

Introduction

An Age of Possibility

A young American with a Japanese face stares at a notebook. He is Nisei, a second-generation Japanese American, and a twenty-five-year-old master's student in social welfare at the University of California, Berkeley ("Cal"). The cacophony of the streets outside his apartment window serves as mere descant to the ringing in his ears, the palpitation in his heart, and the shaking of his hand as Charles Kikuchi writes:

Sunday, December 7, 1941 . . . On this day the escapist pipedreams of paradise indulged in by the Nisei in their secluded university Ivory Tower was explosively shattered by the impact of the cold icy touch of Reality—by the ruthless treacherous "stab in the back" of America by Hirohito's brown slant-eyed warriors.¹

I think not of California or America, but I wonder what will happen to the Nisei and to our parents? They may lock up the aliens. How can one think of the future? We are behind the eightball, and that question for the California Nisei—"Whither Nisei?—[is] so true. The next five years will determine the future of the Nisei. They are now at the crossroads. Will they be able to take it or go under? If we are ever going to prove our Americanism, this is the time."²

Kikuchi offers an honest, immediate, and ambivalence-filled reflection in these two separate diary entries on "the day of infamy," otherwise known as the attack on the Pearl Harbor Naval Base in Hawai'i by the Japanese military (Operation Z). His reaction demonstrates the cynicism he felt about the Japanese American intelligentsia, of which he was certainly a part, but also a genuine concern for the diversity of Japanese living in the United States, from the first generation of immigrants (the Issei) to his American-born contemporaries (the Nisei) to another, "alien" class of Japanese immigrants, many of whom had just returned to America after education in Japan (Kibei). As he appropriately observes, this was not a defining moment just for those of Japanese ancestry in the United States, but for the nation at large: both stood "at the crossroads." Kikuchi makes his allegiance quite clear by emphasizing the need "to prove our Americanism," but



Figure 1. Kikuchi writing in his diary at the Gila River Relocation Center, ca. 1942. Photo courtesy of Yuriko Amemiya Kikuchi and the Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

the ensuing decade would sorely test Kikuchi's ideals and assumptions about his loyalty to the nation and that elusive term "Americanism."

Starting with Pearl Harbor, Kikuchi began a lifelong habit of writing a daily diary entry, not laying down his pen until his death from cancer in 1988 at the age of seventy-two while completing a peace march in the Soviet Union. More than 100,000 pages of diaries would be Kikuchi's legacy to his family, community, and nation. In particular, the immediate years after Pearl Harbor would afford him the opportunity to comment on nearly every significant moment of the war-time period: the fear-filled roundup of Japanese Americans on the West Coast into "assembly centers" or makeshift horse stalls refitted for human chattel; the eventual move of 120,000 men, women, and children to internment camps, or "relocation centers," eight of which were spread throughout the western interior and two of which were located in Arkansas; the denial of constitutional rights to citizens of Japanese ancestry in three pivotal Supreme Court cases; the ultimate resettlement of many Nisei in midwestern and East Coast cities and universities during the war; and the ultimate release of all internees by 1946, some of whom were rightfully frightened to return to their former ethnic enclaves on the West Coast for fear of nativist violence. Hence, Kikuchi's ambivalence—about his own people and his nation—was eminently understandable. The roller-coaster decade of the 1940s elicited Kikuchi's emotional vertigo: fear, anger, betrayal,

sympathy, distrust, ignorance, hopelessness, and hope. In this sense, his initially “separate” diary entries on December 7—the first appears as a hidden insert in an essay for a psychology class (handed in on December 8), while the second appears in his original entry on December 7—adequately capture the seesawing, ambivalent feelings Kikuchi would experience throughout this disorienting, uncertain period. Later in the entry, he invokes Thomas Paine’s “trying times,” conceding that he could not adequately fathom the unknown challenges both he and the nation faced. The contradictory tones—again, fear filled, confused, and mildly assertive—found in his very first writing forecasts the diary as somewhat of a palimpsest. In the morning, he could write one thing, erase those thoughts in the afternoon (or at least begin a new paragraph), and in the evening record something wholly opposite of what he was initially thinking. The diary therefore comes across less like an exterior monologue (or one seamless narrative) than an internal dialogue, shifting between and among the various positions Kikuchi held, like various actors on a stage. In the midst of it all, he would mindfully write down and chart all the geographic and emotional shifts he and fellow Nisei felt throughout their collectively vertiginous experience in the wartime and postwar periods.

Kikuchi was not looking to be the face of Japanese America, its public intellectual. Certainly, other progressives would take on such visible roles. For example, Ina Sugihara graced the pages of the *Crisis*, the major news outlet for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), pleading her people’s case to a largely sympathetic audience. Larry Tajiri, the left-of-center editor of the *Pacific Citizen*, the mouthpiece for the more moderate Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), wielded greater influence by virtue of the editorial page he ran.³ The league’s chief executive, Mike Masaoka, had written the “Japanese American Creed,” or oath of loyalty, in hopes of convincing fellow citizens of Japanese Americans’ patriotism, but as the war and evacuation took place, his mien appeared too conciliatory, his actions too complicit with the government’s desire to imprison his constituents. It is true that Kikuchi wrote the occasional article (“Joe Nisei Looks for a Job”) for the progressive editor Jimmie Omura’s *Current Life*, a Nisei weekly based in San Francisco. During internment, he even helped edit and write for the assembly center newspaper, the *Tanforan Totalizer*. But Kikuchi never explicitly sought the spotlight. He was not an activist intellectual, the Nisei equivalent of W.E.B. Du Bois. Nor would he become the definitive social scientist of Japanese America’s “dilemma” as Gunnar Myrdal, or St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, became for African Americans’ plight by war’s end. Kikuchi nonetheless remains an indispensable historical link in the overlapping networks of intellectuals—immigrant, Black, Nisei, among others—that would dominate the landscape of democratic and ideological discourse throughout the 1940s. Kikuchi not only discussed the various possibilities of a multiracial American democracy with a number of intellectual players, but also invariably recorded these conversations in his trusted diary day after day, providing a road map through the winding and uncharted topography of the

