

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AMERICAN?: THE IMPORTANCE OF
MEMORY IN JAPANESE AMERICAN POLITICAL ACTIVISM**

by

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Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Linnea K. Soo has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Politics.

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Introduction

On December 7th, 1941 Pearl Harbor was bombed by the Japanese military. Two months after Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 mandating that all Japanese Americans¹ evacuate the West coast. It was not an evacuation, but a mass incarceration² of all people of Japanese ancestry. Approximately 120,000 Japanese Americans, most of whom were American citizens, were relocated to incarceration camps across the country.³ It was a violation of civil rights.

On January 2017, President Trump instituted a Muslim Ban that inhibited people from predominantly Middle Eastern countries from entering the United States. This ban inhibited travel from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, only giving exemption to current visa holders and permanent residents.⁴ During the ban, 100,000 visas were revoked.⁵ In addition to this travel ban, President Trump attempted to institute a Muslim registry. For many people, these policies indicate a step backward for the progress of civil rights and justice in America. Some people see these proposals as the repetition of history; particularly repeating the history of Japanese American

¹ I choose not to hyphenate any double identity. I choose not to because I believe that these two identities are separate and equally a part of how people identify. Hyphenation works to undermine these separate identities.

² I choose to use “incarceration” instead “internment” because “internment” is used to describe legally permissible detention of enemy aliens of war. However, most of the Japanese Americans incarcerated were citizens of the United States, and therefore not “enemy aliens”. Incarceration describes the imprisonment of citizens, which is a more appropriate way of describing how Japanese Americans were treated during WWII (“Terminology,” *Densho: Japanese American Incarceration and Japanese Internment*, accessed April 14, 2018. <https://densho.org/terminology/>).

³ Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998) 379.

⁴ Anjali Singhvi and Alicia Parlapiano, “Trump’s Immigration Ban: Who Is Barred and Who Is Not,” *The New York Times*, Jan 31, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/31/us/politics/trump-immigration-ban-groups.html?_r=1.

⁵ Ibid.

incarceration during WWII. Many Japanese Americans are speaking up against these proposals, motivated to prevent history from repeating itself. These Japanese Americans feel it is their duty to stand up in solidarity, to guarantee Muslim Americans have the same opportunities and rights as any other American.

I am Chinese and Japanese American. My grandmother and grandfather were incarcerated during World War II. My grandfather chose to serve in the 442nd regiment, but he passed away before I could ask him about his experiences serving in the military. However, my grandmother endured discrimination and oppression in these incarceration camps. She was ashamed of what happened to her family and, like so many other Japanese American people, she only recently felt comfortable sharing her stories about the camps. The silence I have felt on the incarceration of Japanese Americans, as well as the topic of Asian American political activism has been stifling. I have felt confused about my place within American politics, both unsure of how to position myself with other people of color and how to maintain separate motivations and goals, while still standing in solidarity. Trump's Muslim Ban has allowed me the opportunity to hear the voices of other Asian Americans, as well as to listen and make heard my own political voice. This is as much my own journey to learn about my history and my political voice as a Japanese-Chinese American and Asian American.

This thesis has two purposes. One is to investigate *how* repetition can be used as a positive moment to recollect, reclaim, and revitalize the past. Second, is to examine *what* is and should be revitalized to influence the political activism surrounding Trump's Muslim Ban. These questions are both answered by analyzing

and bringing to the forefront, the experiences, outlooks, and political activism of Japanese Americans in response to Trump's Muslim Ban.

The first section will tackle the first of the two questions. I start by analyzing the parallels, both politically and socially, between the signing of Executive Order 9066 and the institution of Trump's Muslim Ban. Then I will use Victoria Browne's theories of repetition to reframe how to understand repetition and to re-conceptualize the importance of it to political activism. I will argue that this repetition is an opportunity for Japanese Americans to challenge stereotypes of Asian Americans as deferential and submissive. Then, I contextualize the Asian and Japanese American identity within my project by mapping the history of Asian American stereotypes.⁶ I will relate these stereotypes to the barriers and prejudices that continue to affect Asian Americans today.

The second and third sections work together to answer the question of *what* is being brought forth in this repetition. The second section will focus on the political activism of Japanese Americans surrounding Trump's Muslim Ban. I will do this by analyzing an event organized by Densho, a non-profit organization based in Seattle, called "Our History, Our Responsibility" for the Day of Remembrance. The Day of Remembrance commemorates the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World

⁶ I do not contend that all Asian American ethnic groups have experienced the same discrimination, oppression, or hardship. They are not interchangeable identities. However, Asian Americans balance a fine line of differences and similarities by adopting a pan-ethnic identity. Pan-ethnicity both celebrates difference while focusing on coalition and sameness. Many Asian ethnic groups, particularly before World War II, experienced similar "cycles of migration, exploitation, and exclusion that left them similarly positioned vis-à-vis the state and dominant society" (Daryl J. Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009) 21). This similarity is the basis for the Asian American Movement, which is a point I elaborate on in the last section. For the purpose of this paper, I will not be elaborating on the differences and similarities between Asian ethnic groups. However, the coalition between and within Asian ethnic groups has been integral to the shaping of the political identity of Asian Americans, which is why I have chosen to focus on this relationship.

War II. While there is much to celebrate in the activism of Japanese Americans, including how they are challenging stereotypes and engaging in important histories, it is also important to acknowledge the problematic methods and lens used to present these histories. I argue the Japanese American political activism surrounding Trump's Muslim Ban both combats and reproduces stereotypes of Asian Americans as submissive and apolitical. By using a patriotic lens through which to present particular histories, activism surrounding the Trump's Muslim Ban perpetuates frameworks of inclusion and exclusion that justifies the condemnation and mistreatment of foreigners, citizens, and immigrants alike.

The last section will pose alternative lens and histories that can be used in Japanese American political activism. I will do this by investigating the sentiments, values, and messages established in the Asian American Movement of the 1960s-80s. I will make the argument that the Japanese American political activism surrounding Trump's Muslim Ban should utilize these messages of the Asian American Movement. These messages will allow America to revitalize a more global coalitional understanding of community and combat the "us versus them" rhetoric that fueled the institution of these policies. I will then argue that the repetition, represented by Trump's Muslim Ban, is an opportunity to bring forth past realities of what it means to be an American.

Trump's Muslim Ban and Executive Order 9066

In this section, I argue that the motivations and sentiments of Trump's Muslim Ban parallel the political and social environments that motivated President Franklin Roosevelt to sign Executive Order 9066. Both function under the assumption that foreigners are a threat to American society. Japanese Americans and Muslim Americans are depicted as dangerous because of their race and perceived national origin. Japanese Americans were considered enemies of the United States because Japan was one of America's main adversaries during World War II. Japan's attack on the United States Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor instigated America's involvement in the war.⁷

After Pearl Harbor, the United States officially declared war on Japan. President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19th, 1942. The race of Japanese Americans was used to portray them as loyal to the Japanese government and therefore enemies of America. However, most of these people depicted as enemies were citizens of the United States. Similarly, after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001 America waged war against a different type of enemy: terrorism. While terrorism does not explicitly establish one single race as the enemy, Muslim Americans have become the face of terrorism. President Trump has capitalized on the racialization of terrorism to inhibit people from the Middle East from entering the United States. These two events parallel each other because of the way in which they were both used to establish a self-other or us versus them frameworks.

