom lived within twenty-by-twenty-five-foot family apartments. This area encompassed communal mess halls, laundry facilities, and latrines for each inmate block, as well as considerably upgraded living facilities for the appointed personnel. Additionally, it contained a modern 150-bed hospital, schools, churches, recreational and cultural facilities, cooperative stores, and most other amenities found in a "normal" American city of comparable size. Also located in this central area were war-related industries (for example, a camouflage net factory), an experimental plantation for producing natural rubber from the guayule plant, and the Children's Village orphanage. Immediately outside this main camp were 1,500 acres of agricultural land, which not only contributed to Manzanar's food supplies but also augmented those of several of the nine other WRA camps. The camp's core was surrounded by barbed wire and overlooked by eight sentry towers and manned by armed military police, a battalion of which was quartered a half-mile south of the Manzanar center and, in 1942, was equipped with twenty-one rifles, eighty-nine shotguns, six machine guns, and twenty-one submachine guns.

Although relative peace and harmony generally prevailed within the center, inmate resistance to unpopular administrative policies—manifested as work slowdowns and strikes as well as through cultural politics and non-compliance with regulations—was not uncommon. The most dramatic incident of resistance occurred on December 6, 1942. Sparked by the jailing of the Kitchen Workers' Union's popular head (Harry Ueno) for his alleged participation in the beating of an unpopular inmate (Fred Tayama) prominent in the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), whose leaders were widely assumed by inmates to be collaborators and informers, the so-called

Manzanar Riot climaxed in the death of two inmates and the wounding of at least nine others by MP-fired bullets. Its aftermath involved the roundup and ultimate imprisonment (without formal charges or hearings) of Ueno and other suspected “pro-Japanese” advocates and camp “troublemakers” in WRA citizen isolation centers in Moab, Utah, and Leupp, Arizona, and the “protective custody” consignment to an abandoned Civil Conservation Corps (CCC) camp, known as Cow Creek, in nearby Death Valley National Monument, of JACL and allied “pro-American” spokespersons and their families. A more pervasive and protracted show of resistance was set in motion two months later, in February 1943, when the US Army and the WRA imposed a mandatory registration of the adult population of Manzanar (and the other WRA centers) for the joint purpose of establishing eligibility for leave clearance and securing volunteers for a special Japanese American combat team. At Manzanar only forty-two persons (2 percent of the eligible citizen males) volunteered for military service, while approximately 50 percent of all eligible male citizens and 45 percent of all eligible female citizens either answered “no” to the professed “loyalty questions” on the registration questionnaire or refused to answer the questions. The latter situation led to 1,322 allegedly “disloyal” Manzanarians and their families (a grand total of 2,165 individuals) being transferred in late 1943 to the WRA’s newly established Tule Lake Segregation Center in Northern California.

For the remaining two war years, Manzanar was a more accommodating camp. Thus, in early 1944, when the War Department’s resumption of the Nisei draft was challenged by a widespread inmate resistance movement, it was one of only two WRA camps (the other was Gila River in Arizona) not to log a solitary draft resister. With the departure of its “disloyals” to Tule Lake (along with expatriates and repatriates to Japan) and an increasing number of its “loyals” entering the military and resettling throughout the United States as war workers and college students, Manzanar became a community largely of elderly and youthful residents. Notwithstanding limited self-government and an improved physical appearance and social ambience, Manzanar retained constant reminders that it was a concentration camp; its residents were not free to leave, its newspaper (*Manzanar Free Press*) was censored, and its boundaries were patrolled by soldiers with loaded weapons.

After its November 21, 1945, closure, the Manzanar site reverted to its pre-war “natural” state, save for three surviving inmate-built structures (two

1942 pagoda-like stone security posts at the camp's eastern entrance and a 1944 auditorium on the northeast perimeter) plus scattered remnants of the constructed and botanical environment. Beginning in 1969 annual pilgrimages to the site have been held under the sponsorship of the Manzanar Committee, a Los Angeles-based community activist group. Manzanar was declared a state historical landmark in 1972 and a national historical landmark in 1985. On March 3, 1992, President George H. W. Bush signed a law passed by the US Congress that established Manzanar National Historic Site and provided for government purchase of the site and National Park Service administration, under the Department of the Interior, for preservation and historical interpretation.