era. It did not hurt that, according to lifelong friends, Kikuchi also possessed an effortless, photographic memory, extremely useful for reports, case histories, and diary entries.

These well-preserved diaries and the man himself therefore represent a trail guide for a reconstructive investigation of why the various schools of American democracy—including Nisei intellectuals at Berkeley, pluralist advocates like the *Nation* editor Carey McWilliams and the immigrant activist Louis Adamic, Chicago School sociologists, and African American progressives, among other types—ultimately failed *in part* and, not insignificantly, of how some of their ideas managed to survive the larger society's capitulation to Orwellian, Cold War ideology in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Hence, a close examination of Kikuchi and his diaries provides a narrative through-line for the 1940s within the broader cultural history of home-front America and what I consider its unprecedented level of interracial interactions. His, then, is not the role of a downstage actor like Laurence Olivier or Paul Robeson, nor the bit part of a minor player who appears only sparingly; rather, Kikuchi and his diaries inhabit the traditional Greek chorus in an all-too-real staging of democratic America in flux during the 1940s: he touches upon almost every major historical event, records it in his diary, and ultimately fades ever so subtly into the background. His preservation of the time's key moments and meaning makers allows for a restaging of historical actors and events, demonstrating that with the benefit of proper lighting and strategic viewpoints, we can clearly see the contours of their movements, their successes, the limits of their efforts, and their failures. Most importantly, through Kikuchi's narrative, historical actors reenact their earnest but fallible efforts at progressively redefining the idea of American democracy on a stage not quite prepared for the glare of klieg lights, a platform purposefully constructed for a "long winter."

The historian Michael Denning convincingly argues that the period preceding World War II came to be known as the "age of the CIO," one heavily shaped by the working-class culture of the 1930s, with its distinctive "cultural front." Viewing 1929 (the start of the Great Depression) and 1948 (most pointedly signified by Henry Wallace's failed Progressive presidential run) as bookends of the age, Denning acknowledges the victory of Henry Luce's triumphalist "American Century" (over Wallace's more critically minded "Century of the Common Man") as the world war turned to early stages of the Cold War in the late 1940s. However, as various scholars of the subsequent era have asserted, the "age of consensus" and Red baiting could not completely stop the radical, progressive elements that survived the war and shifted the fields of battle, specifically toward the anticolonial struggles waged abroad by Africans, Asians, and African Americans, and the continuing movement for civil rights at home.⁴

In considering these two bookend eras of heightened civil, political, and cultural activity, one might assume that the 1940s—particularly in the context of a worldwide war—represented an overwhelming consensus, a time when all Americans spoke with one voice to support "the good war." On the ground,

however, and on the home front, an intermixture of existential insecurity and idealistic hope infused conversations about potential models of postwar American democracy: what would the country finally look like after the defeat of fascism and the mutual recognition of everyone's part in the war effort (even those behind barbed wire)? Networks of progressive intellectuals (like McWilliams, Adamic, and Margaret Anderson, along with "cultural front" novelists like Richard Wright, John Fante, and Carlos Bulosan), traditional institutional entities (such as the Black press), and university social scientists (at Cal and Chicago) all viewed the war—from decidedly different vantage points—as a useful vehicle and test for the advancement of American democracy, an opportunity for experiment and possibility, and evaluation of failures and limitations. Making their opinions and findings known through monographs, journals, editorials, fiction, and sociological studies, members of these "publics" and their arguments found purchase among a particular group of young Americans like Kikuchi. These young men and women, mostly second-generation ethnics, whom Adamic termed "the new Americans," strove to enter the discussion, affect the democratic discourse, and insert themselves into those very same "publics" that had influenced them. Taken as a whole, these networks were, by and large, in tension with the mainstream American public: against the internment; in favor of immigrants' and African Americans' civil rights; in favor of workers' rights; and skeptical of a growing American empire and extant colonialism. Hence, they can be considered what Michael Warner has termed a set of discrete "counterpublics," or "publics . . . defined by their tension with a larger [normative] public."⁵ In a historical moment when conformity and lockstep support of the war effort was expected, these oppositional networks maintained and served the challenging but historically indispensable role of dissent in American political culture.