⁷ Waldo Heinrichs, *Threshold of War : Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Entry into World War II*. (Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1990) 170.

On March 22nd, during a debate about House Bill 1230, a Republican State representative, Phil Covarrubias defended the use of Japanese incarceration camps in order to justify Trump’s Muslim ban.⁸ This bill was intended to ensure “the state does not aid or assist any federal overreach” in setting up a Muslim registry or internment camps.⁹ In his defense of Japanese incarceration, Covarrubias said "I hear people saying that we need to respect other people's rights, and I agree with that, but what about them respecting *our* rights and *our* country and *our* laws."¹⁰ Covarrubias’s emphasis on “other” and “our” demarcates a separation between those that are a part of the American community, “our”, and those that are not, “other”. His plea to focus on “our” establishes he is asking people to pay more attention to those that belong to his community, meaning American society. He is speaking from a perspective that assumes what an American citizen looks and acts like. He makes it clear that he felt “other” people must respect the rights, country, and laws of the United States. In the context of World War II and Trump’s Muslim Ban, Japanese Americans and Muslim Americans become the “other” in which Covarrubias is referring. His definitions of “us” versus “other” seems contradictory given many of these people he is referring to are citizens of the United States.

Covarrubias’s statement portrays the ways in which racial identities are marked as foreign, while white identities are accepted in to the framework of “American”. In demarcating and “us” versus “other” rhetoric, he establishes that all Japanese and

⁸ Amy B. Wang, "No Time to Ask Questions': Lawmaker Appears to Defend Use of WWII Japanese Internment Camps." *The Washington Post*. March 23, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/03/23/no-time-to-ask-questions-colorado-lawmaker-appears-to-defend-use-of-wwii-japanese-internment-camps/?utm_term=.ff5672df8e60.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Muslim people are foreign and therefore a threat. He neglects two possibilities. One is that many Japanese people in the United States during WWII were citizens and many Muslim people in America right now are citizens. Second, is that foreigners are not actually a threat to American life. Both historical events, demarcate “others” in using spatial identifiers, such as the border of a nation or a physical fence or wall of an incarceration camp. Covarrubias’s quote shows how race and perceived national origin is used to determine belonging and citizenship. These claims of otherness can only be made in conjunction with the accusation that racial foreigners are unassimilable to American ideals, culture, and values. When I say racial foreigners, I mean people who are not white. This includes people of color, immigrants, and refugees. This is because American is often understood to mean white.

The prospect of repeating the atrocities that were inflicted on Japanese Americans during WWII is frustrating and demoralizing for many people. Helen Yasuda, a survivor of the incarceration camps in Arkansas, fears that history is "repeating itself". She says “we’re supposed to learn from our mistakes... and this [the Japanese incarceration] was a tragic mistake.”¹¹ Yasuda portrays the frustration and fear that is elicited by the prospect of repetition. In contrast, Victoria Browne argues for the positive qualities of repetition. Browne illuminates the ways repetition is an opportunity to remember histories that society has lived past, in hopes of revitalizing political activism.

¹¹ Matt Stevens and Rong-Gong Lin II, "Talk of a Registry for Muslims Has Japanese Internment Survivors Asking: 'Can't They See What's Wrong?'" *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, California), November 18, 2016. Accessed March 15, 2017. <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-japanese-internment-20161117-story.html>.

History, Past, and Repetition

In this section, I examine the arguments mobilized by Victoria Browne about repetition and the importance of remembrance. Many people understand the past, present, and future to work in a linear and unidirectional way: the past affects the present, the present affects the future. When people conceptualize time to move in one direction, repetition can only be indicative of moving backwards. In contrast, Browne takes the position that time is multidirectional and fluid. Browne believes that the future and present are in a continuous relationship “that endlessly reworks the past.”¹² Therefore, how society interacts with the present, depending on the political, social, economic environments, can change the outlook on the past. This disrupts traditional understandings of time as linear and, in turn, changes perceptions of repetition. Repetition becomes a regenerative process that allows past histories to be remembered and brought back; memories and histories people would not otherwise address.

However, Browne argues that repetition is about revitalizing unrealized histories, ideas, and realities. She sees repetition as “recollecting forwards.”¹³ She sees “recollecting forwards” as “a kind of echoing which does not passively repeat but actively transforms past and present simultaneously.”¹⁴ The past is not fixed. Rather, while the past is constantly remaking the present and future, the present is also remaking the past. Browne understands repetition to be a process of “looping back”, which allows histories, ideas, and realities society “[has] lived past... to ‘re-emerge’.”¹⁵

¹² Victoria Browne, “Backlash, Repetition, Untimeliness: The Temporal Dynamics of Feminist Politics,” *Hypatia* 28, no. 4 (2013): 912.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 914-16.

Therefore, originality and newness is important to Browne when considering the purpose of repetition. Therefore, in the occurrence of repetition, activists can not only reclaim histories but also must revitalize the past. Inspired by Browne, I aim to investigate what histories are being brought by the occurrence of President Trump's Muslim Ban, as a manifestation of repetition.

The Shaping of Asian American Identity

In this section, I will focus on the history of Asian American identity; from their immigration to America to their integration in to American society.¹⁶ I focus on themes of isolation and foreignness to show the processes of exclusion that has shaped the perceptions and experiences of Asian Americans. I will then investigate how these stereotypes continue to shape the experiences of Asian Americans today.

Asian Americans have been considered perpetual foreigners since the first wave of immigration from Asia in the 1840s. They were considered incompatible with American society because of their culture and their physical attributes. This foreignization of Asian Americans is a common theme in U.S. history. In 1913, California passed a law called the Alien Land Law establishing that Asians were “ineligible to citizenship.”¹⁷ This type of rhetoric shows how race was and is used to render certain groups of people un-American. The exclusion and prejudice against Japanese Americans was based on race and perceived national origin. This act was predicated on the inclusion of some people and the exclusion of others.

Claire Jean Kim and Robert Chang explain the processes and ramifications of this perpetual foreigner stereotype. Chang calls this process of foreignization “nativistic racism”. Nativistic racism is a type of racism that targets foreigners in the

¹⁶ I do not contend that the history of Asian American identity I present is an all-encompassing analysis. Rather, I focus on particular histories of foreignness. There are many Asian ethnicities that have very different histories of immigration and integration. For the purposes of this paper, I mostly focus on East Asian history and experience, with the exception of the section on the Asian American Movement.

