

# “Successful” Nisei: Politics of Representation and the Cold War American Way of Life

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## 要 旨

本論文は、戦後、世界的に高い評価を受けた建築家ミノル・ヤマサキ、木工家具職人ジョージ・ナカシマ、彫刻家イサム・ノグチの三人の日系アメリカ人二世に焦点を当て、いかにメディアが彼らを「アメリカ的生活」(“the American way of life”)の美德を体現する人物として描いたかを考察する。三人のキャリアは冷戦初期に絶頂に達し、ヘンリー・R・ルースが編集長を務めた『タイム』、『ライフ』、『ハウス・アンド・ホーム』、『アーキテクチュラル・フォーラム』などを含む雑誌または各地の新聞に取り上げられた。三人は、人種的マイノリティという逆境に負けることなくアメリカの芸術・建築界において成功を取め、また家庭においては家族に「アメリカ的生活」を保証したとして称讃された。彼らが困難を乗り越えて成功者となったという物語は、アメリカに平等主義、民主主義が根付いていると国内外に宣伝することを可能にした。一方でヤマサキ、ナカシマ、ノグチ自身は、実力主義、個人主義、民主主義がすべての人々に平等に恩恵をもたらしているという主張を無批判に受け入れたわけではない。逆に彼らは、国家がいかに人種差別を形成し、助長してきたかということに対して批判的な感情を抱いていた。しかしながら、白人の読者を主なターゲットとしたメインストリームの雑誌や新聞のなかでは、彼らのこのような批判的な視点は除外されてしまった。日系二世として彼らも直面した人種差別の経験は、メディアの形成する成功物語のなかでは副次的要素として扱われるにすぎなかった。彼らの人生に大きな影響を及ぼした人種問題が、メディアによって本質的に議論されることがなかったということは、彼らに関する「アメリカ的生活」の表象が非常に限定的で表面的だったことを示唆しているし、成功者とされた彼らのアメリカ中産階級への帰属もまた、周縁的であり条件付きであったということの意味している。

## Introduction

Architect Minoru Yamasaki, woodworker George Nakashima, and sculptor Isamu Noguchi were among the most famous second-generation Japanese American (hereafter referred to as Nisei) artists/architects whose influence transcended national borders. The American media celebrated the fact that the three men, in spite of having been victims of racial prejudice earlier in their lives, not only climbed their ways up in the competitive worlds of art and architecture very successfully but also demonstrated that non-whites could play a vital role in representing the virtues of the American way of life. Their careers reached a high point during the 1950s and 1960s when the U.S. was extending its power and dominance in postwar international politics—the move that drew criticism from various parties working for decolonization and antiracism around the world. The image of the Japanese Americans being successful in the

white-dominated American art and architectural fields—the fields that were often associated with the freedom of expression and democracy—served the U.S. greatly to create the self-image of a racially tolerant and culturally plural society. The incorporation of the Nisei's success stories into the contested narrative about America—where different races, genders, classes, and other culturally defined groups supposedly enjoy the fruits of liberal democracy—formed an important aspect of the discourse of the American way of life disseminated within as well as outside the U.S.

One commonality linked the three men's media representations; their works and private lives were associated with important elements of the American way of life such as meritocracy, individualism, and democracy. While all three of them generally embraced these ideologies, there were times when they pointed out the limitations and faults of the rosy picture of American society. Examining the media representations of the three Nisei's lives and careers within the Cold War framework unveils the workings of institutional power that sought to weave a teleological story about benevolent assimilation and of the artists/architects' individual agency that tried to disrupt that attempt.

## 1. Cold War Context and Politics of Representation

During the Cold War, the “American way of life” became one of the most important ideological weapons for American cold warriors. They characterized the virtues of the “American way of life” in opposition to what they considered the “other way of life” to be.<sup>1)</sup> In his 1947 speech, President Harry S. Truman contended that the “American way of life” championed free institutions, democratic government, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression, whereas the “other way of life” was based on a coercive and oppressive political system, control over the ways of expression, and deprivation of personal freedom.<sup>2)</sup> In this speech, Truman defined America within the framework of the liberal tradition that stressed individual autonomy in the economic, political, and cultural arenas.

While the U.S. government insisted on ensuring the better way of life for its citizens and allies, the international community and minority groups in the U.S. gave it a dubious look. The surge of anti-imperialism around the world and intensifying African American struggle against persistent domestic racism threatened to deny the country's credibility as a world leader. However, as Laura A. Belmonte points out, U.S. officials did not necessarily try to conceal the problems of their society. Instead, by providing information about domestic issues such as racism and showcasing how Americans coped with and solved them, “they crafted a national

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<sup>1)</sup> Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 6.

<sup>2)</sup> Harry S. Truman, “Special Message to Congress on Greece and Turkey: The Truman Doctrine,” 12 Mar. 1947, 4. Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, accessed 30 Dec. 2014, [http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/doctrine/large/documents/pdfs/5-9.pdf](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/doctrine/large/documents/pdfs/5-9.pdf).

narrative of progress, prosperity, and peace.”<sup>3)</sup>

I argue that the Japanese American experiences of prewar discrimination, wartime incarceration, resettlement, and elevation to the middle-class were also incorporated into the American story of righting the wrong and creating a plural and free society, where a previously subjugated group lived happily together with the mainstream. The Japanese American success story fit perfectly into the celebratory national narrative of benevolent assimilation and liberal democratic values, which emphasized hard work and self-discipline and understated the factors of race, class, and gender that significantly affected one’s chances of achieving the American dream. The Japanese Americans’ postwar advancement into higher education and professional job markets, despite having been labeled as enemy aliens and incarcerated in the camps during the war, worked discursively to make it seem true that any minorities could climb the social ladder if they tried hard enough and that it was their fault if they failed to do so.

As some scholars have noted, the development of the Japanese American model minority myth and the growing concern over the “Negro problem” derived from the same trend toward sacralizing individualism.<sup>4)</sup> In an effort to propose solutions for improving the lives of African Americans, Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan argued in his 1965 report that African American family structure had to be changed. He insisted that the high rate of single-motherhood in impoverished African American homes forced mothers to work, which affected their children mentally and led them to be less educated and dependent on welfare. While Moynihan’s intention was to encourage whites to stop discriminating especially against African American men so that they could be strong breadwinners and terminate the reproduction of poverty, he promoted the understanding that the “pathologic” aspect of African American culture had to be cured. Moreover, because he did not clearly mention the state’s responsibility and negligence in rectifying the fundamental inequality and racism, he reinforced the belief that it was ultimately up to the individual’s effort whether they could overcome poverty or not.<sup>5)</sup>

While Japanese American intellectuals warned against the use of their success stories as a tool for glorifying individualism, Japanese American experiences of prejudice and discrimination were often incorporated into, and became fundamental parts of, the narrative that championed self-help and effort as the keys to success in American society.<sup>6)</sup> Likewise,

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<sup>3)</sup> Belmonte, *Selling the American Way*, 14.

