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Keith Makoto Woodhouse

**Connie Y. Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire: An Environmental History of the Japanese American Incarceration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018)
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Introduction by Keith Makoto Woodhouse, Northwestern University

It is rare that a historian finds a subject few others have written about, and rarer still that a historian takes on what is practically a new subfield. But that is what **Connie Y. Chiang** has managed to do in *Nature Behind Barbed Wire: An Environmental History of the Japanese American Incarceration*, one of a very few works of scholarship that can be called Asian American Environmental History. Although few if any students today have the opportunity to take a course in Asian American Environmental History, those that do in the future will no doubt encounter Chiang's book as canonical.

The relative scarcity of scholarly work on the relationship between Asian Americans and the nonhuman world has allowed Chiang to explore the environmental history of one of the most infamous chapters in Asian American history: the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. In Chiang's treatment, wartime incarceration was not only a racist policy, a violation of civil liberties, and a systematic persecution of tens of thousands of Americans; it was also an act of displacement in the most profound sense of that word. As detainees endured a yearslong deprivation of their rights they also experienced an ongoing encounter with unfamiliar places—fenced compounds and jerry-built barracks in Utah's Sevier Desert, Idaho's Snake River Plain, and California's dusty Owens Valley. In these places, Chiang makes clear, Japanese Americans contended with new built and natural environments that could be at once forbidding and inspiring, brutal and fruitful, sites of restrictive labor and of subversive recreation. Detainees experienced the camps through forced imprisonment and also through their daily impressions of a rugged environment. Detainees from California who were deposited at the Topaz incarceration camp in western Utah later remembered discovering a "flat, drab, dry, and colorless" landscape, "a wasteland." (60) In southern Idaho, detainees from Washington found similar conditions, but looking back recalled how "We began to see the beauty of the desert; it was not so desolate after all." (149) The distance between those memories spans a complex topography of hardship and resilience. In mapping that topography, Chiang shows us how Japanese Americans made an unintended place and life their own.

This roundtable begins with **Megan Asaka**, who highlights the new avenues of inquiry that Chiang has opened up, among them questions about how Japanese American incarceration intersected with indigenous dispossession and infrastructural development; how work shaped not just the daily experiences but also the identities of detainees; and how the line between compliers and resisters was far from the only or even the most important one structuring camp populations. Asaka notes, however, that Chiang's discussion of the relationship between race and the environment is more implicit than explicit, and wonders whether ideology and social engineering could have enjoyed greater theorization.

Like Asaka, **Duncan Ryūken Williams** appreciates the attention that Chiang pays to how site selection and detainee work helped legitimize Japanese American incarceration to various nearby communities as well as to the broader U.S. public, and how detainees' social identities amounted to far more than their responses to the "loyalty questionnaire" of 1943. Williams also praises how Chiang follows the story far past incarceration, to resettlement and remembrance. Largely left out of Chiang's telling, however, are the relocation centers where Japanese Americans lived before being shipped to camps in the U.S. interior. These centers, Williams points out, tended to be facilities that previously housed animals, and in many ways they may have been even more jarring for new arrivals. Also absent are the two incarceration camps in Arkansas. Including those camps, Williams suggests, would have provided an opportunity to discuss very different environmental conditions and also the juxtaposition of Japanese American incarceration in the middle of the segregated Jim Crow South.

Finally, **Brian McCammack** also celebrates the many achievements of Chiang's book, and the new perspectives it offers on the institutional and quotidian experiences of detainees. McCammack wonders whether other dimensions of detainee life might still require illumination, including the diversity of agricultural and recreational experience among Japanese Americans before incarceration and how that might have shaped detainee communities, possibly along a rural-urban divide. Like Williams, McCammack asks what insights might have been gained from considering the Arkansas incarceration camps in the Jim Crow South, including the chance to examine different structures of racial hierarchy alongside each other. Even more specifically, McCammack ponders the ways that both southern segregation and Japanese American incarceration defined the relationships of African Americans and Japanese Americans to institutions often associated with the conservation movement, including the Boy Scouts of America and the Civilian Conservation Corps. And McCammack poses a methodological question, asking about the relative benefits and drawbacks of using federal documents.

In her response Chiang addresses all of these questions and more, offering us further insight into the Japanese American experience during World War II and into the act of telling a familiar story from an entirely new perspective.

Thanks to all of the participants for taking part in this roundtable.

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Comments by Megan Asaka, University of California-Riverside

In 2008, I sat down with Ted Nagata, a second-generation Japanese American (Nisei) born and raised in Berkeley, California and incarcerated in Utah during World War II. I asked him to describe the journey from San Mateo, where he and his family had been temporarily detained, to the Topaz incarceration camp in northwestern Utah, and his impressions of the site when they first arrived. “It was just flat and there was sagebrush and there was high winds and there was dust all over,” Nagata recalled. “The temperature was very hot, near one hundred degrees. And we actually didn’t see Topaz because the dust was so thick. All we could see out there was just a cloud of dust.”¹ Memories like this are quite common among Japanese American survivors of the World War II incarceration. Nearly all of the Japanese Americans I interviewed during my five years as an oral historian with the [Densho](#) project recalled the landscape and natural environment of camp in vivid detail. I heard stories of the sweltering heat, the bone-chilling cold, the dust and mud, insects and reptiles. Survivors spoke of how the unfamiliar terrain compounded their feelings of despair and alienation as well as the comfort they took in the stark beauty of the mountains and desert landscapes. In her book, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire: An Environmental History of the Japanese American Incarceration*, Connie Chiang is the first historian to take seriously what Japanese American survivors have long expressed in oral history, memoir, and art: that the environment played a critical role in shaping the experiences of the World War II incarceration.

By applying an environmental lens and treating the landscape as more than a neutral backdrop of human interaction, Chiang adds considerably to our understanding of the Japanese American incarceration. As she notes, though the incarceration remains one of the most studied and analyzed topics in Asian American history, much of the literature focuses narrowly on legal and political questions. Scholars have examined the decisions made by government officials to authorize and justify the incarceration; legal challenges to incarceration both during and after the war; the governance of the camps and politics of the War Relocation Authority administrators; and responses by the imprisoned populations to controversial programs, such as the military draft and the so-called loyalty questionnaire.² Some of this has to do with the issue of sources. Many of these

¹ Ted Nagata, interview by Megan Asaka, Densho, June 3, 2008, video, <http://ddr.densho.org/interviews/ddr-densho-1013-3-1/>.