These counterpublics were not entirely autonomous, either, unaware of one another's discourses, members, and positions. In fact, if one could pinpoint each counterpublic or oppositional group on an imaginary cultural map of the 1940s, as well as draw lines between each point to mark the relationships among such groups, a remarkable web of interconnections—some fleeting, others more lasting—reveals itself. These relationships stretch expansively across the landscape of 1940s American culture, meriting more deliberate consideration and deeper exploration of the unexpected coincidences, unpublicized conversations, and unheralded interactions among these ostensibly segregated and unrelated groups of "democrats." Admittedly, I am arguing for the exceptionalist quality of the 1940s, documenting this home-front culture of interracialism and historicizing the era as a significant shift in democratic race relations. What other period in modern U.S. history has encompassed a world war, an unprecedented, wartime incarceration of hundreds of thousands of American citizens based on race, subsequent concerns about a "race war" at home and abroad, a second wave of Black migration for wartime jobs, and a confluence of institutional, activist, and cross-racial protest on behalf of one segment of the Asian American population? My admission does not deny the influence of "cultural front" ideology on

this era's thinkers, or the fragmented intellectual legacy such actors bequeathed to anticolonial, anti-imperial movements of the Cold War. My examination acknowledges the foundation of the Popular Front as well as the torch carried forward by McWilliams, Du Bois, Nisei intellectuals, and others into the Cold War. But this narrative is largely concerned with telling the story of America during World War II, at a moment when the nation attempted to find "unity within diversity" but also, too often and too familiarly, turned a blind eye to the xenophobia, racism, and cruelty sanctioned by its constitutional democracy.

And 1948 marks the narrative's appropriate endpoint. Both domestically and internationally, a significant series of historical events took place that year, signposts of the next era in race relations, and markings of shifting geopolitical ideologies: desegregation of the U.S. armed forces; the reelection of Harry Truman and the advent of a civil rights plank in the Democratic Party platform, as well as an aggressive posture toward the USSR; *Shelley v. Kraemer*, the Supreme Court decision that prohibited courts from enforcing racially restrictive housing practices; the resumption of public witch hunts for un-American activity (e.g., the trial of Alger Hiss); the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the first of many Arab-Israeli wars over Israel's independence; Mohandas K. Gandhi's assassination, one year after the partition of Pakistan and India; the start of the Soviet Union's blockade of Berlin; and a failure to hold free elections throughout the Korean Peninsula, presaging the Korean War and the Cold War.

Before all these events, however, came the internment of Japanese Americans, a signal event of World War II and a repressed moment of shame in the nation's collective memory. Note well: not for the first or last time, America most publicly and unashamedly prioritized the paranoia of internal security over the principle of civil liberty in the 1940s, at the same time that it capitulated to a nearly unimaginable politics of fear, constructing a nationwide apparatus of domestic fascism based on racism while hypocritically claiming to abhor and dismantle the grotesque of international fascism.

Follow Charles Kikuchi, then, a diarist whose writings over this *longue durée* provide the narrative touchstone or the historical trail map through this period of a reclamation of rights, this era of redefining democratic ideals, and this moment of infinite possibility.

Mapping the Networks

Kikuchi's story is at one time both exceptional and representative. On the one hand, it was highly unusual for Japanese American parents to orphan their physically abused child at eight years of age and leave him to fend for himself over a decade of adolescence and young adulthood while they lived with the rest of their children only an hour and a half away. Moreover, very few if any educated Nisei bucked their families' and peers' expectations by pursuing a social work degree (MSW) instead of a more prestigious social science PhD. Not

many other twenty-something Nisei decided to rejoin their families of origin (after that decade in an orphanage) when the roundup and evacuation of Japanese Americans struck the West Coast. Through these examples, Kikuchi stands out as quite an original—ostensibly, a little like Robert Park’s “marginal man” on the periphery of even his own marginalized, racialized group.⁶ Notably, though, with the exception of his orphaning, Kikuchi actively made his own decisions for most of his young life; hardly a shrinking violet, he was not easily pigeonholed or blithely corralled by the herd’s mentality. That type of toughness, a form of contrariness—most likely born out of his traumatic experience as an orphan—is what compelled me to delve deeper into Kikuchi’s life story. He could have given up early in his life and wallowed in a dangerous (but understandable) depression, given the extremity of his family’s neglect. He did not. Kikuchi could have then abandoned his own family in kind, especially since his work as a migratory laborer took him hundreds of miles away, traveling the length of the West Coast up through Alaska. But he did not. Instead, he returned often to San Francisco, a stone’s throw from his family home in San Bruno. Knowing that he had unresolved business there, he made sure he occasionally saw his siblings in the city, keeping some kind of tether to his difficult parents. Last, choosing to share closeted space in makeshift barracks with those same parents during internment represents the most extreme example of how Kikuchi wished to see the whole issue through, emotionally charged and confounding as it might be.

On the other hand, Kikuchi always managed to find a place for himself among surrogate—and representative—families throughout his life. These units might be termed “networks” and “publics,” but regardless of nomenclature, Kikuchi’s participation in these groups reflected his profound desire to be a part of something bigger than himself, something larger than his own contrarian instincts and individualism. For example, even though Kikuchi conspicuously chose social work over sociology (the option for “serious” Nisei intellectuals) during graduate study at Cal, he nevertheless spent almost all his time with a cadre of radical, progressive Nisei at the university (most of whom would earn doctorates in the social sciences): his best friend, Warren Tsuneishi; Tamotsu “Tom” Shibutani; Lillian Ota; James Sakoda; and Kenji Murase (who, like Kikuchi, chose social work), among others. These intellectuals became his debate team as much as a bull-session social club. For many of them, lifelong friendships and long, unresolved intellectual and personal quarrels began at Berkeley.