<sup>4)</sup> See, for example, Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

<sup>5)</sup> For various controversies on the Moynihan Report, see L. Rainwater and W. Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967).

<sup>6)</sup> “Don’t Use Japanese as Models for Negroes, Enomoto Tells Whites,” *New York Nichibei*, 2 Jan. 1969; “Historian Says Japanese Are Becoming ‘Instrument of White Racism,’” *New York Nichibei*, 9 Jan. 1969.

success stories of Yamasaki, Nakashima, and Noguchi became important components of the larger narrative of how Japanese Americans pulled themselves up by their bootstraps; the fact that they had been exceptionally privileged by professional trainings and extensive mobility, which facilitated their career developments, was often left out of view. Their stories of rising from humble beginnings served as a justification for the claim that even those who were racialized and discriminated against could win acceptance into the American nation through their individual endeavor, however marginal and precarious that acceptance might be.

Media representations of the three Nisei men are excellent examples for examining how particular individuals' aspects of lifestyles and works were used to highlight the virtues of the American way of life. They became favorite subjects of national magazines such as *Time*, *Life*, *House & Home*, and *Architectural Forum* for which Henry R. Luce, the fervent nationalist who coined the term the "American Century," served as editor-in-chief. During World War II, Luce had remarked, "Americans had to learn to hate Germans, but hating Japs comes natural—as natural as fighting Indians once was."<sup>7)</sup> Considering his racism against non-whites, the inclusion of the images of the three men and their families in his magazines as representations of the American way of life, which had heretofore been embodied exclusively by white European Americans, indicated a significant shift in global geopolitics as well as in his way of thinking. As Takashi Fujitani argues, Cold War politics required "repositioning Japan and Japanese Americans as global and domestic model minorities" to rationalize American leadership in international relations.<sup>8)</sup> Just like how the story about Japan's transformation from a bellicose totalitarian state to a thriving capitalist hub of Asia under the guidance of Occupation forces allowed the U.S. to emphasize its positive reason for extending power into Asia, representing the Nisei's lives as American models for success served the media mogul's purpose of extolling the benefits of the American way of life to the world.

What was often cropped out of their media representations was the reality that the Nisei men's fame did not actually ensure them the mainstream status and privilege that white middle-class families enjoyed. The Nisei men's lives were greatly influenced—often negatively—by the fact that they were racial minorities, and they never completely accepted the claim that America's purported egalitarian and individualistic principles guaranteed everyone the same benefits and equal opportunity. Using means outside the purview of the mainstream media, such as autobiographies, they communicated racism's impact on their lives as Nisei and questioned the validity of democracy that the U.S. government extolled domestically and internationally.

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<sup>7)</sup> Quoted in Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>8)</sup> Takashi Fujitani, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 236.

## 2. Nisei's Representations of the American Way of Life and Their Racial Consciousness

### (1) Minoru Yamasaki

Minoru Yamasaki was one of the most widely cited Japanese Americans for their success stories. The narrative of him growing up in Seattle's Japanese enclave to become the renowned architect of the World Trade Center in New York in the 1960s was widely disseminated by the media, which helped to promote the understanding that Americans, regardless of their race, enjoyed social mobility. As the Cold War intensified, Yamasaki supported the ideology of American freedom and democracy that supposedly enabled his rise from poverty. However, as an examination of his autobiography reveals, he also pointed out that he had to constantly fight against racism in order to protect his status in American society. He walked a tightrope, balancing his claim for belonging to the American middle class and advocating equal access to freedom and democracy for all, including himself.

Yamasaki was born the first son of a Japanese immigrant couple in Seattle, Washington in 1912. Upon graduating from the University of Washington, he moved to New York and attended New York University from which he received a master's degree in architecture. After working on various architectural projects in New York throughout the war, Yamasaki accepted an offer to become design chief at a Detroit architectural firm in 1945, anticipating opportunities that the growing city had in store for him. Needing a pleasant living environment for himself and his family, Yamasaki looked for a house in Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills, or Grosse Pointe—neighborhoods whose residents were predominantly white upper-class families—where he had designed some homes. However, the local real estate association's discrimination against non-whites prevented him from owning property in any of these neighborhoods. Consequently, Yamasaki settled in a 125-year-old farmhouse in Troy Township on the outskirts of Detroit. Even when U.S.-Japan relations improved drastically, white homeowners were reluctant to allow Japanese in their neighborhoods. The presence of non-whites would depress property values, and although cultural diversity might have become acceptable to some extent, white ethnocentrism was still very prevalent when it came to protecting their traditional privilege and way of life.

As if trying to shake off his disappointment, Yamasaki focused on making the best of the farmhouse. Magazines such as *Architectural Forum* and *House Beautiful* noted Yamasaki's artistry in altering the outmoded farmhouse into a modern abode without distorting the "spirit" of the farmhouse.<sup>9)</sup> Both magazines emphasized the contrast between the Yamasaki residence's unique and modern interior and less assertive exterior that blended in with the trees growing around it. The house successfully fitting into the existing way of life symbolized the Yamasakis' adjustment to the white suburban social landscape. Although the house attracted much attention, it was rarely mentioned that the Yamasakis were forced into it because of

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<sup>9)</sup> "Modernized Farm House," *Architectural Forum* 95 (Dec. 1951): 111-13; "One Glass Wall Made an Old House New," *House Beautiful* (Feb. 1952): 80-81.

housing discrimination.