² Key works include: Greg Robinson, *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Peter Irons, *Justice at War: The Story of the Japanese American Internment Cases* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1993); Eric Muller, *Free to Die for their Country: The Story of the Japanese American Draft Resisters in World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Brian Masaru Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy: The Japanese American Internment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Richard Drinnon, *Keeper of the Concentration Camps: Dillon S. Myer and American Racism* (Berkeley: University of California Press,

studies rely on government records, including those of the War Relocation Authority, which are readily accessible and offer a wealth of information about the legal and political architecture of the incarceration.³ The result is a field that has produced some truly important historical works challenging the notion of the U.S. as a bastion of democracy and also complicating the narrative of the wartime period as one in which the government made strides towards civil rights. And yet, the legal and political focus that has dominated the field since the 1970s has left little room for other scholarly approaches. Until recently, much of the innovative work on the Japanese American incarceration occurred outside of traditional academic scholarship.⁴

What Chiang offers is not necessarily methodological innovation. She relies on a familiar set of sources, including War Relocation Authority and other government records amplified by survivor testimonies. Rather, what she brings is a different set of questions about landscape and the relationship between the human and natural worlds that yield new insights and fresh interpretations. Take, for example, Chiang's discussion of camp selection in Chapter Two. Historians and other scholars have paid little attention to how the government selected and acquired these lands, focusing instead on what took place within the camps after they were already built. By detailing the process behind something as seemingly inconsequential as site selection, however, Chiang has broadened the story of the Japanese American incarceration and opened up new avenues of inquiry. As she shows, the government was quite deliberate in its selection of the sites and prioritized the acquisition of public lands that could be improved by Japanese American labor. This put government officials into contact and conflict with a variety of actors, including the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, which owned the site upon which Manzanar was built, and several Native Nations across the Southwest who opposed the federal confiscation and use of their lands, particularly for the purposes of incarceration. This is important because it places the Japanese American incarceration within a broader historical framework and shows its connections to issues such as public land reclamation, settler colonialism and

1989); and Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972).

³ This was particularly true after the redress movement of the 1980s, which compiled and made available hundreds of thousands of declassified documents unearthed by researchers to mount a case for Japanese American reparations.

⁴ Films: Rea Tajiri, *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige*, 1991; Janice Tanaka, *Who's Going to Pay for These Donuts Anyway*, 1992; Emiko and Chizuko Omori, *Rabbit in the Moon*, 1999; and Tina Takemoto, *Looking for Jiro Onuma*, 2011. Art & public exhibitions: Barbara Johns, ed., *Signs of Home: The Paintings and Wartime Diary of Kamekichi Tokita* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011); Eric Muller, ed., *Colors of Confinement: Rare Kodachrome Photographs of Japanese American Incarceration in World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Jennifer Saville, "Reflections on Internment: The Art of Hawaii's Hiroshi Honda," public exhibition, Honolulu Academy of Arts, 1994; Delphine Hirasuna, "The Art of Gaman: Arts and Crafts from the Japanese American Internment Camps, 1942-1946," public exhibition, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2011; and ShiPu Wang, "Chiura Obata: An American Modern," public exhibition, Art, Architecture & Design Museum, UC Santa Barbara, 2018.

indigenous dispossession, and the development of infrastructure, particularly around water, in the Southwest. While Chiang does not explicitly make these connections, her attention to land-use and ownership as it relates to Japanese American incarceration nonetheless reorients the field and lays the groundwork for future study.

While I welcomed Chiang's discussion of site selection, largely because of its potential to take the field in new directions, the middle chapters on camp maintenance and Japanese American labor are where she makes the most original and compelling interventions. Chiang's focus on landscape and environment allows her to highlight the economic aspects of incarceration, including the cost of operating the camps, the labor needed to maintain them, and the connection between Japanese American incarceration and the broader wartime economy of the U.S. Though government officials carefully selected the location of each camp, they did not take into account how weather, soil composition, and other environmental factors would impact camp infrastructure and operations. As a consequence, it fell to Japanese Americans themselves to perform the labor necessary to keep the camps running and ensure that their fellow prisoners had at least a degree of material comfort in the form of heat, hot water, and nutritious food. Japanese Americans responded very differently to the demands for their labor, and Chiang does not shy away from discussing how these environmental conditions exacerbated tensions within the camps (both between camp administrators and workers and among the imprisoned populations). Chiang also shows how the crippling labor shortages across U.S. industries impacted camp operations. Agricultural companies began to hire Japanese American workers to harvest key crops such as sugar beets, which reduced the pool of workers available for camp maintenance and other tasks and contributed to worsening conditions, particularly during the harsh winter months. Chiang's attention to the political economy of incarceration matters greatly because it underscores the centrality of Japanese American prison labor during the wartime period, both to the War Relocation Authority and the outside agencies who hired them as seasonal workers well below market rates. It illustrates how the precarious status of Japanese Americans *as workers* materially benefitted the U.S. wartime economy and also, perversely, made possible the very conditions of their own confinement.

It's hard to overstate just how refreshing Chiang's contributions are here. Because she approaches the topic of camp labor with a different set of questions and frameworks of analysis, she is able to reveal new insights about the complexity of Japanese American political lives and their varied responses to incarceration. Scholars have struggled with this question, in part because of how Japanese American historiography evolved after World War II. In the immediate postwar years, Japanese American leaders crafted a sanitized version of history, one that emphasized Japanese American compliance with the government and stressed their patriotism and loyalty. This changed during the 1960s and 1970s as younger generations of Japanese American activists and scholars (along with other allies) grew critical of the mainstream narrative and began to publish revisionist histories

that explored resistance and protest within the camps.⁵ However, the topic of resistance vs. compliance never fully resolved, and in fact continued to divide the Japanese American community for decades after the war's end.⁶ This debate cast a long shadow on the field, with scholars often portraying the political landscape of the camps as starkly divided between those who complied with the government and those who actively resisted. While Chiang doesn't ignore these debates, she shows how labor conflict was rooted in the environmental conditions that camp administrators either ignored or grossly mismanaged. This allows her to include new actors who weren't necessarily motivated by a principled objection to the injustice of the incarceration, which has long served as a litmus test for measuring who resisted and who did not.⁷ Instead, Chiang describes the role of high school students and teenagers who worked as "compulsory volunteers" in Topaz and quit after one day on the job because of the horrendous conditions. We also see boilermen and janitors in Minidoka using the changing seasons and in particular the spike in demand for heat and hot water during the winter months to negotiate for higher pay. Chiang is careful to note that only a small number of Japanese Americans engaged in such labor disputes, with the vast majority expressing indifference to issues around camp maintenance. But this, too, grew out of a widespread belief that the WRA was responsible for providing a habitable environment and thus the apathy of many Japanese Americans did not signal resignation or acceptance of the status quo, but served as a form of refusal meant to hold the government accountable. By reframing the roots of conflict in camp, Chiang offers the most nuanced discussion yet of how everyday Japanese Americans negotiated, challenged, and responded to the harsh realities of their imprisonment.