¹⁷ J. Burton, M. Farrell, F. Lord, and R. Lord, "A Brief History of Japanese American Relocation During World War II (U.S. National Park Service)." *National Parks Service*. U.S. Department of the Interior, n.d. Web. 19 May 2017. <<https://www.nps.gov/articles/historyinternment.htm>>.

pursuit of defining what it means to be American.¹⁸ Many people of Asian descent were exploited, discriminated against, and isolated when they arrived in America. It was not until the mid-1960s when Asian Americans were constructed as the “model minority.”¹⁹ Consequently, all Asian Americans were used to establish an ideal racial citizen in America; loyal, obedient, and academically driven became standards. Despite the seemingly positive identity, the model minority stereotype was used to simultaneously valorize and ostracize Asian Americans, reproducing the perpetual foreigner stereotype in a different form.

Asian Americans are positioned between people of color and white people through processes Claire Jean Kim calls “civic ostracism” and “relative valorization”. Kim’s argument challenges notions of racial hierarchy as linear and unidirectional. There are multiple axes of subjugation and domination. Asian Americans are triangulated within this “field of racial positions”, where there are two axes; one is the superior-inferior axis and the other is the foreigner-insider axis.²⁰ Kim argues that Asian Americans are considered to be both more foreign, but also more superior to other people of color. Relative valorization works on the superior-inferior axis, in which Asian Americans are strategically valorized for their attributes, such as obedience, loyalty, and docility.²¹ This model minority stereotype implicitly differentiates between a minority citizen and a white citizen. Minority citizen in America means racial citizen, making American citizen to mean a white citizen.

¹⁸Robert Chang, *Disoriented Asian Americans, Laws, and the Nation State*. (New York: NYU Press, 2000) 30.

¹⁹ Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013) 2.

²⁰Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," in *Asian Americans and Politics*, edited by Gordon H. Chang, (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2001) 40.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

Civic ostracism works on the foreigner-insider axis to render bodies unassimilable to American culture, consequently ostracizing them from the body politic.²² Asian Americans were accepted in academic, economic, and social spheres, but ostracized from the political sphere. Kim's theory builds on Chang's theory of "nativistic racism". The type of discrimination Kim employs is less overt than Chang's, but maintains similar power dynamics and components of foreignization. The model minority stereotype constructed the "ideal image of an Asian American" as "intelligent, passive, polite, self-effacing, and effeminate."²³ In doing so, this stereotype justified inclusion of Asian Americans in certain spheres and the exclusion from American politics. In addition, all these characteristics incentivize behavior and characteristics that support the continued subjugation of people of color, reify the power of white individuals, and bolster the need to assimilate.

The only way for Asian Americans to be accepted was to assimilate to the identities dominant society created for them. This was because to survive in America, immigrants felt they had to fit within the frameworks of American society. Acceptance and inclusion was the goal for Asian Americans, as well as other immigrants, and assimilation was the clearest path to achieve this goal. Through the model minority stereotype, Asian Americans were encouraged to take on characteristics of the white majority, which Chow describes as appeals "to be considered white" or "ascendency to whiteness."²⁴ Chow calls this process "coercive mimeticism", which is the act of a

²² Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," in *Asian Americans and Politics*, edited by Gordon H. Chang, (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2001) 41.

²³ William Wei, *The Asian American Movement*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993) 52.

²⁴ Rey Chow, "Keeping Them in Their Place: Coercive Mimeticism and Cross-Ethnic Representation," in *The Protestant Ethnic & The Spirit of Capitalism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) 47.

subjugated group in imitating the dominant group “in order to exist as themselves.”²⁵

Asian Americans and their experiences were rendered incompatible with American history because they were seen as perpetual foreigners. When given the opportunity to be accepted in to certain American spheres, through the model minority stereotype, many Asian Americans chose to assimilate to survive. Their submissive behavior made it easier for them to be accepted and included in American society, at least socially and economically. These stereotypes continue to make it difficult for Asian Americans to see themselves as political actors in the United States.

To this day, Asian Americans are negatively affected by the “model minority” and “perpetual foreigner” stereotype. The model minority stereotype, as well as the perpetual foreigner stereotype, made it difficult for many Asian Americans to feel they had a political voice in America. Asian Americans have been rendered insignificant in American politics because of the mobilization of the “model minority” stereotype. Frank Wu argues that “before 1996 Asian Americans had been widely regarded as politically ‘apathetic’.”²⁶ Suki Ports shares this sentiment. Ports was a young girl when her family was put under house arrest. She said “There are very few Asians [involved in politics] because we have been taught not to speak out, not to make noise”²⁷.

However, she urges people to “be proactive and call their representatives so that the

²⁵ Rey Chow, "Keeping Them in Their Place: Coercive Mimeticism and Cross-Ethnic Representation," in *The Protestant Ethic & The Spirit of Capitalism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) 103.

²⁶ Frank H. Wu and Francey Lim Youngberg, "People From China Crossing the River." In *Asian Americans and Politics: Perspectives, Experiences, Prospects*, (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Press, 2001) 313.

²⁷ Jessica Prois and Kimberly Yam, “Japanese-Americans Imprisoned For Ethnicity Speak Out In Defense of Muslims,” *Huffington Post*, last modified Mar 22, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/japanese-internment-survivors-muslims_us_584811b7e4b0b9feb0da5492

injustices Japanese-Americans suffered don't afflict Muslims today.”²⁸ Ports's comments portray how some Asian Americans have internalized the submissive identity constructed for them by dominant society. However, Asian Americans have a robust history of political activism. Japanese Americans have engaged in political activism by demanding reparations for their incarceration during World War II, and many were a part of the civil rights movement. Not only have Japanese Americans been politically active, but so has many other Asian ethnic groups. Pilipino Americans, Indian Americans, Korean Americans, Chinese Americans were all a part of the Asian American Movement of the 1960s-80s.²⁹

The feeling that Asian American political activism is non-existent is inconsistent with the actual presence of Asian American political activism. Prominent Asian American scholars, such as Robert Chang, William Wei, and Karen Ishizuka argue that this inconsistency is because “Asian American activism barely registers on the political radar.”³⁰ The invisibility of Asian American political activism is consistent with the perpetual foreigner and model minority stereotypes. Given Kim's theory of civic ostracism, it is not surprising that Asian American political activism is considered illegitimate, if not completely ignored. Joan Tronto argues that “unless some memories of political action survive, then, no capacity to reignite political action is possible... one essential task... remains to construct and to engage in remembrance.”³¹ Tronto's

²⁸ Jessica Prois and Kimberly Yam, “Japanese-Americans Imprisoned For Ethnicity Speak Out In Defense of Muslims,” *Huffington Post*, last modified Mar 22, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/japanese-internment-survivors-muslims_us_584811b7e4b0b9feb0da5492

²⁹ Daryl J. Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009) 25.