As his house and other buildings he designed became famous, Yamasaki's extraordinary story of lifting himself out of obscurity captured media attention. A 1958 *Architectural Forum* article titled "American Architect Yamasaki" delineated how he grew up in Seattle where racial prejudice was rife and toiled as a college student at Alaskan salmon canneries during summers in order to finance his education. The article quoted Yamasaki explaining his inferiority complex as a Japanese working in the white-dominated field of architecture: "I felt that something was missing and that I had to keep running after it. But look: everyone has a complex. . . mine was—that I was Japanese."<sup>10)</sup> The author of the article did not engage with Yamasaki's racial consciousness or the problematic fact that he was made to feel inferior because of his ancestry. Instead, the author focused on Yamasaki's transformation from a humble laborer sweated at salmon canneries to a confident and accomplished architect who relaxed on the terrace of his handsome house.<sup>11)</sup> "Seattle and Yamasaki's days of troubled contention are indeed a long way off," declared the author, ignoring Yamasaki's continuous suffering from racism.<sup>12)</sup>

The architect's successful image was further enhanced by the presence of his attractive wife, Teruko. She played an important role in promoting the understanding that the Yamasaki residence represented an ideal domestic space. *USIS Feature* reported, "Animated, alert, outgoing, deeply content with her life as mother and housewife, she serves as balance for her husband's intensity and dedicated absorption in his profession."<sup>13)</sup> The Yamasaki home stood for Cold War American domesticity in which "successful breadwinners and attractive homemakers" played respective gender roles to achieve the wholesomeness of the home.<sup>14)</sup> The *Detroit Free Press* reported that the Yamasaki family led what Teruko called "strictly American" lifestyle, completely assimilated into American culture and society. The article informed readers: "To Americans they look Japanese but they're not. They're contemporary American." Featuring Teruko, the article reported that the "typical American housewife" and former Julliard student had never been to Japan, "[n]ever made a silk screen scroll—doesn't know a thing about growing flowers and doesn't crawl into the woodwork when the man of the house comes home." In the context of the article, Japan was constructed as a land where strong patriarchy prohibited Japanese women from becoming modern and independent, and in turn, America was defined as antithesis to that backwardness. The article also stated that "in their wide circle of friends there are no Japanese-Americans," masking the fact that the

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<sup>10)</sup> Russell Bourne, "American Architect Yamasaki," *Architectural Forum* 109, no. 2 (Aug. 1958): 85.

<sup>11)</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-85.

<sup>12)</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>13)</sup> *USIS Feature* (undated). "Minoru Yamasaki Papers," Box 1, Folder 12, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University (hereafter referred to as ALUA-WSU).

<sup>14)</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 21.

Yamasakis had been involved in Japanese American organizations during the war and now the husband was a Detroit Japanese American Citizens League chapter member.<sup>15)</sup> In the mainstream American discourse, the Yamasakis' success in American society was linked with their presumed distance from and indifference to Japanese people and customs. Even though Japanese architectural ideas found a way into Detroit's suburb, its door was tightly closed to potential mass migration of any racial minorities. As if to wipe away any anxiety about an unwelcome group of resettlers that might come in the future, the newspaper assured its audience that the Yamasaki family was thoroughly Americanized and that they were independent from Japanese American communities.

The favorable media portrayal of the couple did not ensure their real-life happiness. The increased media attention brought more work to Minoru, and he spent less and less time with Teruko. They fell out with each other and got a divorce in 1961. While Minoru married two other women after he parted from Teruko, she did not commit herself to long-term relationships with other men. She started teaching piano, and the number of students soon grew to fifty. When Minoru and Teruko remarried in 1969, Teruko cut down on her work as a piano teacher in order to prioritize her role at home, which Minoru had requested in their first marriage. In the media, Teruko was portrayed as a faithful and devoted housewife who tolerated her husband's caprice despite the fact that she was a talented pianist and could choose another life course without being subservient to her husband. Remarrying Minoru, Teruko was reported to have declared, "I will try to be more of a Japanese wife."<sup>16)</sup> Her words suggested that a woman becoming too independent and modern might topple the balance and order of the home and that traditional Japanese femininity might be useful in constructing a good relationship with the husband. Her emphasis on Japanese femininity was reminiscent of the ways in which contemporary filmic narratives portrayed the Japanese woman. Gina Marchetti argues that films such as *Teahouse of the August Moon* (1956) and *Sayonara* (1957) "used the myth of the subservient Japanese woman to shore up a threatened masculinity in light of American women's growing independence during World War II."<sup>17)</sup> Teruko's comment was similarly used to implicitly discredit contemporary American feminism, which sought to improve the social position of women. In contrast to how Teruko evoked her potential Japaneseness and femininity to be a better wife, Minoru, who declared that he was "just going to be nicer to her," implicitly distinguished himself from stereotypical Japanese male chauvinism and thereby emphasized his Americanness and gentle manliness.<sup>18)</sup>

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<sup>15)</sup> Pauline Sterling, "Mrs. Yamasaki...: A Modern Design," *Detroit Free Press*, 20 Sept. 1959. "Minoru Yamasaki Papers," Box 31, Scrapbook 2, ALUA-WSU.

<sup>16)</sup> Eleanor Breitmeyer, "Social Scene: Yamasaki, First Wife Remarried," *Detroit News*, 31 July 1969. "Minoru Yamasaki Papers," Box 2, Folder 4, ALUA-WSU.

<sup>17)</sup> Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 158.

<sup>18)</sup> Breitmeyer, "Social Scene."

Yamasaki's stature reached its height when he received a commission to design the World Trade Center in 1962. Upon his selection as the architect for this grand project, Yamasaki appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine, which carried an article that extensively discussed his life and architectural projects. The article described the anti-Japanese discrimination that affected Yamasaki and other Nisei Seattleites before the war, but quickly assured its audience that "there was little bitterness among the Japanese-Americans."<sup>19)</sup> The author buttressed the claim by quoting Yamasaki's own comment: "A word that I heard over and over again whenever there would be an incident or a slight was *shikataganai*, which means 'it can't be helped.'"<sup>20)</sup> Foregrounding endurance and keeping the issue of discrimination in the background, the article emphasized Yamasaki's characteristics as a model minority and promoted the understanding that patience, rather than vocal resistance, was the way to success.

The article's treatment of Yamasaki's experience in housing discrimination reflected the author's careful choice of words in dealing with the controversial issue of racial restrictive covenants, which was facing fierce challenges from Asian Americans and African Americans among others.<sup>21)</sup> The article used a euphemistic language in narrating the incident:

A few years ago, when his income had begun to swell, Yamasaki started looking for a larger house for his family, in either Birmingham or Grosse Pointe. But he soon found that even though he is one of Detroit's most famous citizens, he is also a Nisei and therefore still partly an outsider. His real estate broker told him, "I can't get you a house in either suburb, Yama [Yamasaki's nickname]. But I know of a fine old farmhouse in Troy which you can have." Yamasaki liked the 136-year old farmhouse, and he lives there to this day.<sup>22)</sup>

The author circumvented the issue of Yamasaki's exclusion from the residential districts of white upper-class suburbanites and went on to describe how Yamasaki made the old farmhouse into a serene space with Japanese-style gardens. Rather than delving into the problematic racist incident, the author painted a picture of a satisfied Japanese American man who lived in the old farmhouse that he "liked" and never complained about the unjust treatment or challenged the status quo. An implied lesson to be learned here was that knowing his place in society and accepting the established rules were sometimes necessary for an "outsider"—someone who is not considered to be a mainstream American—to live a peaceful life.