As these examples highlight, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire* clearly demonstrates the value of environmental history to our understanding of the Japanese American incarceration and, in so doing, reinvigorates a field that has long been dominated by legal and political approaches. And yet, on the question of what the Japanese American incarceration illuminates about environmental history, or

⁵ For a discussion of how Japanese Americans used the history of the World War II incarceration in postwar political activism, and how those interpretations changed over time, see Alice Yang Murray, *Historical Memories of the Japanese American Internment and the Struggle for Redress* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

⁶ This topic has been explored most fully in film and fiction. See *Rabbit in the Moon*; Frank Abe, *Conscience and the Constitution: The Untold Story of Japanese American Draft Resistance during World War II*, 2001; John Okada, *No-No Boy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979).

⁷ Much of the historical work that addresses the topic of resistance in camp focuses on draft resistance or Japanese Americans who took a public stance against the government and called attention to the injustice of the incarceration at the time (Gordon Hirabayashi, Fred Korematsu, Frank Emi, etc.). Because these leaders were silenced and ostracized in the postwar years, the current outpouring of scholarship and attention is long overdue. However, we still know very little about how everyday Japanese Americans negotiated and challenged the conditions of their imprisonment. Chiang points us to a way forward here. See Eric Muller, *Free to Die for their Country: The Story of the Japanese American Draft Resisters in World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Roger Daniels, *The Japanese American Cases: The Rule of Law in Time of War* (Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 2013); Gordon Hirabayashi, James Hirabayashi, and Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, *A Principled Stand: The Story of Hirabayashi v. United States* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013).

more specifically, about the relationship between race and the environment, the book has less to say. Why did the environment play such a critical role in this particular project of incarceration? This is a key question that runs throughout the book, but one that Chiang never explicitly addresses. Here, the book would have benefitted from a more sustained discussion of the ideological purpose of the camps as spaces of social engineering. While I commend Chiang for not dwelling on this topic, which has been well covered in the literature, still I think it would have helped to know more about the WRA's end goals for Japanese Americans and how the environment figured in this process of Americanization. As historian Brian Hayashi (among others) has argued, many camp administrators and WRA officials viewed the camps as an opportunity for Japanese Americans to shed their cultural influences and prepare for life in mainstream white society.⁸ This is what Dillon Myer meant when he likened Japanese Americans in the camps to "pioneer communities."⁹ He didn't really see Japanese Americans as white yeoman farmers. Rather, he believed that Japanese Americans could be transformed into productive American citizens through a taming of the wilderness and working of the land. Ironically, this brings to mind the forced assimilation programs targeting Native Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the notion that they were wasting the land by holding it in common and not embracing private property.¹⁰ In both cases, government officials promoted land "improvement" as a means of Americanization and of forced integration into white Protestant capitalist society.

But perhaps this is beyond the scope of the book. As I hope I've shown in this essay, one of the many strengths of Chiang's book is that she uses environmental history to open up new avenues of inquiry and thus lays the foundation for future study. By asking a different set of questions about the relationship between the human and natural worlds, she is able to reveal fresh insights about the experience of the Japanese American incarceration in ways that will shape the field for years to come. Even with a topic as well studied and analyzed as the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans, Chiang shows us that there is still a lot left to learn.

⁸ Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy*.

⁹ As quoted in Chiang, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*, 4.

¹⁰ See, for example, the Dawes Act of 1887.

Comments by Duncan Ryūken Williams, University of Southern California

In *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*, Connie Chiang tells the story of the forced removal by the War Relocation Authority (WRA) of over 110,000 persons of Japanese ancestry on the Pacific Coast to camps in the U.S. interior during WWII. Chiang's novel approach to this familiar story is the lens of nature—how the new environment of these camps shaped the wartime Japanese American experience and how those incarcerated helped shape the natural landscapes of their new homes.

Chiang begins with a detailed discussion of the process of choosing the confinement sites. Leading WRA administrators hoped the camps would be humane communities engineered for the assimilation of Japanese Americans through self-government, education, and public works-oriented projects such as food production. In line with New Deal and Department of Agriculture ideals, the WRA project directors imagined the camps as environmental experiments for turning non-productive lands into agricultural lands using the prewar farming experience of many Japanese Americans. As Chiang makes clear, the language of land improvement and war effort contributions could be framed as a matter of upgrades on Indian reservations (Poston, AZ or Gila River, AZ) or for future white settlers (Minidoka, ID), but was always a necessary rhetorical stance against those who viewed who viewed the “relocation” of Japanese Americans to certain sites as contributing to an environmental degradation.

Fears of sabotage and watershed poisoning by a community deemed a threat to national security also drove the opposition to the site selection of camps like Manzanar, and Chiang argues that such fears were overcome only by reassurances the Army would provide sufficient guards to protect the aqueduct and thereby the Los Angeles-area residents' water supply. Japanese Americans therefore dealt with a social and governmental response to their presence on the West Coast that oscillated between outright hostility and efforts to frame the “relocation” in terms of sacrifice during war.

The hastily-built WRA camps were often marked by shoddy construction, with beetles, scorpions, and other desert “bugs of a thousand varieties” seeping through the cracks and knotholes of the tar-paper barracks. As the new environment presented itself even into the interior of the internees' new homes, Chiang argues that this radical shift in both natural and built environments had a profound effect on how Japanese Americans experienced their wartime dislocation and loss.

The book has a nice balance between stories from the inside out (how those incarcerated experienced the cold winter evenings and problems with heating) and stories about how government officials developed policies to deal with housing a large population in rather unforgiving environmental conditions. The central

chapters of the book explore agriculture in deserts and the growing of gardens in the camps as forms of environmental patriotism. The standard discussion of patriotism in the camps centers around how Japanese Americans responded to the 1943 leave clearance form (or the so-called loyalty questionnaire) and the service of Nisei in the U.S. armed forces, either as part of the segregated 442nd RCT in the European theater or the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) in the Pacific theater. In a rather inventive re-framing of the patriotism question—which had provoked deep splits in the community between most internees and those who were segregated as “disloyals” to a newly formed segregation camp at Tule Lake, between those who willingly served in the military versus those who resisted the draft, and between those who saw their futures in Japan and those who viewed themselves as belonging in America—Chiang focuses on food production (large scale self-sufficiency projects, smaller “victory gardens”, or farm work on beet farms outside the camps) as war contribution. Patriotism in this mode also included controversial projects like the Manzanar guayule production project, a more overt patriotic project of growing rubber in the camp that directly addressed a shortage caused by the Japanese military advance on rubber growing regions of the Pacific and Southeast Asia.

Finally, Chiang nicely captures how the wartime encounter with these new environments affected postwar resettlement processes as well as postwar remembrance projects, such as the pilgrimages to the confinement sites by camp survivors and their descendants.

My only minor quibbles with the book have to do with subjects that Chiang opted not to cover. For example, Chiang states that she left out of her discussion “the temporary assembly centers, which housed Japanese Americans for an average of three months while the camps were being built. Because these centers were located in close proximity to Japanese Americans’ homes on the West Coast, the displacement experienced was both short-lived and not as dramatic as in the permanent camps.”