As further proof of his seeking kinship networks, Kikuchi met Adamic in the early 1940s and attached himself to the Slovenian writer and his wife, Stella, in a fawning but shrewdly opportunistic manner. Kikuchi understood that he himself might not become one of the main interlocutors within the immigrant intellectual network, of which Adamic and his wife were a significant and recognizable part. But he realized that knowing Adamic represented a chance to gain precious social capital and valuable access to possible wartime and postwar opportunities. Adamic was, after all, the author of several well-received books and editor of the progressive, multiethnic magazine *Common Ground*: he hobnobbed

and rubbed elbows with the likes of McWilliams, Fante, Bulosan, and William Saroyan. Surely, Kikuchi must have thought, Adamic could provide entrée into a worthy postwar prospect.

Furthermore, during the evacuation and resettlement itself, Kikuchi joined a few of the Cal Nisei mentioned above (and others) to work under the demographer Dorothy Swaine Thomas and her handsomely funded study of the internment. Here, Kikuchi became not only a member of the Nisei team on the ground in the camps, but also a protégé of Thomas and her well-known husband, the sociologist W. I. Thomas. Working in California and Arizona during the internment, Kikuchi also joined the Thomas team during the resettlement of 20,000 Japanese Americans in Chicago. In those heady days, he enjoyed unfettered access to the famous Chicago School of sociology, working at the University of Chicago campus in Hyde Park and living on the South Side, just on the edge of Bronzeville, the historic African American neighborhood studied and celebrated by a bevy of scholars.⁷ In this limited context, Kikuchi became part of a generation of Asian American social scientists trained by Chicago sociologists; he once again strove to be part of a larger whole—consciously or unconsciously representative—however small his own contribution. My point here is that Kikuchi's life story is complicated and rich enough that he can be termed “both-and” rather than “either-or.” As Kikuchi would self-diagnose in a letter to Adamic, he was a man with “a multitude of complexes.”⁸

The Map's Legend

For most of the Popular Front era, Kikuchi himself was a teenager, but he was not entirely sheltered from the significant movements and issues affecting the sizeable migrant labor force or the number of Japanese relegated to domestic jobs. Especially toward the end of the 1930s, Kikuchi supported his own education at San Francisco State College through a panoply of odd jobs—chauffeur, domestic, cannery worker, fish scaler, and farmworker in the San Joaquin Valley, to name a few. While one would be hard pressed to include him among the historically recognized cadre of Communist Party USA members, like Karl G. Yoneda, or even term him a fellow traveler, Kikuchi nonetheless sympathized with—not to mention, experienced—the worker's plight. Even though considered part of the mass of workingmen and workingwomen, he kept a particular kind of distance from his own position as a worker and tried to maintain a putatively objective stance as a participant-observer (well before he would learn what this technical sociological term meant). Experience in the harvesting fields or in the kitchen of a well-heeled white employer certainly did not anesthetize Kikuchi to the feelings of being a laborer or prevent him from understanding the massive forces facing the proletarian class, especially immigrants in the United States. In fact, Kikuchi remained admirably committed to protesting the injustices faced by Mexican, Filipino, and Japanese migrant laborers, or longshoremen agitating for better

work conditions and wages. He simply never labeled himself a party member, a fellow traveler, a Young Democrat, or any other moniker, for that matter. And for the most part, he eschewed formal organizations and mass movements in favor of direct, individual action and intervention. Up until the trauma of internment, it would be reasonable to say that class stands out as the main interpretive device in Kikuchi's analysis. It is, in large part, why he chose to attend a lesser-known college, San Francisco State, one associated with the working class of the Bay Area, rather than what he considered the bourgeois ivory tower for Nisei: Berkeley, an institution Issei parents easily recognized and respected. Conversations with other workers or students—highly personal, intimate, and dialogic—were his foundational fieldwork, while his memory, pen, and diary were tools for analyzing and ultimately working through the personal and the professional. The workingmen and workingwomen would be the catalyst and force for freedom, Kikuchi believed, as Marx had suggested. However, internment would radically alter the centrality of class in relation to race in his evolving belief system, forcing him to see many moving parts in the all-too-real process of an institutionalized exclusion based on race.

An immigrant himself, Adamic vigorously promoted the acceptance of “new Americans” (particularly second-generation immigrants) by “old Americans” through his numerous autobiographies and monographs, but primarily through *Common Ground*. In Adamic, Kikuchi found a surrogate father, an intellectual mentor whose levity and support counterbalanced the literal and figurative weight of Kikuchi's biological father. In Kikuchi, Adamic discovered an impressionable young man whose uniquely tortuous family story made his contribution to Adamic's immigrant-focused anthology *From Many Lands* (1940) that much more engaging and attractive to sympathetic readers. Close readings of Kikuchi's original twenty-six-page contribution to the book, and the ultimately slick revision published by Adamic, complicate characterizations of their friendship, revealing Adamic's liberal rewriting of his ward's work, and the puzzled but subsequently grateful feelings with which Kikuchi read the final draft. Once again, a thread of Kikuchi's web spins out in connection to another overlapping network here, but this time in more directly interactive, mutually dependent, and problematic terms.⁹

What I have loosely termed the “Common Ground School” (see chapter 3) in the 1940s was headlined by an informal, multiracial network of writers, including Adamic; Anderson; McWilliams; Langston Hughes; Zora Neale Hurston; the Nisei activist Mary “Molly” Oyama; the novelist D'Arcy McNickle; Roi Ottley, the *Chicago Tribune* columnist and award-winning author of *New World A-Coming* (1943); Bucklin Moon, the editor of the popular anthology by and about Black America *A Primer for White Folks* (1945); and Lillian E. Smith, a native Georgian and the left-leaning editor of *South Today*. These writers were all developing and improving upon cultural pluralist ideas first introduced in the early part of the century by thinkers as varied as Mary Antin, the author of *Promised Land* (1912), and the essayists Randolph Bourne, who penned “Trans-National America”