The year after his appearance on the cover of *Time* magazine, Yamasaki, along with Pearl

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<sup>19)</sup> "The Road to Xanadu," *Time*, 18 Jan. 1963, 61.

<sup>20)</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21)</sup> Cindy I-Fen Cheng, *Citizens of Asian America: Democracy and Race during the Cold War* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>22)</sup> "The Road to Xanadu," 64.



S. Buck and eight other prominent Americans, received the 18<sup>th</sup> annual Horatio Alger Award from the American Schools and Colleges Association. Over three thousand educators in colleges and universities throughout the country cast their ballots to choose the winners who “rose to success under the traditional free enterprise system” by taking advantage of the “equal opportunity that enable a youth to overcome humble beginnings and achieve success through work and determinism.”<sup>23)</sup> The dedication of the award to Yamasaki indicated that his life story of rising from a slum to become a sought-after architect epitomized the American dream. As he gained prominence as the first Japanese American man of great influence in the American architectural world, Yamasaki became an icon of racial equality and meritocracy.

While Yamasaki established his fame as a Japanese American Horatio Alger, he did not completely buy into the claim that democracy was uniformly achieved for Americans. His own memoir on constantly fighting against racism serves as the best example that demonstrated his understanding that racial minorities were continually exposed to unreasonable treatments in U.S. society. A large portion of his 1979 autobiography is dedicated to explaining what he had to go through as a Japanese American youth. His biographical sketch starts with his humble beginning and bitter memories of his childhood; as a Nisei boy, he was rejected at the gates of public pools and mistreated at theaters. Racism haunted him after he left Seattle for New York and escalated when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Yamasaki “was very carefully checked by the FBI, the Navy, and the Army” as his main job at that time happened to be designing defense facilities of the Sampson Naval Station in Geneva, New York.<sup>24)</sup> He realized that even though New York was more “cosmopolitan” than Seattle, racial prejudice was not nonexistent. He listed the incidents he encountered while living in New York: a woman suspected that he was a spy and reported to a policeman; a guard at a security station would not let him go because he was Japanese; he was bluntly refused to rent one of the apartments which he had designed. One of the most unpleasant experiences happened on the subway:

One evening a man said to me, “What are you, Chinese or Jap?” I told him it was none of his business, whereupon he grabbed my collar and pulled out a badge of some sort. I said to him, “Take your hands off me, I’m an American citizen.” He let go and ran off the train at the next stop.<sup>25)</sup>

This happened at the time when *Time* and *Life* magazines published articles on “How to Tell Your Friends from the Japs.”<sup>26)</sup> As Ellen D. Wu mentions, “The wartime rivalry between the

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<sup>23)</sup> “Architect Yamasaki Wins ’64 Horatio Alger Award,” *Detroit News*, 17 Apr. 1964; “Horatio Alger Awards Go to Autry, Thornton,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 May 1964.

<sup>24)</sup> Minoru Yamasaki, *A Life in Architecture* (New York: Weatherhill, 1979), 19-20.

<sup>25)</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26)</sup> “How to Tell Your Friends from the Japs,” *Time*, 22 Dec. 1941, 33; “How to Tell Japs from the Chinese,” *Life*, 22 Dec. 1941, 81-82.

United States and Japan along with the concurrent US-China alliance thus obliged the state's and society's divergent treatment of Japanese and Chinese Americans."<sup>27)</sup> When the American public was inculcated with essentializing notions about race and ethnicity, there was not much one could do to counteract the discursive power of othering besides asserting his/her American citizenship.

All these instances of prejudice led him to declare: "I am a firm believer that all people, whatever their color, race, or creed, should be recognized for their character and for their contributions to society."<sup>28)</sup> In magazines such as *Time* and *Architectural Forum*, whose main audiences were white Americans, his encounter with racism was turned into an anecdote for his success story. When the U.S. eagerly advocated its democracy to the world, a Japanese American man's suffering of racism was not a savory topic that would attract a wide range of readers. Yamasaki therefore did not have an opportunity to discuss the negative experiences as much as he might have wanted to at the height of the Cold War. In 1979, at the last stage of his life and career, Yamasaki was finally able to write an autobiography and use it as a space to delineate his firsthand experiences as a victim of blunt racism and his belief in a more egalitarian and multicultural U.S.

## (2) George Nakashima

"Today, in a world of mechanization that separates man's home from his work place, Nakashima is admired not only for his unsurpassed craftsmanship, but also for his independent way of life."<sup>29)</sup> George Nakashima was thus described in a 1959 *Look* magazine article. In rebuilding his home, work, and life after being released from the Minidoka camp, he "was portrayed in the press as a heroic spirit emerging from the ashes of an internment camp" and "as a powerfully creative genius, quietly working alone in his workshop," which emphasized his self-reliance, diligence, individualism, and creativity—important elements for success in the capitalist world—under challenging circumstances.<sup>30)</sup> The narrative about Nakashima's successful transformation from a detainee, lumped together with potential subversives, to a model citizen in a white community became an important component of the image of the U.S. as a democratic state that ensured a good life to its loyal subjects. However, Nakashima did not conform to the smooth story of redemptive democracy as a signifier of the country's tolerance for difference. Nakashima was critical of the state's decision to incarcerate a group of people based solely on their race. While the mainstream media did not delve into Nakashima's wartime experience, *Maryknoll*, the magazine published by a Catholic denomination which

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<sup>27)</sup> Wu, *The Color of Success*, 12.

<sup>28)</sup> Yamasaki, *A Life in Architecture*, 11.

<sup>29)</sup> John Peter, "Nakashima and Son," *Look* (Apr. 1959), 70. "George Nakashima Papers, 1950-1991," Magazine Clippings, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>30)</sup> Mira Nakashima, *Nature, Form, and Spirit: The Life and Legacy of George Nakashima* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003), 211.

had a significant number of followers among Japanese Americans, covered its critical impact on his life. Later, Nakashima presented a short but sharp criticism on the incarceration in his autobiography.