³⁰ Karen L. Ishizuka, *Serve the People: Making Asian America in the Long Sixties*. (London: Verso, 2016) 4.

³¹ Joan Tronto, “Time's Place,” *Feminist Theory* 4, (2003): 132.

comment explains both the importance of engaging with history and why Asian American political activism has gone unrecognized and unacknowledged. This is why these stereotypes continue to be harmful to the experiences of Asian Americans.

However, the Japanese American activism surrounding Trump's Muslim Ban engages in remembrance by incorporating many of these histories of Japanese American political activism. By mobilizing these histories, this activism disrupts notions of submissiveness and makes visible the presence of Asian American activism. This activism dismantles processes of foreignization and isolation that not only plague Asian Americans, but also many immigrants and people of color. The primary purpose of repetition for Browne is to investigate what forgotten histories should be remembered, reclaimed, and revitalized. Therefore, the goal of the next sections is to investigate *what* forgotten histories are and should be brought forth.

Japanese American Political Activism

Day of Remembrance: Our History, Our Responsibility

In this section, I examine the political activism of Japanese Americans by analyzing an event organized by Densho for the Day of Remembrance called “Our History, Our Responsibility”. The Day of Remembrance commemorates the signing of Executive Order 9066 on February 19th, 1942. This order required the incarceration of all people of Japanese ancestry in America. The content and messages of this event was created in response to the institution of Trump’s Muslim Ban. One of the purposes of the event was to bring together the Japanese and Muslim American communities, to not only combat Trump’s Muslim Ban and commemorate the incarceration of Japanese Americans, but also to argue that what happened to Japanese Americans should never happen again. I start by celebrating the event for its ability to create a platform for underrepresented voices and then I critique the themes of the event by analyzing strategies of patriotism identified by Shampa Biswas.

“Our History, Our Responsibility” reclaims Japanese American resistance, perseverance, and loyalty during World War II. In addition, by emphasizing the voices of Japanese Americans, as well as the voices of Muslim Americans, this event challenges pre-conceived notions of Asian American identity as submissive and apolitical. During “Our History, Our Responsibility”, Tom Ikeda, the founding Executive Director of Densho, Khzir Khan, a Gold Star parent who spoke at the Democratic National Convention in 2017, and Kishi Bashi, a musician and activist, gave speeches. Both Tom Ikeda and Kishi Bashi are a part of the Japanese American community in the United States. In speaking at the event, they disrupt notions of Asian

American submissiveness. Ikeda and Bashi are examples of how some Asian Americans are outspoken and passionate about politics in America. In doing so, “Our History, Our Responsibility” established a space for Japanese Americans to reclaim their political roots by remembering and engaging with histories of their incarceration during WWII. Japanese Americans are engaging with Browne’s theories of remembrance and repetition through their political activism.

The definition of Asian American political identity is one aspect of the past that has resurfaced because of the repetition Trump’s Muslim Ban represents. The reclamation of Asian American political identity is integral to attaining self-determination, combatting the model minority stereotype, and entering the American political sphere. Densho reclaims Asian American political identity by giving space for Japanese Americans to actively voice opinions and by creating a platform for others to do so, as well. However, it is not enough to simply engage in political activism. The messages and content of activism, in events and speeches, are important in shaping the effect and impacts of the activism. Despite creating a space to reclaim Asian American political identity, speakers, such as Tom Ikeda and Khzir Khan, focus primarily on the patriotism of marginalized groups of people, such as Japanese Americans during WWII and Muslim Americans in response to Trump’s Muslim Ban. In doing so, Khan and Ikeda reproduce narratives of Americanism that justified the incarceration of Japanese Americans and the establishment of Trump’s Muslim Ban in the first place.

Tom Ikeda and Khzir Khan utilize particular histories of patriotism. Specifically, they mobilize two types of patriotism that Japanese Americans exemplified during World War II. One is the history of Japanese American loyalty. The

second is the history of Japanese American resistance during World War II. The type of patriotism Khizr Khan employs is predicated on loyalty to one's country. Khan commends Japanese Americans for their perseverance through hardship. He says:

They never lost hope even when they were so badly treated. In the history of mankind there has never ever... been a display of patriotism as the Japanese American community has displayed. Regardless of families that were incarcerated and men were fighting [sic], not because of compulsion but because of their patriotism, because they wanted to serve, [because of] their belief in their country.³²

Based on his statement, Khan supports Japanese Americans because they were loyal to their country despite being treated unfairly by the U.S. government and being constantly excluded and isolated from the community. He valorizes Japanese Americans for their perseverance, but also for prioritizing American society over their individual rights and wellbeing as racial others. In doing so, Khan commends Japanese Americans for being courageous and admirable, while also highlighting their docility in the form of loyalty. Khan portrays Japanese Americans as admirable because they were obedient to the demands of the government, loyal to the country, and submissive in the face of injustice. Therefore, while emphasizing courageousness, this type of patriotism reinforces and incentivizes submissiveness.

Khan uses his depiction of Japanese Americans to develop criteria for what it means to be a "good" American. Khan emphasizes the role Japanese Americans played in their inclusion and acceptance within the United States, while using them as examples of how Americans should act. Khan says that Japanese American patriotism during World War II "will be the legacy that will always be remembered... and it

³² "Day of Remembrance 2018: Our History, Our Responsibility," YouTube video, 1:15:55, posted by *Densho*, February 19, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=S8D1vA25pVI

serves as an inspiration for all Americans... we salute you.”³³ The loyalty of Japanese Americans by joining the 442nd regiment was depicted as the “ideal image of an Asian American.”³⁴ This image was ideal because it leaves unquestioned the power dynamics of race in America. Implicitly, Khan’s statement gives the sense that all Americans should strive to be loyal to the government, reinforcing the power and influence of the nation-state. Similar characteristics of submissiveness and valor were associated with the model minority stereotype, which further shows the continued effects this stereotype has on Japanese Americans, as well as other minorities in America.

Khan’s mobilization of Americanness, including loyalty and submissiveness, affects people of color differently than white people. The implications for people of color who do not fulfill the criteria of Americanness Khan mobilizes, is far greater than for white people. A person of color’s citizenship is questioned and interrogated when they do not actively engage in patriotism. White individuals do not suffer from the same consequences. Therefore, people of color must adhere to much higher standards of patriotism than white individuals to be accepted as citizens in America. People of color are considered enemies of the nation if they do not adhere to these standards of patriotism. This is because an “American” is often conflated to mean a “white American”. This makes the status of people of colors’ citizenship precarious, while the citizenship of white Americans often goes unquestioned. This differentiation is intensified in the cases of Japanese and Muslim Americans. Even before World War II, Japanese Americans were considered to be foreigners and therefore it was easier for the nation to portray them as enemies. Consequently, many felt they had to prove their

³³ “Day of Remembrance 2018: Our History, Our Responsibility,” YouTube video, 00:48:08, posted by *Densho*, February 19, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=S8D1vA25pvI

³⁴ William Wei, *The Asian American Movement*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993) 52.

loyalty. Therefore, when Khan says the actions of Japanese Americans' are "an inspiration for all Americans", he actually means all *people of color* in America. This differentiation between white Americans and people of color shows how race is enmeshed in foreignness.