I wonder if the regional proximity of the Assembly Centers to internees’ prewar homes actually offsets the dramatic nature of this part of the incarceration story. Just as one example, Hisa Aoki in her reflection on having been moved from her home in Los Angeles to a horse stall at the Santa Anita Assembly Center, notes, “presently, thousands have been thrown into unsanitary horse stalls and forced to live there. I wonder if Japan has confined American noncombatants in horse stalls [with] women forced to use toilets with no doors.” In a diary entry several days later, she writes despairingly of the latrine situation: “From the hole used to pump out waste, sewage is pouring out, pouring out! On to the road, under the barracks, to any low area, flows this stinky river of human waste. . . . I don’t care if I am sent to Japan with only what I am wearing. I want to get out of this insulting, humiliating, melancholy, uncertain life without purpose.”

It could be argued that the sudden displacement from the comforts of home to a horse stall at the Assembly Centers—with so many of them located on sites of

horse racing tracks, county fairgrounds, and other facilities that had only recently been occupied by animals—was a very dramatic shift of environment, in some ways much more jarring than the move to the interior WRA camps. Given that these facilities were run by the U.S. Army (as opposed to the WRA camps run by a civilian agency), scholars widely regard them as having a much more draconian set of constraints on normal living than life in the WRA camps.

The other major omission in the book are the two camps located in Arkansas (Rohwer and Jerome). Chiang argues that “the exact location of their confinement, was, in some respects, less important than the larger process in which they participated.” This may be true in the broadest sense, but especially for Japanese Americans who experienced life in more than one camp, these internees often commented on stark contrasts between the environments of those camps. The swampy forest-surrounded camps in Arkansas might have been very fruitful to explore in a book dedicated to how the natural environment impacted the lives of those confined. Also, given Chiang’s wonderful section on Japanese American temporary explorations of areas just beyond the barbed wire (such as hiking and fishing near Manzanar), there might have been fruitful contrasts with how Rohwer and Jerome residents found themselves reminded of the strict segregationist life of the region, symbolized by the history of race seared into the cotton fields just beyond the barbed wire, echoing the ambivalent positions Asians faced in the Jim Crow South.

Overall, “Nature Behind Barbed Wire” is a tremendous addition to the growing scholarly work on the WWII Japanese American incarceration. The environmental prism through which to explore this history is so obvious, and yet so much of the literature on the wartime camp experience focuses on the impact of executive orders, violations of constitutional ideals, and forms that determined loyalty. Chiang’s focus on how the history of nature and the history of a community are intertwined make this book a must read for anyone interested in this chapter of American history.

Comments by Brian McCammack, Lake Forest College

Connie Chiang's *Nature Behind Barbed Wire: An Environmental History of the Japanese American Incarceration* is an important contribution to a growing environmental historical literature that examines "how racial identities and the dynamics of race relations have intertwined with the environment through time" (4). In well-conceived chapters that comprehensively explore myriad environmental dimensions of more than 110,000 Japanese Americans' incarceration during World War II—including detainees' environmental connections prior to internment, the harsh environmental conditions detainees faced in remote areas of the Mountain West, the environmental (often agricultural) labor detainees performed during their incarceration, and the extent to which some detainees were able to find a measure of agency and self-determination in environmental leisure—Chiang convincingly argues that "the confinement of Japanese Americans was an environmental process, deeply embedded in the lands and waters along the coast and the camps further inland" (5).

One of *Nature Behind Barbed Wire's* key arguments is that nature contributed both to the oppressiveness of incarceration and—to the extent possible given the profound infringement of civil liberties they suffered—the hopefulness many Japanese American detainees were able to cultivate during their incarceration by finding "many ways to harness nature and assert some control over the terms and conditions of their confinement. In doing so, they often proclaimed their Americanness" (5). Those themes come to the fore most remarkably in chapters 5 and 6, the former of which is titled "Environmental Patriotism," a term which Chiang defines as "the idea that one's devotion to nation could be expressed through engagement with the natural world" (123). Like millions of Americans during World War II, for example, some detainees spent leisure time growing small victory gardens for which they could choose what crops to plant, harvest, and ultimately consume, supplementing foodstuffs detainees produced from larger-scale farm projects directed by War Relocation Authority (WRA) officials (124-7). By the same token, ornamental gardening, hiking, swimming, and especially fishing gave some detainees a sense of control and empowerment, allowing them to carve out some small measure of autonomy and participate in environmental leisure activities that millions of Americans enjoyed (214-5). As Chiang points out, officials' willingness to grant detainees some control over these environmental relationships could have been motivated by ulterior motives—akin to slave masters granting slaves hunting and fishing rights, or welfare capitalists' creation of recreational activities for employees—because such activities could be "tools to reinforce the incarceration of Japanese Americans. If detainees enjoyed themselves in the outdoors, they would have fewer reasons to object to their confinement" (173).

When it came to environmental labor, that coercion—and the illusory nature of freedom in the context of incarceration—was even more apparent. Much of the labor detainees performed in camps was agricultural, as officials were intent on

making camps as self-sustaining as possible despite their locations on submarginal lands ill-suited for growing food. Ultimately, however, those harsh environmental conditions in combination with poor labor conditions meant that “only about 14 percent” of the total food consumed (by cost) was produced by detainees (121). It’s hardly surprising that officials constantly had trouble finding enough laborers to work the fields when detainees’ wages ranged between \$12 and \$19 per month, roughly 1/10th of the wages similar work typically garnered on the open market (101). Those pitiful wages—in addition to the promise of temporarily escaping detention camps—help explain why many detainees jumped at the opportunity to earn prevailing open market wages in local agricultural industries when the WRA relaxed incarceration policies in an ostensibly patriotic effort to prop up industries critical to the war effort. Most notably, the sugar beet industry employed 8,000 Japanese Americans in 1942 (134), but many detainees found the backbreaking work exploitative and were incensed that the companies employed “patriotic rhetoric to coerce them into working” (133). Especially for those Japanese Americans forced to abandon successful agricultural enterprises they had built prior to incarceration, the conscription and exploitation of their environmental labor and knowledge added insult to injury. All this fits into a broader theme in *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*: the surprising (at least to me) extent to which economic considerations surrounding environmental labor factored into the rationales both for and against internment (as opposed to, say, national security). Agricultural industries fretted over losses from fields and fisheries that internment forced Japanese Americans to abandon (14-23), just as much as the sugar beet industry salivated over the prospects of a literally captive labor pool.

With some of those key environmental elements of incarceration as pretext, I’d be eager to hear Chiang’s thoughts on how internment might reflect more broadly on the way Americans—especially marginalized communities like racial and ethnic minorities—understood nature through environmental labor and leisure in this period. More to the point: did environmental leisure promise more freedom than labor? For me, the victory gardens detainees cultivated are a particularly interesting site for thinking through these relationships, especially in comparison to the larger-scale, WRA-directed agricultural endeavors. Both were fundamentally agricultural, but the former was much more recreational/leisurely, and hence seemed to offer a degree of autonomy and control unattainable in the latter. With money at stake for both the WRA and private businesses, environmental labor grafted an imbalanced employer-employee relationship on top of an already profoundly imbalanced WRA official-detainee relationship. Environmental leisure, by contrast, often constituted a partial and temporary reprieve from these power inequalities, when detainees could sometimes strike out on their own with minimal supervision, free to establish environmental relationships on their own terms (though always within the prescribed boundaries of detention).