Nakashima was born to a Japanese immigrant couple in Spokane, Washington in 1905. Encouraged by his parents, he enrolled at the University of Washington and studied forestry and architecture. After receiving a master's degree in architecture from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he worked in New York, France, Japan, and India before returning to the U.S. in 1941. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and Executive Order 9066 was declared to forcibly remove all residents of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast, George, his wife Marion, and their newborn daughter who then lived in Seattle were sent to the Minidoka camp in Idaho administered by the War Relocation Authority (hereafter referred to as WRA). Although the incarceration was a traumatic and humiliating experience, the camp provided him with an opportunity to work closely with a well-trained Japanese carpenter on the project of building model rooms for detainees to give their lives some level of comfort and dignity. The skills of wood joinery and the use of Japanese hand tools that the carpenter passed down to him became important assets for Nakashima who had lost much of his possessions as a result of the incarceration.<sup>31)</sup>

His post-incarceration experience of establishing woodworking as an independent means of living attracted considerable attention from WRA authorities. Nakashima was among a small group of detainees who were able to take advantage of the WRA's resettlement policy to leave the camp before the termination of the incarceration program. Within a couple of months after incarcerating residents of Japanese ancestry, WRA officials as well as Japanese American opinion leaders started to think that loyal Japanese Americans should be released so that they could resettle in the Eastern parts of the U.S. and engage in productive activities rather than being confined and idle in the camps. Those who were able to "secure an outside sponsor, furnish proof of employment or education, and submit themselves to FBI background checks" could apply for leave clearance.<sup>32)</sup> Most of those who were willing to move to places where few other Japanese Americans resided were middle-class Nisei whose first language was English and "who were most open, psychologically and emotionally, to reducing—if not cutting—their ties to the ethnic community."<sup>33)</sup> Thanks to the efforts of Nakashima's former boss Antonin Raymond, his wife, and other supporters who petitioned for the Nakashima family's release, they were able to leave the camp in May 1943. The petitioners attested that the Nakashimas had never been associated with the Japanese before the war and were very well assimilated into the white community, which must have influenced the WRA's decision

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<sup>31)</sup> George Nakashima, *The Soul of a Tree* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1981), 69.

<sup>32)</sup> Megan Asaka, "Resettlement," *Densho Encyclopedia*, accessed 21 Aug. 2014, <http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Resettlement/>.

<sup>33)</sup> Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, *Japanese American Resettlement through the Lens: Hikaru Iwasaki and the WRA's Photographic Section, 1943-1945* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2009), xviii.

to categorize them as loyal Americans and qualify them for release.<sup>34)</sup> The Nakashimas' resettlement in New Hope, Pennsylvania went smoothly as the petitioners had assured. The family's relocation was such a great example of what WRA officials intended for all the resettlers that they recorded his way of life with photographs of Nakashima working on his furniture, teaching his daughter how to use hand tools, and preparing a meal with his wife, and therefore portraying Nakashima as a happy, successful, and independent family man. The Nakashimas in the WRA photos exhibited middle-class family values based on strictly defined gender roles. The father produced furniture to earn a living and provide a comfortable living environment for the family; the mother worked joyfully in the kitchen, sometimes getting help from her husband. The house's interior also conformed to the norms of a regular American home, with a Western style light, fireplace, and bed, except that there were rice bowls and chopsticks on a dining table. The family members wore Western attire and shoes in the house. All these signifiers of Americanness convinced WRA authorities that the Nakashimas could be presented as the exemplary figures for other Japanese American resettlers who needed to be assimilated into larger society.<sup>35)</sup>

When the Museum of Modern Art exhibited his work in 1951 and the American Institute of Architects awarded him a craftsmanship gold medal in 1952, Nakashima attracted attention from popular magazines such as *House & Home*, *Life*, and *Look*, which featured Nakashima's home that he built for himself and his family and his ability in assimilating into the local community, keeping the family united, and surviving independently and creatively through the mechanical age. A *House & Home* article complimented the Nakashima home on being unique yet artfully blending into New Hope's landscape. Nakashima's use of indigenous wood for the house and furniture symbolized the family's adjustment to the local—predominantly white—social landscape, as opposed to transplanting a foreign custom to the host society. The article mentioned that Nakashima's "product and his way of life" had a Japanese flavor but were "still more like New Hope's old ways."<sup>36)</sup> The author commended Nakashima for using Japanese ideas as supplemental elements in his work and living, which did not pose any threat to the existing cultural order of New Hope.

The images of the Nakashima home were filled with signs of the family's strong unity and pleasant life, which were in line with the values of American domesticity. The bond of the Nakashimas was represented by the living room's fireplace, "the symbol of the home."<sup>37)</sup> *Look* magazine pictured the Nakashima family sitting intimately by the fireplace and sharing

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<sup>34)</sup> June Mott, letter, undated; Mabel Martin Jones, letter, 30 Sept. 1942. Individual File, "Nakashima, George Katsutoshi," National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>35)</sup> "War Relocation Authority Photographs of Japanese-American Evacuation and Resettlement," no. G-868 through G-880, Series 12: Relocation: New Homes, etc. (Various Places), Volume 40, Section E, Japanese American Relocation Digital Archives, accessed 20 Nov. 2014, <http://www.calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu/jarda/>.

<sup>36)</sup> "George Nakashima's Furniture, House, and Way of Life," *House and Home* 1, no. 3 (Mar. 1952), 81.

<sup>37)</sup> "New Forms for Fireplaces," *Life*, 7 Dec. 1953, 139.

food.<sup>38)</sup> The image framed the Nakashima home as a place where the Cold War ideal of the nuclear, heterosexual family was embodied; the father provided meat and potatoes to his family and the mother assisted him in nurturing the children. Although their experiences of going into the camp, resettling in a foreign place, and building their house—all from scratch—were markedly different from what the typical American way of life was about, the images of the happy Nakashima family constructed and promoted the understanding that the Japanese Americans enjoyed the American way of life as a reward for being loyal and hardworking.

A *Look* magazine article, titled “Nakashima and Son,” not only highlighted Nakashima’s leadership as the family head but also portrayed him as an exemplary father who could teach important woodworking skills to his heirs so that they had a means of living independently and creatively. The article emphasized the bond between the two males in the family and how the fine woodworking skills were to be transmitted from the father to the son. Nakashima embodied an ideal Japanese American breadwinner who established a stable family and taught the next generation the importance of self-help and diligence. This association between the Japanese American man and strong fatherhood is significant when seen in the context in which contemporary African American men were characterized as irresponsible and absent from home, resulting in the problematic description of African American family structure in the 1965 Moynihan Report. The *Look* magazine article implied that Japanese American men, who were emasculated and demeaned by the incarceration as enemy aliens, regained autonomy as American citizens through sheer hard work. In this way, the story of Nakashima’s search for an independent way of life and work was woven into the narrative of individualism and equal opportunity for success.