Tom Ikeda mobilizes a different type of patriotism. Tom Ikeda argues that refusing to serve in the U.S. military is another form of patriotism. After Khzir Khan's speech, the moderator, Michele Storms, ACLU Washington's Deputy Director, asked how Khan and Ikeda felt about patriotism. Ikeda said:

"Not only [is patriotism] the sacrifices of what Japanese Americans went through during World War II...but [there are] other ways to show patriotism... When we had so many Japanese Americans fighting in the 442nd and gave their lives and when the government saw how well the Japanese fought, they started drafting men from the camp. But there were some men who felt on principle that that was wrong. They said 'let my family go...if you do so I will serve gladly'... so when I think of resistance, [I think that] is another form of patriotism."³⁵

Ikeda accepts loyalty as patriotic, but also includes resistance as another form of patriotism. Ikeda mobilizes a type of patriotism that is predicated on actively resisting mandates of the nation. Ikeda's portrays citizens as the enforcers of "true" American values. Citizens' roles become to keep the government from deviating from American values of freedom, liberty, and justice. Ikeda's statement gives the sense that by resisting, Japanese Americans were able to show the American government how to be a better America, an America that upholds the values of the constitution. Khan and Ikeda appear to employ contradictory narratives of patriotism. One honors loyalty above all, while the other codifies dissent and resistance as core values of Americanism. While these two mobilizations of patriotism seem at odds, they both utilize similar exclusionary frameworks.

³⁵ "Day of Remembrance 2018: Our History, Our Responsibility," YouTube video, 1:20:00, posted by *Densho*, February 19, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=S8D1vA25pvI

Limits of Patriotism

In this section I analyze the patriotic lens in which Khzir Khan and Tom Ikeda present the history of Japanese American courageousness, loyalty, resistance, and dissent. I start by examining the particular frameworks through which patriotism functions. Then, I use the logics of us versus them frameworks to illuminate the problems with mobilizing patriotism to ground the messages and content of political activism.

In Shampa Biswas's article "Patriotism in the U.S. Peace Movement: The Limits of Nationalist Resistance to Global Imperialism", Biswas illuminates the logics in which patriotism functions. Biswas analyzes the peace movements that were in response to the counterterror movements after the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001 and the Iraq War in 2003. Biswas identifies four strategies that the peace movements utilized to mobilize different types of patriotism. I will focus on two of the four. One is "the distinction made between American 'ideals' and 'practice', claiming an exemplary American past...based on certain founding myths of what 'America truly is' and arguing that the practices of the current administration were in fact betraying those ideals."³⁶ This strategy mobilizes a pure, untainted history of America's actions, as if this is the only history of America. The other strategy is the distinction that is made between the "American government" and the "American people", which depicts the American people "to be the better representatives."³⁷ Khan and Ikeda's patriotisms are consistent with one, if not both of these strategies.

³⁶ Shampa Biswas, "Patriotism in the U.S. Peace Movement: The Limits of Nationalist Resistance to Global Imperialism," in *Interrogating Imperialism: Conversations on Gender, Race, and War*, edited by Robin Riley and Naeem Inayatullah, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 82.

³⁷ Ibid.

The patriotism Khan mobilizes is consistent with Biswas's strategies because it constructs an exemplary American past by mobilizing ideals such as life, liberty, and freedom. The patriotism Khan employs establishes that despite the actions of the nation, the values of America will be upheld as long as one stays loyal. In his speech at the Democratic Convention in 2016, Khan says:

“Like many immigrants we came to this country empty handed, we believed in American democracy that with hard work and the goodness of this country we could share in and contribute to its blessings. We are blessed to raise our three sons in a nation where they were free to be themselves and follow their dreams.”³⁸

Khan paints a positive image of America that reinforces the notion of freedom and equality. His statement leads his listeners to believe that all people who come to America can succeed regardless of national origin. The mobilization of his identity as an immigrant in conjunction with the valorization of the American democracy constructs an idyllic America that all people can access. He establishes confidence and trust in the nation's values. He uses this picturesque image of America and its past to argue that the anti-Muslim sentiments of Trump's Muslim Ban and registry are anomalies in American history.

Khan calls on the movement of time to argue that the racist and xenophobic sentiments of Trump's Muslim Ban are anomalies. In his speech at “Our History, Our Responsibility”, Khan says “as a Muslim under the current circumstances, I draw strength from [the actions of Japanese Americans during their incarceration], I am hopeful... I am certain that this moment will pass.”³⁹ Khan argues that Trump's

³⁸ Khizr Khan, “Khizr Khan's powerful DNC speech (full speech),” CNN video, 1:10, posted by CNN, July 29, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2016/07/29/dnc-convention-khizr-khan-father-of-us-muslim-soldier-entire-speech-sot.cnn>

³⁹ “Day of Remembrance 2018: Our History, Our Responsibility,” YouTube video, 1:15:55, posted by *Densho*, February 19, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=S8D1vA25pvI

Muslim Ban, as well as the treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II, are anomalies in the history of America. He does this by giving agency to time itself. His dependence on the inevitable movement of time is also problematic because it strips individuals of their agency in making a difference in the political environment. The statement “this moment will pass” argues that racism against Muslim Americans will simply go away as long as individuals stay loyal to the country. Khan undermines the significance of Trump’s policies by employing the idyllic image of American ideals and history.

The patriotism Ikeda mobilizes is consistent with both strategies Biswas identifies. After Ikeda’s statement about resistance being patriotic, the moderator, Michelle Storms says, “Dissent is patriotic, which is constitutional as well.”⁴⁰ Storm and Ikeda’s statements show how resistance and dissent become credible when they are tied to the constitution, which is symbolic of the values of America. The patriotism Ikeda employs is subject to both of the strategies Biswas identifies. He does this by arguing the ‘real’ values of America are inconsistent with the actions made by the American government and making a distinction between the American government and the American people by emphasizing the importance of dissent and resistance. The American government is depicted as the actor enacting these problematic policies, and the American people are portrayed as the actors responsible for showing the government the true values of America. The American people become regulators of the government’s actions. In addition, Storms’s comment implicates that dissent is a constitutional right and citizens should be empowered to utilize it. However, her statement also implicitly empowers only those apart of the nation, who are subject to

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1:21:50.