(1916), and Horace Kallen, who wrote “Democracy and the Melting Pot” (1924). Inclusive as they believed their conceptualization of pluralism to be, the older generation of intellectuals (and some in the younger one) possessed an uncannily similar blind spot. Their collective belief in universalism and in America as an exceptionalist, multiethnic model for the world often confused ethnicity for race in problematic and, frankly, unsatisfying ways.¹⁰ While many of these thinkers focused on anti-immigrant prejudice and inclusion, their understanding of ethnicity did not fully encapsulate the native, racialized citizens already struggling for racial equality, namely, American Indians and African Americans. Even some of the Nisei (like Kikuchi)—clearly the sons and daughters of immigrants—considered themselves indigenous to the land, removed from unfamiliar “Oriental” traditions and customs. As Kikuchi’s narrative demonstrates, some Nisei even viewed African Americans as the ideal “model minority” in America to emulate, given Blacks’ long-standing, organized, and historical protest against oppression.

None of the writers in either generation, however, matched the ideal formulation conjured by the newspaper editor Hamilton Holt, whose farsighted, racially and ethnically inclusive *Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans: As Told By Themselves* (1906) earnestly wrestled with the arbitrary definition of what and who an American could be. As the scholar Werner Sollors has painstakingly documented, Holt believed “the elastic term ‘American’ to refer to a very broad spectrum of the populace.” A veritable parade of Americans populates Holt’s list, including “an Irish maid,” “Agnes M., a German nurse girl,” “a Syrian journalist,” “an anonymous Negro peon,” “a Chinese laundryman and businessman, Lee Chew,” and “an Indian, Ah-nen-la-de-ni.” Sollors highlights this diversity—“Holt includes everyone in his notion of the ‘American’: Black, white, Indian, Asian, native-born, immigrant, refugee, temporary migrant, sojourner, men, women”—and its implication: “The collection virtually transformed the inhabitants of the whole world into potential Americans.”¹¹

A tall order by any measure, the challenge laid out by Holt to see these disparate people as Americans was unusually formidable. Consciously or unconsciously following Holt’s model, midcentury intellectuals nonetheless tried envisioning and actualizing the inclusive, rather than the exclusive, America. Some did it better than others, while leaders such as Adamic, Anderson, and McWilliams, Black newspaper editors like Robert Abbott and John Sengstacke of the *Chicago Defender*, Almena Davis of the *L.A. Tribune*, and Charlotta Bass of the *California Eagle*, as well as the *Pacific Citizen*’s Tajiri, provided superb outlets of publication for antiracist and pro-immigrant voices, like Kikuchi, Ottley, Smith, Cayton, Hughes, the novelist Toshio Mori, and the short-story writer Hisaye Yamamoto.

Well-funded institutional publics also grew very much invested and interested in the subject of race and ethnicity, particularly in studies of the internment of Japanese Americans. Recruited by Cal’s Dorothy Thomas, Kikuchi embarked on the Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study (JERS), which

was heavily funded by the Rockefeller, Columbia, and Giannini Foundations. This enterprise—not to be confused with the government’s own War Relocation Authority (WRA) study of the camps—has come under close scrutiny since the war, but it indisputably remains a remarkable archive of primary-source materials directly relating to the day-to-day camp experience, camp politics and governance, post-camp resettlement, and the uncensored views of internees.¹² Kikuchi’s own contribution would result in the publication of fifteen interviews with Japanese Americans resettled in Chicago, found in the edited volume by Thomas (the second of three planned volumes) entitled *The Salvage* (1952). Mentored by Thomas, who quickly grew into an ideal surrogate mother figure, Kikuchi also managed to buttonhole and garner critical advice from Thomas’s husband, W. L., the coauthor (with Florian Znaniecki) of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918–1920) as well as (in)famous member of the Chicago School of sociology.¹³ Thomas and Znaniecki broke methodological ground with their work by relying on intensive life histories, an approach that Thomas would encourage Kikuchi to master over twenty years later for the Nisei’s work on JERS.

Focusing on JERS invites consideration of the efficacy and heavy involvement of these social scientists in their evaluation and analysis of internment camp life, culture, and politics. Some institutions continued their studies outside relocation camps, charting the generally difficult transition of internees to resettlement in new cities with new lives and new freedoms, but also facing familiar nativist anti-Japanese feelings and prejudices. From the Gila River Relocation Center in Rivers, Arizona, to Chicago, Illinois, a hub of wartime production, culture, and Japanese resettlement, Kikuchi witnessed and recorded remarkable violations of Japanese Americans and the Constitution as well. His subjectivity as a prisoner undoubtedly complicated the objectivity of his participant-observer status in the study. Additionally, seldom a day went by without tension with the older-generation Issei infecting his writings, and his self-confidence sagging. It was Dorothy Thomas’s role (and that of her shadowy husband) to push, cajole, and encourage Kikuchi in these early days, reassuring him of his indispensable contributions to the study: his ability to listen, to remember conversations nearly verbatim, and to ingratiate himself with differing elements of the camp and resettlement populations. Kikuchi’s work left him vulnerable but open to the intersecting and overlapping counterpublics of institutional entities like the Cal team of demographers, the Chicago School of Sociology, and young Nisei social scientists, stuck between the reality of their own alienated status and the promise of inclusion in a privileged set of nationally recognized, respected institutions.¹⁴