Nakashima, however, would not have accepted such a narrative uncritically. He was well aware of the state’s violation of individual liberty and racism that denigrated his dignity during World War II. One of the instances where Nakashima’s hard stand against racism manifested itself was a 1960 *Maryknoll* magazine article in which he was featured as a prospective architect for a church to be built in Japan. The main audience of *Maryknoll* magazine was its followers, thus the magazine had relatively more freedom in deciding what to say about Nakashima and his experiences compared to mainstream magazines that targeted larger audiences and had a number of interested parties involved in judging what can be included on their pages. While Nakashima’s expressions about his wartime experience in the *Maryknoll* article were rendered somewhat less critical, probably due to the magazine’s main purpose of telling stories of redemption, it is still possible to read between the lines to discover Nakashima’s voice that pointed out the state’s wrongdoing. Nakashima said that his life was “comparable to that of a tree planted in desert sand, subjected to a variety of elements, and finally transplanted to a soil and climate intended by God.”<sup>39)</sup> The metaphor of Nakashima as

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<sup>38)</sup> Peter, “Nakashima and Son,” 70.

<sup>39)</sup> Joseph M. M. Michenfelder, “George Nakashima: Artist in Wood,” *Maryknoll* (Mar. 1960), 5. “George Nakashima Collection,” Box 9, James A. Michener Art Museum Library & Archives, Doylestown, P.A.

a tree planted in desert, subjected to harsh conditions, is evocative of the image of Nakashima going through various adversities—including anti-Japanese sentiment and incarceration—for which he was a vulnerable target. Moreover, the desert is suggestive of the Minidoka camp and the barren land on which it stood, where he was confined during World War II. Nakashima described that the incarceration was humiliating, as he had to live in a large, “dirt-floored cattle barn.”<sup>40)</sup> He emphasized the inhumane living conditions in the camp, whose huge barracks were barely partitioned with thin veneers to give minimum privacy to the detainees. Having gone through these difficulties, Nakashima empathized with his employees who were European war refugees. He mentioned, “I hired them because. . . like me, they were searching for a way of life that would not destroy human dignity.”<sup>41)</sup> He and his employees shared the experience of being disfranchised and were in the same boat searching for an independent way of living in a society where individual agency could be easily nullified by the state.

Nakashima’s 1981 autobiography provided a space for him to express his resentment against the incarceration more strongly than he did in *Maryknoll* magazine:

Pearl Harbor broke, and all of us of Japanese descent were put in concentration camps. My wife and I and our newly born daughter were sent to a camp in Idaho. This I felt at the time was a stupid, insensitive act, one by which my country could only hurt itself. It was a policy of unthinking racism. Even Eskimos with only a small percentage of Japanese blood were sent to the Western desert to die.<sup>42)</sup>

The use of the term “concentration camp,” rather than a more euphemistic “internment camp,” suggests that Nakashima associated the U.S. government’s treatment of its citizens of Japanese ancestry with the Nazis’ persecution of the Jews. The indictment that the U.S. government’s decision to incarcerate Japanese Americans was only to “hurt itself” pointed to the contradiction in what the government did and what it preached; while the U.S. sharply criticized the racism of the totalitarian states of Germany and Japan, the U.S. could not let go of its own prejudice against people of color. The “unthinking racism,” which was based solely on blood, found its historical precedent in the “one blood policy” applied to African Americans in negating their human rights. Through this short but profound commentary, Nakashima put forth his unequivocal assertion that the incarceration was based on racism and was not justifiable in any way.

Nakashima mounted a branch of bitterbrush from the camp on the wall of his workshop as a reminder of the hardship he was forced to go through.<sup>43)</sup> Keeping this piece of wood from

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<sup>40)</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>41)</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>42)</sup> Nakashima, *The Soul*, 69-70.

<sup>43)</sup> Julie V. Iovine, “George Nakashima,” in *Modern Americana: Studio Furniture from High Craft to High Glam*, eds. Todd Merrill and Julie V. Iovine (New York: Rizzoli, 2008), 126.

Minidoka symbolized his long-held indignation against the U.S. government's decision to incarcerate Japanese Americans. Nakashima's choice to lead an isolated life of woodworking in the countryside can be seen as a form of protest against the ruthless society that labeled a group of citizens and immigrants as enemies and locked them up. However, journalists and artists who visited his workshop and wrote about it rarely discussed his critical eye toward the society and the state. What was frequently mentioned instead was his untiring effort and self-discipline, which enabled his successful comeback from almost nothing after the camp.

### (3) Isamu Noguchi

Because of his hybrid racial and cultural background, Noguchi and people around him believed that he was uniquely entitled to preach the American way of life and democracy to the Japanese. Noguchi believed in the importance of America's role in reconnecting Japan with the international community in the wake of World War II, but it did not mean that he supported American democracy unconditionally. Through his art, Noguchi criticized how the U.S. government failed to ensure democracy for Japanese American citizens during the war.

Noguchi was born the illegitimate child of Japanese poet Yonejiro Noguchi and Caucasian American Leonie Gilmour in 1904. He spent his childhood in Japan and was later trained as an artist in the U.S. and Europe. By the end of the 1920s, Noguchi had established his stature as an up-and-coming sculptor in New York. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, he felt obliged to take some action. "With a flash I realized I was no longer the sculptor alone," Noguchi stated in his autobiography, "I was not just American but Nisei. A Japanese-American."<sup>44</sup> Joining hands with West Coast Nisei intellectuals and artists, Noguchi organized the Nisei Writers' and Artists' Mobilization for Democracy, which advocated the loyalty of Japanese Americans and sought to refute the proposal of their mass incarceration. When the mobilization could not prevent the incarceration, Noguchi voluntarily entered the Poston camp in Arizona to direct an arts and crafts program for the detainees as a part of the WRA's project of "democratizing" Japanese Americans and making them assimilable to white American society.<sup>45</sup> However, he left Poston after several months of self-incarceration. Noguchi, who identified with liberal middle-class Japanese Americans involved in the Nisei Writers' and Artists' Mobilization for Democracy, failed to see a common goal with other detainees who seemed to be "completely un-intellectual [*sic*], and with little apparent interest in the policies or politics of democracy."<sup>46</sup> Not only his political inclination but also his mixed-racial heritage posed challenges for Noguchi in becoming a member of the camp community. His Caucasian features such as large blue eyes made the detainees think of him as a part of camp

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<sup>44</sup> Isamu Noguchi, *A Sculptor's World* (London, Thames & Hudson, 1967), 25.