These questions surrounding environmental labor and leisure connect to another set of questions I’d be interested to hear Chiang address: namely, how Japanese American internment might speak to Americans’ changing relationships to

the environment in a rapidly urbanizing (and suburbanizing) nation. Painting with exceptionally broad strokes, urbanization meant that fewer and fewer Americans—especially racial and ethnic minorities that would increasingly cluster in cities after World War II as middle-class whites populated suburbs—primarily understood nature through labor (at least via extractive industries like agriculture, timber, mining, fishing, etc.). Instead, nature became a leisure retreat—someplace visited, not dwelled in. Despite these trends, the sort of agricultural labor undertaken at internment camps tends to lead *Nature Behind Barbed Wire* to focus on Japanese Americans with prior experience in agriculture, seeking continuities and discontinuities concerning “Japanese Americans’ environmental knowledge” that was notable on the West Coast because “workers knew how to plant and harvest crops in a specific and unusual environmental context” (22). That’s a fascinating story, but it made me wonder just how varied detainees’ “environmental knowledge” was—beyond agriculture—because the Japanese Americans at the four camps Chiang examines in depth “came from a wide swath of rural and urban locales up and down the Pacific Coast” (4) including urban dwellers from Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area, Seattle, and Portland. Indeed, fewer than half of the nearly 50,000 adult detainees in Military Area 1 were employed in agriculture (29); prior to incarceration, detainees held a “range of occupations, from farmers and foresters to skilled professionals and business proprietors” (69), and at one camp, “only 200 out of the 8,000 [...] had ever lived on a farm” (qtd on 105). In other words, a majority of detainees—in some cases an overwhelming majority—had been urban-dwellers prior to incarceration.

There are hints of the sorts of tensions this urban/rural divide created: we learn that “As urbanites mixed with country dwellers, conflicts sometimes emerged” (69) and that because detainees who labored in Wyoming “were mostly urbanites accustomed to an eight-hour day and modern housing with sanitation and heat, they found rural life unpleasant and failed to meet farmers’ expectations” (136). But with the focus on nature as agricultural “workscape,” as Thomas Andrews called it in *Killing for Coal*, I wonder if we lose some sense of the diversity of Japanese American understandings of nature, and the extent to which place—city and country, not just race and ethnicity—shaped those understandings. And while, as I note above, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire* devotes an excellent chapter to detainees’ leisure in the natural environment, it’s not entirely clear if either environmental labor or leisure in internment camps—and hence the environmental significance of internment itself—resonated differently for urban-dwelling Japanese Americans compared to those who had come from lives closer to the land, so to speak. This question of Japanese Americans’ urban or rural backgrounds pre-internment seems even more potent given that farmlands dispossessed and agricultural market niches destroyed during internment seems to have, on the whole, further urbanized Japanese Americans after World War II (196); more than 6,000 detainees resettled in Chicago alone (177).

My own research has grappled with these urban/rural and leisure/labor issues in the context of the African American Great Migration, and it’s also led me to

think a lot about how the particularities of place govern environmental relationships for racial and ethnic minorities. For the African American migrants I write about in *Landscapes of Hope*, for example, the interplay between the social, political, cultural, and environmental was fundamentally different in the American South than it was in the North; migration necessitated adaptation to new environments, the translation of cultural practices, and the forging of new environmental relationships. The ways in which place dictates those changes are why I'd be curious to hear more about the choice to focus on four of the ten internment camps, all four of which were in the West. That focus makes *Nature Behind Barbed Wire* an indispensable contribution to the region's environmental history; as Chiang rightly asserts, the book offers new insights on "key themes in the history of the American West—the prevalence of public lands, the influence of aridity, and an enduring record of displacement and social inequality" (6). But it comes at the expense of bracketing off two Arkansas internment camps (Rohwer and Jerome) that housed between 15,000 and 20,000 detainees, about 1/6 the total internment population (I'm a little bit ashamed to say this, but I had no idea these two internment camps existed). Those camps were located in the "marshy delta of the Mississippi River floodplain [which] contained bayous and swamps and were surrounded by forests" (7), an environment far different than the arid mountain West. Chiang writes that, "While juxtaposing the southern and western camps could yield some intriguing points of comparison, it is beyond the scope of the book" (7) and concludes that, "The exact location of their confinement was, in some respects, less important than the larger process in which they participated" (7). I'm not sure I'm completely comfortable with that devaluation of the particularity of place—at least in an environmental history—in part because the Arkansas camps' environments differed so radically from their arid Western counterparts, not to mention the West Coast environments from which detainees were drawn. Detainees in Arkansas presumably didn't have to contend with the dust storms (61-65) or, as one internee noted, "the absence of green things" (qtd on 60) that largely defined life in the Western camps, for instance, and Arkansas thunderstorms were a notable departure from what detainees were familiar with on the West Coast (59-60).

Thinking more specifically about the relationships between race and environment in Southern internment camps, I wonder what sort of interracial insights might be reached from the story of Japanese American internment camps in the land of slavery and Jim Crow. Chiang points out that in these Arkansas camps, "Japanese Americans logged [the surrounding forests] for heating fuel" (7), and it immediately made me think of centuries of African American environmental labor in the South—clearing forests, cultivating fields, and more. Similarly, when Chiang writes that "For most Japanese Americans, wartime incarceration was part of an ongoing experience of exclusion and discrimination" (9), I couldn't help but think of the similar experiences that African American sharecroppers and laborers endured in what James Cobb called "The Most Southern Place on Earth," just a stone's throw away from those Arkansas camps. What did it mean—to detainees, to black Southerners, to white Southerners—for Japanese Americans' civil liberties to be infringed upon and their environmental labors exploited near the heart of the

Mississippi Delta, a place in many ways emblematic of African Americans' exclusion and discrimination in the South?

These comparisons are all the more intriguing given the way Japanese Americans' environmental labor was racialized. They were valued in West Coast agricultural industries because of "their willingness to perform undesirable work" (23); white employers believed that Japanese Americans were "good workers, dependable and thoroughly law abiding. White men will not do the work" (qtd on 18) and that "the rigors of our climate have been found to be unsuited for the most part even for the strongest of white men" (qtd on 22-23). That kind of thinking bears a striking resemblance to the way many whites racialized black labor in the South (and well beyond), and perhaps is even more similar to enduring stereotypes about Latinx agricultural labor. Of course, all this is getting a little far afield from Japanese American internment specifically, and I don't fault Chiang at all for staying focused on that particular experience—you have to draw the boundaries somewhere, and *Nature Behind Barbed Wire* is a coherent, focused account of the environmental implications of internment. But I raise these issues partly as a way of thinking through how environmental historians, with place as our primary lens of inquiry, may be uniquely positioned to break through or reach across traditional disciplinary boundaries that tend to limit analysis to a particular racial or ethnic group to the exclusion of others.