The diaries that Kikuchi kept at Gila reveal a maturing, highly political man who was much more sympathetic to the various Japanese groups than ever before. The historian Arthur Hansen has convincingly argued that two distinct moments in Kikuchi’s life—his tenure at the orphanage in Healdsburg, California, and his graduate days at Berkeley—marked critical moments in his self-identification. At the orphanage, surrounded by boys of so many different races, Kikuchi found himself most at ease in a multiracial and multiethnic context, all the way through

his time at San Francisco State, which was more working class and racially diverse than Cal. Even in his teenage years, Kikuchi ran against the grain, joining a multiethnic gang in San Francisco called the Yamato Garage Gang. When he attended Cal, Kikuchi's friends were the radical Nisei, who purposely stayed on the fringe of the mainstream Japanese on campus but were Nisei nonetheless. Gila thus became the place where Kikuchi's self-awareness as a Nisei was transformed into a broader-minded but still strongly self-critical identification as part of the Nikkei, or entire Japanese diaspora. Before his detention in Tanforan and Gila, Kikuchi derogatorily dismissed those who were not in his circle as "Japs"—Issei, Nisei, or Kibei, rural or urban—as mere abstractions, while he reserved his most venomous ire for the older and backward Issei bachelors, with whom he associated his abusive and distant father. In camp, the disdain Kikuchi had cultivated for most of his young life was transformed into measured but significant empathy as he officially took on the job of social worker, ministering to the neediest of the incarcerated the best he could, seeing them, at last, as individuals under extreme duress. Seeing firsthand how the camp administration treated "his" people and listening to their stories as a caseworker, Kikuchi grew into a much more knowledgeable, vocal, and fierce advocate for the rights and needs of his fellow Nikkei. This larger community taught him much that his own nuclear family had never imparted to him.

In April 1943, Kikuchi left the camp, even though much of his family remained behind. As described in Kikuchi's resettlement diaries—or "Chicago diaries"—he became immersed in another politically active, socially mindful set of counterpublics in the 1940s: the working-class African American population of Chicago's South Side and their middle-class brethren in San Francisco and Berkeley. Even though the majority of Kikuchi's fieldwork and life histories were recorded in Gila River and Chicago, he earned the rare privilege of reporting back to Thomas in person in Northern California during the war, as well as an opportunity to visit his old neighborhood and university. This marked an intensely attentive time in his life; Kikuchi was joined by two of his younger sisters in Chicagoland (for whom he was granted legal guardianship) and reunited with one of his brothers in San Francisco. With family members at his side, Kikuchi experienced the most riveting and engaging encounters with African Americans: strangers on the streets of Chicago, old friends from San Francisco, and rising intelligentsia at Cal. While it would be naïve to characterize Kikuchi's situation during this time as one of "being" Black, he inhabits what Craig Wilder has termed a "situational Blackness," a consciousness that cultivates a sense of deep respect for the African American struggle on the rough-and-tumble streets of the Black metropolis, for the national civil rights movement led by African Americans, and for culture, religion, and politics in everyday Black life.¹⁵ What's more, Kikuchi was not the only Nisei to look up to African Americans as a model minority to emulate and follow into the promised land that could be the new multiracial American democracy. Unlike many of his Nisei colleagues, Kikuchi had experiential closeness to African Americans—living next to and interacting

with them daily for decades—although this made his difference from other Nisei one only of degree, not of kind.

Kikuchi's rich conversations with a couple of these very Nisei—in person and by letter—accompanied the end of the Pacific War and the beginnings of the Cold War. His correspondence with two university friends, Tsuneishi and Murase, thus dominate the tail end of the book. As a microcosm of the Nisei network of intelligentsia from Berkeley, the three principals discuss their various experiences in the military, attempting to forecast the fate of Nisei and all Americans in a postwar world order. Despite the epistolary form in which their intimate conversations took place and the challenging context in which they wrote (i.e., as U.S. military personnel with family members still interned), the trio constituted a fascinating counterpublic—outsiders looking in, insiders looking out, neither marginal men nor fully realized democratic citizens. The precarious nature of their situations fittingly encapsulated the unease that the nation would collectively experience in the hazy aftermath of a hot war that quickly turned cold, with little time for any reevaluation. For example, the violation of constitutional civil liberties for the sake of internal security: had the society matured enough during the war to question that bald-faced, undemocratic act?

By the end of the 1940s, the foreclosure of transformative democratic possibilities in the United States appeared as inevitable as the counteractive rising tide of anticolonialist fervor at home and abroad. Paradoxically, then, melancholy and hope fill the Kikuchi diaries at this point, just as the historical reality sounded a corresponding blue note of political redefinition and ideological retrenchment.