American constitution. This brings in to question how those deemed foreigners or outsiders of this nation are empowered and even allowed to act. Therefore, while seemingly at odds, both definitions of patriotism mobilized by Khan and Ikeda similar for two reasons. First, they both distinguish between an “us” for Americans to identify, and an “other” who are excluded from the privileges of being an American. Second, they are both predicated on upholding an untainted past of America. In doing so, both work to de-historicize America’s actions and values. The act of de-historicizing allows Khan and Ikeda to argue that America is inherently “good”.

There are two things I problematize about these mobilizations of patriotism, as well as patriotism generally. One is the ways in which patriotism renders invisible America’s complex history. Biswas argues that to “claim American traditions of ‘freedom,’ ‘liberty,’ and ‘justice’ is to forget the long history of U.S. military aggression and foreign intervention.”⁴¹ Biswas emphasizes the problems of de-historicizing a country’s actions that have been controversial and fraught. The focus on the idyllic history of America also renders invisible the racism, xenophobia, and nationalism that are used to justify the incarceration of Japanese Americans and the implementation of Trump’s Muslim Ban. People fail to recognize the ways citizens and government officials alike are complicit in the frameworks that produced these events. This failure is a result of presenting the history of America through a patriotic lens. “Our History, Our Responsibility” problematizes the actions of the government and reclaims histories of racism and xenophobia through mobilization of the treatment of Japanese and Muslim Americans. However, the event simultaneously undermines these

⁴¹ Shampa Biswas, “Patriotism in the U.S. Peace Movement: The Limits of Nationalist Resistance to Global Imperialism,” in *Interrogating Imperialism: Conversations on Gender, Race, and War*, edited by Robin Riley and Naeem Inayatullah, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 86.

histories by emphasizing the idyllic image of America's democracy, history, and values.

Moreover, the emphasis on an idyllic image of America fails to acknowledge and combat us versus them rationales that motivated the institution of Executive Order 9066 and Trump's Muslim Ban. American values and patriotism is so deeply enmeshed in the rhetoric of us versus them. The divisive logic of patriotism created and shaped internalized frameworks that fueled the incarceration of Japanese Americans and the institution of Trump's Muslim Ban. While patriotism upholds the nation's values, fuels loyalty, and creates unity among citizens, it does so by defining an "us" to identify with, and a "them" to differentiate from the "us". The strategies mobilized by Ikeda and Khan, are "predicated on certain self-other constructions that are intrinsic to nationalist discourses."⁴² Shampa Biswas recognizes that "renderings of community and unity in the face of 'national' crisis builds the kind of horizontal solidarity that detracts from the many forms of vertical asymmetries... that plague the national space."⁴³ Horizontal solidarity is building or maintaining coalition between people who are already positioned on the same plane, politically, socially, or economically. Vertical solidarity is building coalition between groups, across national borders, and differences to have a larger understanding of community that recognizes difference. In a moment of national crisis, white Americans are able to look at one another and come together in solidarity. Horizontal solidarity was achieved after Pearl Harbor and

⁴² Shampa Biswas, "Patriotism in the U.S. Peace Movement: The Limits of Nationalist Resistance to Global Imperialism," in *Interrogating Imperialism: Conversations on Gender, Race, and War*, edited by Robin Riley and Naeem Inayatullah, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 82-3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 79.

September 11th; white Americans saw their obligation to one another as citizens.⁴⁴

However, Japanese and Muslim Americans were excluded from this comradeship.

In their speeches, Ikeda and Khan delineate an inside and outside; those that belong in America, and those that do not belong, when they mobilize patriotism. This self-other construction pervades national discourse. This rhetoric has been used to both argue for the inclusion of marginalized groups of people, as well as the exclusion of people. Covarrubias used this rhetoric to justify the incarceration of Japanese Americans and therefore legitimate the treatment of Muslim Americans, defining these communities as “other”. In contrast, Khan argues with perseverance and unwavering loyalty, all Muslim Americans will be accepted in American society, just the same as Japanese Americans. He portrays Muslim and Japanese Americans as a part of “us”. Ikeda argues it is the patriotic duty and responsibility of disenfranchised individuals and their allies to challenge America’s actions because they are citizens. He also defines Muslim and Japanese Americans as a part of “us”. In doing so, “Our History, Our Responsibility” works to only expand the definition of those included within America, rather than challenge the entire “us versus them”/self-other frameworks that justified Trump’s Muslim Ban. “Our History, Our Responsibility” not only fails to combat, but reproduces the “us versus them” frameworks that threaten the well-being of Muslim Americans and other marginalized groups, foreigners and citizens alike.

Browne argues that repetition is a process of “recollecting forwards”, which does “not passively repeat [the past] but actively transforms past and present

⁴⁴ Shampa Biswas, “Patriotism in the U.S. Peace Movement: The Limits of Nationalist Resistance to Global Imperialism,” in *Interrogating Imperialism: Conversations on Gender, Race, and War*, edited by Robin Riley and Naeem Inayatullah, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 79.

simultaneously.”⁴⁵ Therefore, the occurrence of repetition allows society to look at the past to create space to *revitalize* past histories and realities. Revitalization holds the possibility of creating new components of the past to implement in the present. It is important to acknowledge the role Densho has played in allowing Japanese Americans the opportunity to loop back and engage in remembrance by commemorating the signing of Executive Order 9066. In doing so, Densho’s act of remembrance allows Japanese Americans, and Asian Americans alike, to reclaim forgotten histories of political activism and resistance. However, they do so by mobilizing patriotism.

During World War II, in 1938, James Y. Sakamoto, President of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), also used patriotism as a method of integrating in to American society. During a public statement he declared that the “JACL was ‘definitely aligned’ with ‘patriotic organizations [such] as the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars... and all that uphold American institutions.’”⁴⁶ For many this was a surprising declaration given “the anti-Asian histories” of these organizations, “yet Sakamoto and the JACL sought to prove to nativists that Japanese could become good Americans through assimilation” and patriotism.⁴⁷ Sakamoto’s statement exemplifies the process of appeals “to be considered white” or “coercive mimeticism.”⁴⁸ Sakamoto found that in order to exist as an openly Japanese focused organization, the JACL had to adhere to frameworks of patriotism. Patriotism has been used and incentivized in the past and continues to be mobilized today. The model

⁴⁵ Victoria Browne, “Backlash, Repetition, Untimeliness: The Temporal Dynamics of Feminist Politics,” *Hypatia* 28, no. 4 (2013): 912.

⁴⁶ Daryl J. Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009) 30.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Rey Chow, “Keeping Them in Their Place: Coercive Mimeticism and Cross-Ethnic Representation,” in *The Protestant Ethnic & The Spirit of Capitalism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) 47.

minority stereotype (i.e. loyalty, submissiveness, etc.) was incentivized for similar reasons that continue to affect Asian Americans. Both the model minority stereotype and patriotism were and are methods for Asian Americans, as well as other foreigners and immigrants, to gain access to the political, economic, and social spheres of America.