<sup>45</sup> Brian Masaru Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy: The Japanese American Internment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Masayo Duus, *The Life of Isamu Noguchi: Journey without Borders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 171.

administrators or their spy.<sup>47)</sup> Many signs of dissonance between him and the detainees led him to abandon the goal of building a cooperative community he had set upon entering the camp.

While his mixed-race background hampered his acceptance into Poston's Japanese American community, his hybridity was interpreted as a positive embodiment of multicultural American democracy in the context of the art world. In 1946, Noguchi was selected as one of the fourteen Americans to exhibit at a Museum of Modern Art show titled *Fourteen Americans*. In an *Art News* review of the exhibit, Thomas B. Hess discussed Noguchi's hybrid identity extensively, declaring that Noguchi "has fused in his art the East and the West as they were fused in his body."<sup>48)</sup> The article carried an old picture of young Noguchi dressed in kendo fencing gear, "star[ing] mournfully from behind a wooden mask with his intricate padding and wooden sword [and] stand[ing] barefooted in the pose of an ancient warrior."<sup>49)</sup> Art historian Amy Lyford argues that Hess underscored Noguchi's transformation from a mournful "Japanese" child who looked as if he was confined in an old, rigid culture to an "American" artist who enjoyed the freedom of expressing his hybrid identity through art.<sup>50)</sup> Hess celebrated "cultural fusion," an example of which was embodied in Noguchi's work and in himself, "as the future of postwar democratic culture in the United States."<sup>51)</sup> Hess's account of Noguchi as a mediator of East and West was influential—so much so that it defined the way in which Noguchi was hereafter characterized in the context of art history.<sup>52)</sup>

A reviewer for *View*, while not as enthusiastic as Hess, admitted the importance of Noguchi's work in the exhibit. In his review titled "Fourteen Minus One," Parker Tyler mentioned:

A striking and not too encouraging aspect of the show is that the best exhibitor is Isamu Noguchi, whose nationality is boldly crossed, as his name attests, with the Japanese. Happily, Noguchi's American birth made it possible (if not inevitable) that he live in the United States with its relative freedom of conditions for the artist. America as a land of good working conditions for the artist is probably the objective really aimed at by the show.<sup>53)</sup>

The article's title indicated the "irony" Tyler felt—he was clearly ambivalent about the hybrid artist stealing the show dedicated to fourteen *Americans*. Admitting that Noguchi was the best

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<sup>47)</sup> *Ibid.*, 171-72.

<sup>48)</sup> Thomas B. Hess, "Isamu Noguchi '46," *Art News* (Sep. 1946): 34.

<sup>49)</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50)</sup> Amy Lyford, *Isamu Noguchi's Modernism: Negotiating Race, Labor, and Nation, 1930-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 164.

<sup>51)</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52)</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>53)</sup> Parker Tyler, "Fourteen Minus One," *View* (Fall 1946): 35.



exhibitor in the show, Tyler also keenly pointed out that Noguchi's inclusion in the exhibit served as a form of propaganda that conveyed the message that freedom, democracy, and the opportunity to become successful were ensured to even an artist whose national identity spanned across the U.S. and its former enemy. For Tyler, Noguchi's belonging to America was not unconditional; Noguchi could choose his father's country, Japan, as his home and thus differed from other Americans who were "inevitably" American. Tyler's understanding conflicted with Hess's, who regarded hybridity as a quintessential American symbolism. Nonetheless, Tyler shared the view with Hess that Noguchi played an important role in highlighting America's freedom and tolerance toward differences.

While Noguchi's hybridity had been a frequent target of hostility in the prewar period,<sup>54)</sup> few Americans expressed negative sentiment about it publicly in the postwar era. Many journalists reported favorably on Noguchi's "inherent" ability in understanding both East and West and hoped that Noguchi, who was liberated by American art himself, could now act as an ambassador for Japan's postwar democratization. Noguchi's marriage to Yoshiko "Shirley" Yamaguchi, one of Japan's top actresses, best demonstrated Noguchi's symbolic role in acting as a bridge of understanding between East and West and in expanding U.S. influence to the former enemy nation. Naoko Shibusawa argues that in convincing the American public to "accept an alliance with Japan so quickly after the brutal war" to prevent Japan from falling into Communist hands, the image of feminine, vulnerable, and loyal Japanese women "helped to chip away at the wartime stereotype of brutal Japanese soldiers" and to emphasize the necessity of extending America's paternal support to the victims of the war.<sup>55)</sup> The marriage of Noguchi and Yamaguchi was symbolic of postwar U.S.-Japan relations: the patriarchal U.S. escorting feminized Japan to the modern, democratic, and capitalist world.

A 1952 *Time* magazine article shows how this figurative meaning of Noguchi's relationship with Yamaguchi in post-Occupation Japan played out in the media. At the beginning of the article, the author characterized Yamaguchi as a woman who was susceptible to American influence and interested in learning "how to kiss" in American style so that she could become a better actress.<sup>56)</sup> The article emphasized Yamaguchi's femininity, trainability, and eagerness to learn American culture and designated Noguchi as her guide. The author noted that the two "made a good team," as "Noguchi started spreading his modern ideas with lots of help from his wife." The "modern ideas" that Noguchi introduced included the Westernization of traditional Japanese clothing. The article reported,

he takes familiar objects and gives them an up-to-date twist. Instead of bulky old-style kimonos, Shirley wears formfitting, Noguchi-designed robes with Zipper fasteners.

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<sup>54)</sup> For examples of racist remarks on Noguchi and his works, see Amy Lyford, "Noguchi, Sculptural Abstraction, and the Politics of Japanese American Internment," *Art Bulletin* 85, no. 1 (Mar. 2003): 137-54.

<sup>55)</sup> Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally*, 4, 14.

<sup>56)</sup> "Isamu-san & Shirley Too," *Time*, 3 Nov. 1952, 78.