Potentially one way to anchor these questions about how different racial groups forged different or similar environmental relationships in the same times and places is to examine how they engaged with specific institutions or environmental(ist) movements. In this particular case, I wonder how the environmental relations Japanese American detainees forged in camps fit into the broader historiographical understanding of race and the evolving conservation movement in this period. An environmental history of internment—and especially the sort of environmental labor many detainees undertook—invites comparisons to New Deal public works agencies, most of which ended at about the same time internment began in 1942, pivoting on the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941 and the United States' entry into World War II. As Chiang points out, one of the most "critical distinctions" between the two was that Japanese Americans "labored under conditions of forcible confinement" (41-2). But in terms of the connections many detainees had with the natural environment, similarities to the Civilian Conservation Corps, in particular, are striking. Perhaps most importantly, as Chiang writes, "Much like the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the WRA promoted the use of labor to both improve public land and Americanize its charges" (41). Additionally, just as the CCC was meant to rehabilitate natural resources to aid economic recovery during the Depression, WRA labor was meant to "harness natural resources for the war effort" (43); both leveraged the expertise of conservationists in agencies like the Soil Conservation Service. But while the overt comparisons between the WRA and New Deal agencies in *Nature Behind Barbed Wire* mostly end there, other similarities are also striking. For example, one camp in particular, Minidoka in Idaho, was selected in part due to "Japanese Americans' ability to

improve the land for whites” (47), and after the war (overwhelmingly white) “veterans also received priority to purchase land and barracks” at several camps Japanese Americans had built or improved (203). Similarly, as I write in *Landscapes of Hope*, the long-term benefits of African Americans’ environmental labor in the CCC (higher agricultural yields, more abundant recreational areas, and the like) mostly accrued to whites.

All these inequalities (and more) were perpetuated under the auspices of government agencies like the CCC that, as Neil Maher writes in *Nature’s New Deal*, emphasized patriotic reasons for translating early-twentieth century conservationist ideals into a prescription for remedying social and environmental strife in the Depression. In so doing, the CCC arguably helped lay the foundations of the modern American environmental movement by creating a generation of post-war conservationists that carried with them a greater appreciation for human-nature interrelationships as a result of their environmental labor. I wonder how Japanese Americans’ environmental experiences during internment might help shed light on these broader trends, particularly because Chiang touches on youth detainees’ participation in Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts (159-162) and local conservationists’ suspicion that detainee fishermen were depleting stocks (159), both of which brought to mind African Americans’ similar experiences (on the former, see *Landscapes of Hope* as well as Marcia Chatelain’s *South Side Girls*, which examine the role of scouting in the black community; on the latter, see Scott Giltner’s *Hunting and Fishing in the New South*, which details the way Jim Crow conservationism was often wielded as a cudgel against black Southerners, propping up white supremacy). More pointedly: is there any way in which internment helps shed light on how “mainstream” American environmentalism/conservationism in the post-WWII era became—or remained—a predominantly white middle-class movement (at least inasmuch as the contours of the movement were defined and driven by large environmental NGOs and so forth)?

Last but not least, I have a related methodological question: I’m somewhat selfishly (given the challenges I faced in my own research on the CCC) eager to hear Chiang’s thoughts on the promises and perils of writing environmental histories about subjects that are thickly documented by government agencies. As Chiang writes in the introduction, “voluminous records of the WRA figure prominently” in *Nature Behind Barbed Wire* “as they provide a detailed portrait of the camps’ daily operations from the perspectives of government officials” (8-9). The records of the CCC, like many other government agencies particularly from the New Deal era forward, are also voluminous, and a boon to researchers. But as Chiang points out, those documents almost inevitably skew toward the perspective of those in power (government officials, who were overwhelmingly white men) and even a fantastic job of reading between the lines in addition to using source material from the perspective of the marginalized—both of which Chiang does to great effect throughout the book—can sometimes still leave the reader with a frustratingly imbalanced sense of how the environment was significant to marginalized groups. One of the moments where this imbalance comes to the fore is in the account of

detainees' research into supplying rubber from guayule, "a small, woody drought-resistant shrub that resembled sagebrush and was native to the southwestern United States and northern Mexico" (137). The WRA's documentation illustrates the racial (and even racist) dimensions of the project, but we're still largely left to speculate as to the way detainees themselves viewed their participation. As Chiang puts it, while WRA officials "clearly invoked environmental patriotism to describe the guayule project and to either defend or challenge the incarceration of Japanese Americans, it is not clear to what extent [detainees] pursued this work in an effort to prove their loyalty" (145). In the end, then, this particular vignette arguably reveals much more about those in power than about the marginalized. This is but one instance in a narrative that generally does an excellent job of illuminating internment's environmental significance to detainees, however, and I'd love to hear more about Chiang's approach to balancing extensive archival materials documenting official/institutional perspectives with what seem to be comparatively skimpier archival sources documenting detainees' perspectives. Archival barriers to accessing the experiences of marginalized groups are obviously problems that transcend environmental history, but in some ways I think they may actually be more vexing to environmental historians since the environment itself so often is relegated to the margins of archival documentation. Researchers working at the intersection of race and the environment often confront a sort of double archival marginalization, then, and *Nature Behind Barbed Wire* is inspiring for the ways in which it overwhelmingly succeeds in surmounting these obstacles. It was a great pleasure to have had the opportunity to engage this deeply with such an excellent book, and I hope environmental historians continue pushing the field in this direction in the years to come, enriching our knowledge of the ways diverse communities experience and understand the environment.

Response by Connie Y. Chiang, Bowdoin College

When Keith Woodhouse approached me about this roundtable, I was keen to gather a group of scholars who would bring multiple perspectives to my work. The book is, first and foremost, an environmental history, but I wanted to engage colleagues who were not self-identified environmental historians. Indeed, when I started this project, one of my goals was to encourage scholars in disparate fields to consider the value of an environmental perspective when studying and teaching the Japanese American incarceration. Keith immediately understood my ideal roundtable and assembled a stellar group. Megan Asaka, Duncan Ryūken Williams, and Brian McCammack bring a range of intellectual and personal perspectives to their reviews. I am deeply grateful for their thoughtful critiques of *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*.

Before pursuing an academic career in Asian American and urban history, Megan Asaka was an oral historian and visual history coordinator for Densho, the Seattle-based non-profit organization dedicated to “preserv[ing] and shar[ing] history of the WWII incarceration of Japanese Americans to promote equity and justice today.”¹ Any quick glance at my notes and bibliography makes clear how indebted I am to Densho; its archive and encyclopedia are indispensable resources for anyone researching the wartime experiences of Japanese Americans. Given Asaka’s time at Densho and the many interviews she conducted with camp survivors, I am gratified that she recognized my efforts to bring new questions to bear on this episode.