Where the Map Ultimately Leads Us

On the one hand, as the scholar Charlotte Brooks convincingly argues, Japanese Americans felt the strangeness of being the middleman minority between “the twilight zone” of black and white in their relatively new home of Chicago.¹⁶ Similar kinds of liminality affected the lives of Issei and Nisei in their old homes on the West Coast. By 1955, as the historian Paul Spickard has shown, the number of mainland Japanese Americans living next door to one another dwindled to a negligible statistic.¹⁷ “Yellow flight” into the suburbs of major cities followed on the heels of white flight. As a metaphoric thread among the progressive counterpublics of wartime and postwar America, the Nisei had—for the most part—abandoned the interracial alliances that had held such pregnant possibility only a decade earlier. Of course, a significant and plausible explanation for this kind of exodus was the internment itself. A major consequence of the war was the fragmentation and dispersal of many Nikkei families, not to mention their former possessions, property, and businesses: it would be difficult to rebuild wholesale communities from such physical and emotional devastation. Even some of the most radical Nisei, like Kikuchi, believed that drawing attention to the group—by living in ethnic enclaves, for example—would only resuscitate the

nativist sentiment and economic jealousy that had led to their incarceration in the first place.

Furthermore, the late 1940s and the 1950s brought an air of postwar relief, but also an unnerving cocktail of suffocating Cold War rhetoric, McCarthyism, and an alarming type of conformist culture that superficially papered over a pervasive existential anxiety regarding nuclear annihilation. In short, it was an era of paradoxes. For example, Chief Justice Earl Warren—the same man who, as attorney general of California a decade earlier, had vociferously encouraged the internment of Japanese Americans—remarkably reshaped the direction of the high court and ostensibly improved African American lives with a watershed, unanimous decision to desegregate public schools in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). However, the following year, the court would recommend the implementation of desegregation to occur, confusingly, “with all deliberate speed.” In another example, a decade later the conservative William Petersen would sear the contested symbol of the “model minority” onto the body of Japanese Americans, in a *New York Times Magazine* article entitled “Success Story, Japanese-American Style.” Despite the platitudes expressed in Petersen’s premature article, Japanese Americans in the mid-1960s remained on the rolls of welfare agencies, still struggled with less overt forms of exclusion in housing and jobs, and continued to experience the lingering scourge of anti-Asian, nativist prejudice, in city and suburb, from farmland to fishery.

On a more personal level for Kikuchi, W. I. Thomas died in 1947, and his work with Dorothy Thomas had formally come to an end a year earlier. In 1951, Louis Adamic allegedly committed suicide at his farmhouse in New Jersey. In other words, the luminous polestars of Kikuchi’s life had faded away. Additionally, Kikuchi would separate from many of his Japanese American friends, move to Manhattan with Yuriko, and raise their children, Susan and Lawrence. Meanwhile, politically, culturally, and socially, America inexorably entered an age of consensus. That kind of sterile conformity and emphasis on U.S. authority (vis-à-vis the USSR) would not sit well with a man who had crossed the brook of fire that was the 1940s.

Traveling Beyond the Edges of the Map

Fifteen years before Kikuchi conducted research for Thomas at the University of Chicago’s Department of Sociology, one of its graduates and future professors, Louis Wirth, a pioneer in the field of urban studies and race relations, wrote: “If we knew the full life-story of a single individual in his social setting, we would probably know most of what is worth knowing about social life and human nature.”¹⁸ He was championing the importance and power of the personal document, as opposed to mere statistical evidence, in conveying the history of a person, time, and place.¹⁹ Exploring history through the looking glass of a single life offers what the Yale scholar David Brion Davis deems “a concreteness and sense

of historical development that most studies of culture lack . . . by showing how cultural tensions and contradictions may be internalized, struggled with, and resolved within actual individuals.” By Davis’s reckoning, “it offers the most promising key to the synthesis of culture and history.”²⁰ In this context, the Kikuchi diaries provide not only a window into the evolution of an intellectual, but also a broader canvas upon which the history of racial and ethnic formation in wartime and postwar America can be projected, played out, and analyzed.

To that end, a reexcavation of the Kikuchi diaries reveals avenues of information and unexamined layers in the history of “democratic interracialism” at a time when America’s democracy was hardly a foregone conclusion. A historical set of dynamics and processes in the 1940s allowed for, even actively provoked, the instability of defining key terms like “race,” “democracy,” and “citizenship.” The multiple factors of the war, the internment, the ongoing civil rights movement, labor shortages and agitation, among other causes, encouraged an unprecedented set of overlapping counterpublics to interact and seek common cause, politically and ideologically. In the formation of such alliances, ostensibly immutable and preconceived notions of “how the races get along” were proved entirely provisional and contingent or, more simply, fluid. A new historical route renders old maps incomplete and long-held interpretations wanting. Charles Kikuchi thus stands at the center of these intersecting counterpublics. Under the influence of Adamic and his band of ethnic writers, the Thomases, fellow Nisei, and African American thinkers (of the “talented tenth” or not), Kikuchi enjoyed broadening the frames of his analysis beyond the dyad of black and white, incorporating the ideas and experiences of Asians, Jews, Mexicans, white ethnics, and indigenous people, as well as that of fellow travelers, migrant laborers, urban workers, and marginalized intellectuals in a fully globalized context. As John Stauffer wisely advises: “Only by changing perspectives, listening to multiple voices from different social groups and vantage points, is it possible to understand how racial identities get defined, blurred, and remade.”²¹