. . . Says Noguchi: “Tradition is all well and fine, but it must be adapted to modern times.”<sup>57)</sup>

The modern-style kimono that Noguchi designed provided Japanese women with a way to look beautiful without conforming to traditions and sacrificing practicality. Noguchi showed how traditional ways of Japan could be adapted to modernity and how Japanese women could become modernized with the help of Americans. A reporter for the *New York Times* similarly alluded to Noguchi’s role in “liberating” Yamaguchi and others from the old Japanese way of life which Japanese men had tried to protect against Western influence. The reporter commented, “Her delighted curiosity, her deep respect for serious creative art and her sense of being liberated into the international world are perhaps symbolic of her whole generation.”<sup>58)</sup> Using the image of Yamaguchi who was married to and “liberated” by Noguchi, American magazines and newspapers crafted a story of Noguchi representing and preaching American democracy and modernity in Japan. Although Noguchi and Yamaguchi were together only for four years, their image as a happily-married couple was interpreted as an epitome of postwar U.S.-Japan relations in the minds of those who believed in the virtues of America’s democratizing crusade in Japan. In this narrative, the unequal power balance between Noguchi and Yamaguchi with the former exerting his influence over the latter, which was symbolic of America’s dominance over Japanese society and landscape, rarely came to the surface.

While he represented the democratic influence in postwar Japan, Noguchi did question the meaning of democracy at times, especially when it came to the U.S. government’s treatment of Japanese American citizens during World War II. The concept of American democracy was fundamentally shaken when the U.S. government labeled Japanese Americans as enemy aliens, a judgment that was based solely on race. When the incarceration order was declared, Noguchi at first believed that he could be of help for detainees in constructing an ideal community in the camp and showcasing that even in an ad hoc community Japanese Americans were able to live democratically, thereby asserting their legitimacy as American citizens. Noguchi sympathized with John Collier, the head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs who arranged Noguchi’s stay at the Poston camp and declared, “Though democracy perish [*sic*] outside, here [in the camp] would be kept its seeds.”<sup>59)</sup> However, Noguchi recounted later that he soon became disillusioned with the vision of creating a “democratic” community “by locking people up.”<sup>60)</sup> Noguchi was keenly aware of the racial prejudice behind the stated goal of the incarceration.

During his incarceration and after, Noguchi developed a series of artwork using light, titled *Akari* [“light” in Japanese], which critically reflected his sense of being confined in the

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<sup>57)</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58)</sup> Aline B. Louchheim, “Noguchi and ‘Sculptured Gardens,’” *New York Times*, 30 Sep. 1951.

<sup>59)</sup> Noguchi, *A Sculptor’s World*, 25.

<sup>60)</sup> Isamu Noguchi, interview with Kazue Kobata, 1986, 7, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation, Long Island, N.Y.

camp. He mentioned to the leading Japanese art magazine *Geijutsu shincho* in 1954 that *Akari* was inspired with his “dark prison-like life at the relocation camp at Poston” and his longing for “a brighter world.” The work stood for his desire “to free the dark world with *akari*.”<sup>61)</sup> This statement was indicative of not only his belief in a freer world but also his protest against the U.S. government’s power that took away Japanese Americans’ liberty in the name of democracy. In contemporary American magazines in which *Akari* was featured, there was no mention of this critical thought that the product was imbued with, and the discussion was almost exclusively focused on the harmonization of Eastern tradition and modern Western abstraction realized in *Akari*.<sup>62)</sup> It is not clear whether Noguchi chose not to talk to American reporters about how the bitterness of the incarceration experience inspired him with the idea for *Akari*, but the absence of this story in the contemporary American media indicates their depoliticization of Noguchi. Instead of discussing the underlying concept of *Akari* that questioned the state’s ability in protecting the well-being of its people, the American media focused exclusively on the aesthetic quality of the work, thereby avoiding political debates that it could have raised.

Although Noguchi’s symbolic role as an East-West bridge worked to his advantage in emphasizing his uniqueness in the American art world, it also made Noguchi uncertain about his national belonging. He raised this issue in his autobiography:

With my double nationality and double upbringing, where was my home? Where my affections? Where my identity? Japan or America, either, both—or the world? . . . I find myself a wanderer in a world rapidly growing smaller. Artist, American citizen, world citizen, belonging anywhere but nowhere.<sup>63)</sup>

This statement reflects his struggle of not being accepted as a legitimate American (by a reviewer of the *Fourteen American* show) or Japanese American (by the Poston Japanese American community). Regardless of his precariousness, the media overwhelmingly represented him as a successful, exemplary figure in promoting multiculturalism in the U.S. and extending democracy to Japan.

## Conclusion

*Time, Life, House & Home, Architectural Forum*, and other magazines on art and lifestyle

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<sup>61)</sup> Translated and quoted in Duus, *The Life of Isamu Noguchi*, 183; Isamu Noguchi, “Akari,” *Geijutsu shincho* 5 (Aug. 1954): 194.

<sup>62)</sup> “New Shapes for Lighting: Sculptor’s Lamps Are Dim, Decorative,” *Life*, 10 Mar. 1952: 114-15, 117; “New Lamps from the Old World,” *House and Home* (Apr. 1952): 148; “Noguchi in Kitakamura [sic],” *Interiors* 112 (Nov. 1952): 117-20, 171, 172.

<sup>63)</sup> Noguchi, *A Sculptor’s World*, 11, 39.

fondly narrated the stories of the three Nisei's remarkable transformation from the racially stigmatized to some of the most successful American cultural producers. At a time when the U.S. propagated its cultural and racial diversity to the world, Yamasaki, Nakashima, and Noguchi effectively represented the new faces of postwar America—racial minorities who, through their untiring efforts, achieved success and access to the American way of life. The American media celebrated these Nisei's postwar lives and works that exhibited the values of the freedom of expression and individualism that American democracy was supposed to ensure for its loyal subjects. The Nisei men did not necessarily concur with the idea that American democracy has always benefitted them, because they had experienced the nation's undemocratic hostility firsthand. But their critical views on racism rarely made it onto the pages of popular magazines in the 1950s and 1960s. Like many other Nisei, they might have avoided raising the issue of racism in front of American journalists for fear that evoking the memory of anti-Japanese sentiment could rekindle prejudice and obstruct the recovery of their social status; or they might have been simply unable to bring up the issue vis-à-vis powerful interest groups in the publishing industry. Either way, the dominant discourse of the media at that time allowed little room for them to express themselves freely. It was not until the 1970s and 1980s when the socio-political climate was more tolerant of minority movements that the Nisei artists/architects were able to openly discuss their wartime experiences.