Asaka’s main critique concerns the book’s position on what the Japanese American incarceration illuminates about the relationship between race and environment. Or, as she puts it, “Why did the environment play such a critical role in this particular project of incarceration?” Further discussion of “the ideological purpose of the camps as spaces of social engineering” could have addressed this question. As she notes, I do not ignore these issues but do not dwell on them, either. For instance, in chapter 2, I draw a connection between the War Relocation Authority camps and earlier Civilian Conservation Corps camps in their mutual application of outdoor labor “to both improve public lands and Americanize its charges” (41). Moreover, the underlying premise of chapter 5 is that certain environmental activities—such as growing victory gardens or cultivating guayule—could help to turn detainees into patriotic Americans. Still, I recognize that these links between the environment and the WRA’s assimilation goals could have been developed further.

While ideology was important, I think the answer to Asaka’s question also turns on practical considerations. The environment played such a critical role in this particular project of incarceration because expelling and confining over 110,000

¹ “About Densho,” <https://densho.org/about-densho/>, accessed November 8, 2019.

people required space and resources, such as food, water, and energy. Federal officials had to detain them somewhere. They had to provide for their basic needs. As I detail in chapters 2 and 3, these environmental requirements shaped where the camps were located and what Japanese Americans did when they settled there. With nationwide food and labor shortages, they had to work on the farms, clean their own latrines, and fix their own leaky pipes. All of these activities required them to engage with the natural world. In the process, Japanese Americans raised questions about whether they should work to perpetuate their own race-based confinement.

As for the larger relationship between race and environment—“what the Japanese American incarceration illuminates about environmental history”—the answer is woven throughout the book. There is no question that the environment was part and parcel of the WRA’s social engineering goals, as Asaka suggests. However, it was not just a force of racial oppression or control. In some instances, Japanese Americans harnessed the environment in order to rebuff their racial marginalization and to assert their place in American society. The WRA also found that the vagaries of the natural world stymied its efforts to assert power over detainees. Just as in other times and places, the environment served as both a force and instrument to simultaneously establish, circumvent, and reject racial domination. The relationship between race and environment was thus complex and rarely straightforward.²

Duncan Ryūken Williams, a renowned scholar of Buddhism and author of the much-acclaimed *American Sutra: The Story of Faith and Freedom in the Second World War*, focuses his critique on two key omissions. First, I do not examine the seventeen temporary assembly centers where Japanese Americans typically spent two to three months after their initial expulsion from their homes. Williams questions my reasons for leaving them out, using the compelling story of Hisa Aoki to demonstrate how living conditions in the assembly centers were harsher and just as bewildering as those of the ten permanent WRA camps. Japanese Americans’ time in the temporary facilities undoubtedly represented a form of environmental displacement that was traumatic and unsettling, but they were not experiencing entirely new climates or surrounded by unfamiliar geographical features. They also had far more time to engage with and alter the land in the permanent camps. These are critical distinctions. Still, Williams raises an intriguing point, and I welcome future research on the environmental history of the temporary assembly centers and comparisons to the WRA camps.

Williams also calls attention to my decision to exclude the Arkansas camps, Jerome and Rohwer, from my study. Brian McCammack, author of the award-

² For a recent discussion of this scholarship, see Kathleen A. Brosnan, “The Lifting Fog: Race, Work, and the Environment,” *Environmental History*, Volume 24, no. 1 (January 2019): 9–24. See also Connie Y. Chiang, “Race and Ethnicity in Environmental History,” in *Oxford Handbook of Environmental History*, edited by Andrew C. Isenberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 573–599.

winning *Landscapes of Hope: Nature and the Great Migration in Chicago*, makes a similar criticism. They both note that the Arkansas camps provide a sharp social contrast to the other camps, as Japanese Americans there encountered the mores of the Jim Crow South. This point resonates with Asaka's critique; an examination of Jerome or Rohwer would certainly add further insight into the relationship between race and environment. Although John Howard and Jason Morgan Ward have already explored the complex place of Japanese Americans in the Arkansas racial hierarchy, more work could be done on how the natural environment shaped their tenuous position.³ Like Williams and McCammack, I am intrigued by possible comparisons between the racialization of Japanese American and African American labor in the Southern context. I am also curious to what extent the history of slavery resonated with Japanese Americans as they worked the Mississippi Delta.

In explaining my decision to exclude Jerome and Rohwer, I assert that the "exact location" of confinement was less important than the larger environmental process of incarceration. McCammack called this point the "devaluation of the particularity of place," and I recognize now the sloppiness of my statement. I did not mean to suggest that the specific environments of the camps were irrelevant to Japanese Americans' experiences. Rather, I wanted to be clear that my book was providing a broader framework for understanding the incarceration as a whole. Whether the camp was in Arkansas or Wyoming or California, I argue that the incarceration was an environmental process, "deeply embedded in the lands and waters along the coast and the camps further inland" (5). The particularities of the process varied by location, but there were common issues and activities—labor, agriculture, and recreation, for example—that shaped all of them. Ultimately, I hope that future scholars will examine the environmental history of all the camps, building upon, modifying, and even refuting my framework.

I also want to note that scholars often have to make difficult decisions when defining the scope of their projects, sometimes omitting—much to their chagrin—important topics and materials in the interest of deeper analysis or more concise books. Thus, excluding the assembly centers and six permanent camps was also a pragmatic decision. When I first started my research, I had ambitions to study more camps but quickly discovered that each facility generated copious primary sources, from federal correspondence and camp newspapers to memoirs and oral histories. In the interest of time, space, and analytical uniformity, I found it absolutely necessary to limit my study to four camps.

McCammack also poses several probing questions about the role of Japanese Americans' rural and urban backgrounds in shaping their engagement in labor or leisure activities. As he points out, the book devotes considerable attention to

³ John Howard, *Concentration Camps on the Home Front: Japanese Americans in the House of Jim Crow* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Jason Morgan Ward, "'No Jap Crow': Japanese Americans Encounter the World War II South," *Journal of Southern History* 73, no. 1 (February 2007): 75-104.

detainees with prior agricultural expertise, more so than any other type of environmental knowledge. This focus marginalizes the environmental experiences of many urban dwellers, glossing over the ways in which city living shaped their understandings of nature, too. This leads to his bigger point: “it’s not entirely clear if either environmental labor or leisure in internment camps—and hence the environmental significance of internment itself—resonated differently for urban-dwelling Japanese Americans compared to those who had come from lives closer to the land.” This is an excellent point, and I agree that I could have paid more consistent attention to this distinction throughout the book.