What is more, Kikuchi’s vision of the democratic experiment did not simply pour all racial and ethnic minorities, like molten lead, into homogeneous molds of white Americans. On the contrary, his ideal required a significant and moral transformation of society, one in which seeing Black or hearing Japanese engendered neither fear nor stigma in the eyes and ears of others. He most demonstratively put this philosophy into practice when counseling traumatized African American veterans of the Vietnam War later in life: Kikuchi recognized each man’s individual problems, delineated consciously structural and systemic barriers to Black progress, and tried his best to provide aid and proper employment for these young men. Tragically, given its level of unprofessionalism, the Veterans Administration hospital where Kikuchi worked assumed that the psychotic tendencies of all Black soldiers were a tried and true matter of policy, systematically committing more and more Black vets to psychiatric wards without taking any in-depth case histories or spending measurable face-to-face time with the patients. Kikuchi retired from this position in the early 1970s, but not before

he purposely took many of those African American men under his supervision in order to give them proper and professional treatment as individuals, vastly different from one another yet conveniently grouped together by his intellectually lazy colleagues as one dark and psychologically damaged monolith. His co-workers eventually left him alone with his Black patients or immediately referred them to him, but by his midfifties, Kikuchi decided he had had enough, and retired in 1973. Yet he needed to make one last point: he stood outside the hospital where he had worked for decades, strategically positioned on the public sidewalk across from the building's private property, and protested the Vietnam War in plain sight, with a homemade placard and the verve of his voice.

Deeply invested in plumbing the depths of racism, xenophobia, and the basic fear of the unfamiliar, Kikuchi initiated countless discussions with a variety of people—of various colors, religions, classes, ideologies, intellects, and prejudices—both in person and by letter. As a consequence, his diary weaves an intricate web of interconnected conversations, a large number of which focus intently on the intersection of race, class, ethnicity, and the possibilities for this elusive new American democracy. One might even posit that the young diarist hatched a “Kikuchi thesis” while living his last days in the crucible of an Arizona internment camp. On March 22, 1943, he soliloquized at length, asserting that racial history cannot repeat itself:

Although we talk about maintaining Democracy, the defeat of the Axis is not going to solve any of the minority problems. I think that the very quality of future civilization is dependent upon the solution of these problems . . . If we can get them [the white majority] to have the same ideals of democracy, much of the world's ills will be solved . . . The Nisei group is important in that the problem will never be solved if rehabilitation is merely going to be a restoration of the status quo before the War.²²

In this light, then, my work at first glance appears to be that of an eavesdropper on important debates or that of a translator of precious correspondence. But cartographer appears to be a more apt category: one who draws lines and connections between historical pinpoints on Kikuchi's map of innumerable conversations with mentors, friends, colleagues, strangers, family members, and other loved ones. Such dialogues prove not only that a discourse of interracial alliance was taking shape and evolving at this time, but also that the boundaries between the discussants were far more porous and arbitrary than initially drawn. Through Kikuchi's diary and my larger narrative of the period, the reader gains a greater sense of the substance and makeup of the oppositional groups in wartime, both formal and informal; the degree to which these networks were taken seriously and had an impact; and their revealing areas of overlap on many levels (intellectual, relational, geographic, ideological, and publicational). Cultural history as a field has not sufficiently considered the possibility of “the greatest generation” on the lower frequencies—previous narratives have not mapped out this especially challenging and untraveled route. My particular interpretation of this history

therefore attempts to demonstrate not only the meaning making and agency of ordinary people under extraordinary circumstances, but also the structures and institutions against which they strategized and operated, sometimes successfully.²³ In the process, the contour and arc of a complex cultural history of race relations in the 1940s move into sharper relief, and one man's life comes to represent the through-line to a world of possibility.

A Note on Terminology

I wish to take this opportunity to clarify my usage of *internment camp* instead of *concentration camp*, or other similar euphemisms (e.g., *assembly centers* or *relocation centers*) regarding the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans. I often use these euphemistic terms in my text as referents to the historical period, such as “during the era of internment.” However, these terms—as widely propagated by the U.S. government—were consciously chosen to diminish the experiences of incarcerated Japanese Americans and blunt the language used to describe the severity and truth of these experiences. I thus strongly support the Power of Words Resolution (2010) passed by the National Council of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) and the most recent debate (November 2011) over terminology reform facilitated by community leaders and intellectuals, like Roger Daniels, Don Hata, Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga, Karen Ishizuka, Tetsuden Kashima, Mako Nakagawa (author of the resolution), Barbara Takei and the Tule Lake Committee, among many others. Their work builds on earlier foundations laid by Paul Bailey, Allan Bosworth, Daniels, Richard Drinnon, and Ray Okamura.

To be clear, *internment camp* legally refers to the incarceration of “enemy aliens” by the government in times of war, a term which does not appropriately encompass the dehumanizing nature of Japanese American incarceration (throughout North America) which explicitly included citizens and noncitizens. To be sure, the reform movement is much more than a semantic debate, but also a sincere effort to address and revisit history, to accurately convey the injustice and violation of an entire population's civil and human rights.

Therefore, I wholeheartedly endorse the eradication of euphemistic terminology in respect to the historical representation of the World War II Japanese American exclusion and detention experience. However, I must also concede to the reader that I did not become fully aware of the reform movement and its far-reaching accomplishments until my book's publication process had, regrettably, reached a point of no return. This is not the fault of the Press, nor that of colleagues, advisors, or anyone else. I alone am responsible for the usage of such terms and I will hopefully have the opportunity to revise them in any subsequent edition of my book.

It is my equal hope that the history of interracialism told here, with courageous Japanese American men and women at the center, will not be lost amid this worthy and genuine concern over terminology.