However, newness is an important component of Browne's theories of repetition. Patriotism is not a new reality that is in need of revitalization. It is a method of the past that codifies dangerous rhetoric of us versus them that fuels xenophobia. After World War II, Japanese Americans were commended for their patriotism, but that did not appropriately challenge and disrupt the problematic sentiments of the xenophobia. Patriotism is not a new component of the past that is need of revitalization. Therefore, patriotism is not adequate in combatting the racism and xenophobia exemplified in Trump's Muslim Ban. The patriotic lens through which Densho engages with Japanese American history confines the possibilities and realities that could be brought forth from the past. In doing so, Densho is unable to revitalize histories society has lived past. I critique Densho's mobilization of the histories of patriotism in hopes of making space for other histories, lens, and messages in the activism of Japanese Americans.

Transforming Repetition into Revitalization

In this section, I analyze the history of the Asian American Movement of the 1960s-80s to investigate alternative histories and lens that society has lived past. However, I do not find problematic the utilization of Japanese American history, but the patriotic and nationalist lens through which Densho chose to look at Japanese American history. Therefore, while my arguments going forward advocate utilizing a broader history of Asian American activism, I argue that Japanese American histories are integral to the project of combatting Trump's Muslim Ban. Japanese American history is important to establishing clear connections and parallels between Trump's Muslim Ban and the signing of Executive Order 9066.

In "Our History, Our Responsibility", Densho utilizes a history that is nationalistic and therefore inadequate in combating the rationales that motivated these two policies. Memories of global ethics are troublesome for many to imagine when patriotism and nationalism are so deeply enmeshed in the understanding of American identity. In addition, it is hard to accept a more global framework of community because it threatens the existence of the current conceptualizations the nation state. The Asian American Movement of the 1960-80s is helpful in combatting the "us vs. them" rhetoric that motivated these orders and policies.

The Asian American Movement spanned the entire country, while maintaining distinct goals within each region. The movement was carried out by activists, students, and communities. While the Asian American Movement had a unique agenda, it was not insular. The Asian American Movement had different goals specific to the place and time. The activism of this movement included instituting an Ethnic Studies

program in universities⁴⁹, protecting culturally important buildings such as the International Hotel⁵⁰, and opposing the Vietnam War⁵¹. In addition, this movement also focused on creating a new and unique identity for Asian Americans. The Asian American Movement of the 1960s-70s is a history that is being brought forth in this political moment of repetition for two reasons.

One reason is because the Asian American Movement sought to reclaim and reinvent Asian American political identity. The desire to reclaim Asian American identity and consciousness was integral to the Asian American Movement of the 1960s-70s. Robert Chang, Amy Uyematsu, Glenn Omatsu, William Wei, and Karen Ishizuka examine the role consciousness and identity played in shaping the goals and effects of the movement. The movement sought to disrupt the notion that assimilation was the goal for Asian Americans. The movement effectively opposed what Chow describes as the ascendancy to whiteness.⁵² The Movement's goal was self-determination rather than integration.⁵³ This distinction disrupts and challenges notions of patriotism. Integration stresses the need to be a part of a larger whole, which can be easily used to incentivize assimilation. Therefore, assimilation was not a goal of the movement, but was something the Movement sought to combat. The desire to obtain independence and self-determination allowed the Asian American Movement to create a new identity for people of Asian descent.

⁴⁹ Daryl Joji Maeda, *Rethinking the Asian American Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 27.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 58. This was a hotel in San Francisco that housed a large population of low income Asian Americans, specifically Filipino Americans. Despite the activism resisting its shutdown, it closed on August 4, 1977.

⁵¹ William Wei, *The Asian American Movement*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993) 26.

⁵² Rey Chow, "Keeping Them in Their Place: Coercive Mimeticism and Cross-Ethnic Representation," in *The Protestant Ethnic & The Spirit of Capitalism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) 47.

⁵³ Daryl J. Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009) 15.

Before the Asian American Movement, the term “Asian American” did not exist. People were either Americans of Japanese, Chinese, Filipino (etc.) ancestry⁵⁴ or they were Oriental.⁵⁵ The creation of “Asian American” signified a common experience against racism and barriers to citizenship and a shedding of the passivity associated with Oriental.⁵⁶ The ability to define their identity was integral to Asian Americans’ ability to force their way in to the American political sphere. It actively combatted the process of civic ostracism that worked through the model minority stereotype. Consequently, the new term challenged discourses of identity that had long confined and limited the Asian American experience. The Asian American Movement portrayed the ways in which Asian American identity is, at its core, political. In doing so, the Asian American Movement advocated for a “remaking of the Asian American experience.”⁵⁷ There were original and new histories being made in this activism. In contrast, “Our History, Our Responsibility” reproduced histories of submissiveness by reclaiming histories of patriotism. Asian Americans during the Asian American Movement did not just reclaim the past, but revitalized histories by creating new realities, such as the identity of “Asian American”.

The second reason the Asian American Movement should be a history utilized in the political activism of Japanese Americans is because it disrupted patriotism by rendering obsolete the “us versus them” rhetoric. The AAM was dedicated to building solidarity within and between different groups of people regardless of race, ethnicity,

⁵⁴ Karen L. Ishizuka, *Serve the People: Making Asian America in the Long Sixties*. (London: Verso, 2016) 1.

⁵⁵ Diane Fujino, “Who Studies the Asian American Movement: A Historiographical Analysis,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 11, no. 2 (2008): 128.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Robert Chang, “Toward an Asian American Legal Scholarship: Critical Race Theory, Post-Structuralism, and Narrative Space,” in *A Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 355.

or national origin. It included six student organizations “The Black Student Union, the Latin America Student Organization, The Mexican American Student Confederation, the Asian American Political Alliance, the Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action, and the Pilipino American Collegiate Endeavor.”⁵⁸ These achievements aligned with what Glen Omatsu describes as a dedication to serve the people, as well as give power to the people through self-determination and a united front.⁵⁹ The activists within the Movement saw themselves as a part of a New World Consciousness that renegotiated the relationship between society and the identity of individuals.⁶⁰ New World Consciousness represented a fusing together of Third World people, from different countries, and people of color in America.⁶¹ The movement was a critique of identity, but also of America’s treatment of people who do not conform to dominant understandings of what it means to be American, that being whiteness. The Asian American Movement captured a more active spirit of Asians that had long been stifled by dominant society.

The Asian American Movement was a part of the Third World Liberation Front. The Third World Liberation Front emphasized “commonalities among ‘people of color’ and creating a forum which facilitated a ‘cross-pollenization of ideas’.”⁶² People in different nations were brought together through the Third World Liberation Front and the New World Consciousness. The borders of countries became insignificant as people came together over common struggles of exploitation and

⁵⁸ Daryl Joji Maeda, *Rethinking the Asian American Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 29.