That said, the urban/rural divide did not always map neatly onto the labor/leisure divide. Put another way, urban dwellers did not just see nature as a place of leisure, while rural dwellers did not just see nature as a place of labor.⁴ In fact, some urban dwellers developed their environmental knowledge through labor. This was the case at Manzanar, where experienced nurserymen and gardeners came from the greater Los Angeles region and honed their skills in a recently urbanized area. In the camps, a curious transformation occurred. What was once a form of environmental labor—raising ornamental plants for and tending to the gardens of white clients—became a form of environmental leisure, as they could now construct and tend to their *own* gardens for personal benefit. Gardening helped them forge a path toward greater autonomy even as the incarceration reinforced Japanese American inferiority. On the flip side, some Japanese Americans from rural backgrounds had extensive leisure experiences in nature. Consider the Yasui family of Oregon’s Hood River Valley. Masuo Yasui became a successful businessman and orchardist, but his children grew up fishing for salmon, camping in the woods, and swimming in a local cove.⁵ Their participation in these leisure activities also reflected a generational divide, which further complicates attempts to generalize about Japanese American experiences with or knowledge of the natural world. A variety of factors—generation, age, gender, education, in addition to urban or rural background—shaped the ways that Japanese Americans interacted with the environment.

Indeed, environmental knowledge was not just acquired through labor or leisure. I cannot help but think of Toyo Suyemoto, whose memoir, *I Call to Remembrance*, includes perceptive observations of the natural world in both prose and poetry. I quote her description of the silence of Topaz, which lacked the melodious bird songs of her home in Berkeley, California (60). That Suyemoto noticed that camp *sounded* different because of the absence of certain songbirds was not, I think, a reflection of a pre-incarceration life lived closer to or further away from the land. I’m guessing that she was simply attuned to the world around her, urban or otherwise.

⁴ Lawrence Lipin, *Workers and the Wild: Conservation, Consumerism, and Labor in Oregon, 1910-30* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

⁵ Lauren Kessler, *Stubborn Twig: Three Generations in the Life of a Japanese American Family* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2005), 109-110.

The difficulty of determining how environmental labor or leisure resonated differently for urban and rural Japanese Americans is also a reflection of the source base for this project. In many accounts, it is unclear if detainees' environmental activities were influenced by their urban or rural backgrounds or any other element of their identities. For instance, in chapter 6, I discuss how detainees at Gila River revived a cultural tradition of "moon viewing" in which they went on walks during the full moon and recited haiku and tanka poems. This activity was observed by Robert Spencer, a fieldworker for the Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study. He noted, "Now...that there is leisure time, and that the moonlight nights are reminiscent of those of Japan, the desire to do this has returned on the part of some" (150). Because he referred to evenings in Japan, I can surmise that it was the Issei who participated. It is also clear that he was referring to individuals who had worked prior to incarceration, as they now had leisure time to engage in this activity. But what kind of work? Since Gila River's population drew from both urban and rural areas in California, there are many possibilities. Without additional sources, I do not know how or if detainees' urban or rural backgrounds influenced this leisure activity.

The question of sources brings me to McCammack's final question about the "promises and perils" of using federal sources to write studies at the intersection of race and environment. I'll address the promises first. The War Relocation Authority records proved to be teeming with materials pertinent to the environmental history of the incarceration. I found boxes overflowing with reports about the camp sites under consideration, the farm projects, and the recreational programs, just to name a few topics. Sometimes, I dug a little deeper to find material. For instance, each camp had a project attorney who often adjudicated legal issues involving detainees. I had a hunch that I would find plenty of relevant information in this correspondence, and I was right. In addition to stories of farmland and crops left behind, it was here that I discovered the story of Takano Asano, who was burned by hot roofing tar at Topaz (56-57). This incident did not immediately scream "environmental," but I was struck by its larger environmental context—that confining people in the desert required housing, and the quality of the housing typically did not match the harsh conditions. I had to tease out the environmental significance of this incident and others, but I did not find that the environment was buried very deeply, if at all, in the WRA records.

However, I did face the perils of the WRA records, namely the marginalization of Japanese American voices. While the records sometimes contained correspondence from Japanese Americans, the WRA officials' voices are the most pronounced. Their letters and reports are largely descriptive, with some substantive commentary on camp events and management issues. Whenever possible, I analyzed Japanese American oral histories and personal narratives alongside these sources. Fortunately, most topics covered in this book had corresponding Japanese American materials from which to draw. However, as McCammack noticed, the guayule project was one topic with a dearth of Japanese

American materials. Because I had to rely almost entirely on WRA records, I could only offer a range of *possible* motivations for their participation in this program, based on what I had learned about their motivations in other contexts. I remain quite unsatisfied with my educated guesses. Nonetheless, I think it is important to include a range of stories in our narratives, even if the perspectives of the marginalized groups are obscured. In the case of guayule, the fact that the project generated so much interest and correspondence ultimately speaks to Japanese American power and influence, even if their actual voices are largely silent in the record.

While “double archival marginalization” is a real obstacle for historians working at the intersection of race and environment, the Japanese American incarceration has a robust source base that usually mitigates against this problem. The willingness of camp survivors to share their memories—before Congress in the late 1970s, with oral historians over the course of three-plus decades, and in dozens of poignant memoirs—ensures that scholars can continue to tease out the nuances and complexities, environmental and otherwise, of this critical episode from the American past. Of course, these sources are not without problems, but I am nonetheless grateful for survivors’ candor and bravery in the face of injustice.

Megan Asaka, Duncan Ryūken Williams, and Brian McCammack have shown that there is still much to be said about the environmental history of the Japanese American incarceration specifically and race and environment in the United States history more broadly. I am appreciative of their smart questions and thoughtful engagement with *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*. Their insights provide plenty of fodder for scholars who continue to probe the historical significance of the environment to racial minorities across time and space.

About the Contributors

Megan Asaka is an assistant professor of history at the University of California, Riverside. Trained as an interdisciplinary scholar and public historian, her work examines how marginalized peoples navigated, inhabited, and transformed the urban landscapes of the Pacific Northwest during the early twentieth century period. She also worked as an oral historian for Densho, a grassroots organization dedicated to preserving and sharing the stories of Japanese American history through an online archive and other digital platforms.

Connie Y. Chiang is Professor of History and Environmental Studies and Director of Environmental Studies at Bowdoin College. *Nature Behind Barbed Wire* is her second book and the 2019 recipient of the Agricultural History Society's Theodore Saloutos Memorial Award for best book on agricultural history.

Brian McCammack is Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies at Lake Forest College, where he teaches environmental history and politics & policy. His next book examines 1970s environmentalism and the roots of the environmental justice movement.

Duncan Ryūken Williams is Professor of American Studies & Ethnicity and Religion at the University of Southern California and Director of the USC Shinso Ito Center for Japanese Religions and Culture. He is the author of *The Other Side of Zen* (Princeton University Press) and *American Sutra: A Story of Faith and Freedom in the Second World War* (Harvard University Press).

Keith Makoto Woodhouse is an associate professor of history at Northwestern University and director of the Environmental Policy and Culture Program. He is the author of *The Ecocentrists: A History of Radical Environmentalism*.

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