⁵⁹ Glenn Omatsu, “The ‘Four Prisons’ and the Movements of Liberation,” in *Asian American Politics: Law, Participation, and Policy*, ed. Don T. Nakanashi and James S. Lai (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 136.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Karen Umamoto, “On Strike!” San Francisco State College Strike, 1968-69: The Role of Asian American Students,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1989): 20.

discrimination.⁶³ Patriotism was not the dominant unifier. The Asian American Movement was inspired by the tenets of the Third World Liberation Front. New alliances and coalitions were formed through the Asian American Movement that challenged the “us versus them” framework.

The Asian American Movement was not solely about Asian Americans, nor did it focus on creating one single narrative of an Asian American identity. Rather, it was about “constructing a *multiethnic* Asian American racial identity, and [about adopting] anti-imperialism as a way to build solidarity with people of color in the United States and abroad.”⁶⁴ Activists apart of the Asian American Movement fought, not only for more recognition of people of color in the United States, but also for those Vietnamese individuals affected by the war. The actions they made against the war “articulated Asian Americans’ racial commonalties with” those abroad.⁶⁵ The relations abroad are integral to the ways in which the Asian American Movement disrupted nationalism. Therefore, the movement was not nationalist, but global. It was not Americans against foreigners, rather the very conceptualization of foreigner was shattered. Such coalitions between groups at home and groups abroad disrupt the national borders in which patriotism functions. It was not just coalitions between and within racial groups in the U.S., but also with people abroad. This movement shattered what it meant to be, act and connect as an American. This is the type of history that must be recovered and revitalized to, not only combat the policy of Trump’s Muslim Ban, but to dismantle the problematic framework of patriotism and the nation-state that produced these policies.

⁶³ Karen Umemoto, “On Strike!” San Francisco State College Strike, 1968-69: The Role of Asian American Students,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1989): 20.

⁶⁴ Daryl J. Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009) 104.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

When James Sakamoto, the president of the JACL during World War II, was only a child, he received his first lesson in what it means to be an “American”. His father asked him “What would he do if war broke out between the United States and Japan.”⁶⁶ Sakamoto, too young to feel comfortable with this question shied away from answering. His father answered for him saying “If war comes you’ll fight for America even to the extent of pointing your gun at me.”⁶⁷ This is the type of Americanism that determines those that are American and isolates, discriminates, and oppresses those who do not. While many would contend that this is not the Americanism we live with today, our sense of what it means to be American is so deeply enmeshed in patriotism that slivers of this anecdote still exist in American psyche. The treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II, the institution of Trump’s Muslim Ban, and the treatment of immigrants from all countries are all evidence of this. “Our History, Our Responsibility”, while powerful in giving voices to Japanese and Muslim Americans, is also evidence of this type of Americanism.

The Japanese American political activism surrounding the Muslim Ban both combats and reproduces the Asian American stereotype of submissiveness. This activism, as exemplified in Densho’s event “Our History, Our Responsibility”, reproduces submissiveness by grounding arguments of inclusion of Muslim and Japanese Americans within frameworks of patriotism. In doing so, this activism perpetuates self-other logic that justified the incarceration of Japanese Americans

⁶⁶ Daryl J. Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009) 31.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

during World War II and the institution of Trump's Muslim Ban. Victoria Browne argues that repetition should not be demoralizing but allows for society to investigate unrealized realities and pathways of the past. I pose that Trump's Muslim Ban is an opportunity to rethink what it means to be American. We must consider a type of American that is not predicated on whiteness or self-other logic. Densho's event "Our History, Our Responsibility", implored American society to see Muslim Americans as a part of our American community. However, in doing so, the event only expanded the narrative of who could be American, rather than challenging the entire exclusionary narrative.

This moment of repetition in the form of Trump's Muslim Ban is an opportunity for Japanese Americans to not only reclaim, but to revitalize histories of their identity as global citizens. The Asian American Movement stressed the importance of global ethics and coalition, which will allow us to redefine what it means to be an American. We must welcome the prospect of a fluid identity. Angela Harris argues that individuals' identities are an "unending dialogue" between all parts of identity.⁶⁸ She calls this "multiple consciousness."⁶⁹ There are two important pieces of this argument. One is that identity is "never fixed attained once and for all" but is "a constant contradictory state of becoming."⁷⁰ Harris's arguments show the ways in which identity is constantly changing through time and space. In the same way, what it means to be American is not fixed. We must look back at the histories, such as the Asian American Movement, the resistance and courageousness of Japanese Americans,

⁶⁸ Angela Harris, "Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory," *Stanford Law Review* 42, no. 3 (1990), 584.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

not through a patriotic lens, but through a global lens to investigate new ways of conceptualizing our Americanness. Second, is that we are each more than American. Harris establishes that identity is made up of multiple consciousnesses. We are a part of different racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural groups that are not dependent on the rationales of the nation-state.

Benedict Anderson argues that “the nation has to be ‘imagined.’ Nations are imagined ‘because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.’”⁷¹ Coalition within a nation, between citizens, is imaginary. We created these ties. Japanese Americans and Muslim Americans are different culturally, socially, and religiously. Both communities have not met, nor heard of each individual within these communities, but were brought together by the institution of Trump’s Muslim Ban. The differences between any American regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin can be immense. Angela Harris argues that difference is integral to acknowledging the voices of all, and that commonalities will manifest through “acts of will and creativity.”⁷² If we were able to find similarities between people who only share physical proximity, I believe we can create commonalities that span other countries, religions, and cultures. We must not allow dominant ways of living stop us from seeing other possibilities and realities.⁷³

⁷¹ Shampa Biswas, “Patriotism in the U.S. Peace Movement: The Limits of Nationalist Resistance to Global Imperialism,” in *Interrogating Imperialism: Conversations on Gender, Race, and War*, edited by Robin Riley and Naeem Inayatullah, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 77.

⁷² Angela Harris, “Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory,” *Stanford Law Review* 42, no. 3 (1990): 608.

⁷³ Victoria Browne, “Backlash, Repetition, Untimeliness: The Temporal Dynamics of Feminist Politics,” *Hypatia* 28, no. 4 (2013): 914.

We must be willing to imagine a more fluid and global understanding of belonging. Reclaiming, remembering, and revitalizing both Japanese American history and the history of Asian Americans creates the space to imagine and see different lines of coalition and solidarity. By challenging stereotypes of Asian Americans, political activism opens up space to question stereotypes of all identities rendered foreign and unassimilable. In the same way we do not know the faces of our fellow Americans, we do not know the faces and lives of the displaced, homeless, foreign, and ostracized. I believe we have the creativity and will to create coalition, communion, and solidarity with those beyond our borders, so that we can see new ways of being and living as global Americans.

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