

UC Riverside

UC Riverside Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Marking Asian American Time: Community Archives and the Asian American Drum and Bugle Corps Tradition

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7vc6t8g6>

ISBN

9798189264993

Author

Huxtable, Nathan

Publication Date

2026-05-05

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Marking Asian American Time: Community Archives and the Asian American Drum and
Bugle Corps Tradition

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

by

Nathan R. Huxtable

June 2026

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Deborah Wong, Chairperson

Dr. Jonathan Ritter

Dr. Catherine Gudis

Copyright by
Nathan R. Huxtable
2026

The Dissertation of Nathan R. Huxtable is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

Acknowledgements

This project is about, at its core, the Asian American drum corps communities who have shaped over a hundred years of musical tradition and performance practice. Without the care and support of countless individuals from the Sacramento Mandarins, Nisei Ambassadors, L.A. Imperial Dragons, and Koyasan Boy Scouts, none of this endeavor would be possible. Special gratitude must be delivered to Daniel Fong, Jim Tabuchi, J.W. Koester, Scott Jow, Joseph Khalifa, Terry Nakagawa, Dean Rolando, and Linda Ching-Ikiri. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart for guiding me. Thank you too all performers past, present, and future of these ensembles for insisting that Asian American music *is* US American music.

I cannot thank my committee members enough for the insights, questions, and critiques that turned the seed of this research project into a reality. Thank you to Dr. Deborah Wong, Dr. Jonathan Ritter, and Dr. Catherine Gudis for their continued, unwavering support through years of seminars, meetings, and personal conversations. Special thanks are warranted for Dr. Eric Hung, Dr. Nancy Rao, and Dr. Susan Asai, both for their productive questions and for their engaged interest in a project on Asian American military music-making.

In a dissertation about community archives, archivists and community historians played an essential role in providing resources and information. Thank you to Kristen Hayashi and Jaime Hendricks of the Japanese American National Museum, Eugene Moy of the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, Stuart Walthall of the Locke Historical Society, Lynne Basz of the Isleton Historical Society, Bill Ives of the

Marching Pageantry Arts Museum, and the many archivists of the National Archives and Records Administration who each pointed me to the right materials at the right time.

So many peers and colleagues brought their caring commentary and insightful perspectives into the project. Dr. Sara Bowden, Dr. Alyssa Wells, Dr. Jamil Jorge, Dr. Allan Zheng, Dr. Victoria Romano, Dr. Hannah Snavely, Dr. Kari Lindquist, Dr. Emily Ruth Allen, Dr. Heather MacLachlan, Sarah Ryan, Deoin Cleveland, David St. John, and Amanda Paruta all asked the right questions at the right times.

Finally, thank you to my family, whose backing from afar made all the work possible. Much love goes to my mother Ellen, who started my interest in Asian American drum corps performance ten years ago, and my father Robert, who took the chance of taking me to my first ever drum corps show fifteen years ago not knowing anything about it. The love and support you two have shown throughout my life is indescribable. Thank you.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Marking Asian American Time: Community Archives and the Asian American Drum and Bugle Corps Tradition

by

Nathan R. Huxtable

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Music
University of California, Riverside, June 2026
Dr. Deborah Wong, Chairperson

In this dissertation, I explore how Asian American musicians over the last century have turned to the US American musical tradition of drum and bugle corps to situate themselves within broader flows of Asian American history. Drum and bugle corps incorporate marching brass, percussion, and color guard members who perform music arrangements in parades and marching field competitions. Despite their longstanding contributions to this space, Asian Americans have often experienced exclusion from scholarly and community histories of the drum corps tradition. In response, Asian American drum corps musicians have underscored their presence in this scene through critical turns to the archives that constitute a process I term “marking Asian American time.” What does US band music sound like when the archival contributions of Asian Americans come to the fore? And how might critical archival studies, oral histories, and ethnographic engagements illuminate the connections between historical and contemporary Asian American drum corps?

I first trace Asian American drum corps performance to the transpacific politics of interwar Chinese and Japanese American communities. Using a methodology of archival sonification—the intentional, speculative, and critically empathetic reintroduction of sound into archival encounters—I explore how early Asian American drum corps negotiated the contradictions of their transnational politics through music performance. I then shift focus to the Japanese American concentration camps of World War II, examining how incarcerated musicians from both pro- and anti-US factions performed military music to expand physical and sonic mobilities while protesting their imprisonment. I next compare public history efforts from the L.A. Imperial Dragons and the Chicago Nisei Ambassadors, attending to how these organizations both reinforce and challenge normative, colonial archival temporalities. I conclude by exploring the process of musical re-racialization in the Sacramento Mandarins, the last remaining competitive drum and bugle corps from an historically Asian American community. I evince how Mandarins alumni have turned towards self-archiving practices to address the corps’ decreasing Asian American membership and departure from Asian American-themed productions. Ultimately, it is my position that Chinese and Japanese Americans have transformed drum corps into a fundamentally *Asian American* practice for more than a century.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abstract of the Dissertation.....	vi
List of Figures.....	ix
List of Media Examples.....	xii
List of Abbreviations.....	xiii
Introduction: Mark Time, Mark!.....	1
Chapter 1 - Stepping Off: Archival Sonification and Transpacific Politics in Interwar Asian American Drum Corps	27
Chapter 2 - Sonifying Mobility: Drum and Bugle Corps Performance During the Japanese American Incarceration.....	63
Chapter 3 - Marking Time in the Community Archives of Postwar Asian American Drum Corps.....	109
Chapter 4 - Forward, March: The Sacramento Mandarins and Re-racializing Asian American Drum Corps Performance.....	161
Conclusion: Reset, Do It Again.....	201
Bibliography.....	211
Archival Collections.....	224

List of Figures

- Figure 1: Troop 79 Installation Ceremony photograph, 1932. Troop 64 provided music for the installation festivities with their drum and bugle corps, whose equipment is pictured. Photo by Toyo Miyatake and courtesy of the Japanese American National Museum, JANM NEG 120.19.40 98.338.3, Mas Fujimoto Collection..28
- Figure 2 (a, b): Detail from panoramic photograph of General Tsai Tin Kai's visit to Isleton, November 24, 1934. Warren Tom, former director of the Sacramento Mandarins, is pictured in (b), first row. Isleton Historical Museum, photo by author. 37
- Figure 3 (a, b, c): Detail from panoramic photograph of Shoong Chinese School opening. Locke, CA, 1926. Photographs by author..... 41
- Figure 4: Detail of Troop 379 scouts aboard the Goodwill Tour ship, 1937. JANM NEG 120, 8, 47C : 93.15.27. Kei Kokubun Collection. 49
- Figure 5: Troops 64, 79, and 197 assemble for the Second Biennial Convention of the Japanese American Citizens League in Los Angeles, CA. June 1932. Japanese American National Museum, Ikey Kakimoto Family collection (98.120.1; JANM, 13, FF, 3 FO)..... 51
- Figure 6: Boy Scouts of America Troop 197 identification card for George Yoshida, 1937-8. Signed by Assistant Scoutmaster Cedrick Shimo. JANM 2000.400.8.... 58
- Figure 7: Troop 197 Chuo Gakkuen Boy Scouts 11th Anniversary photograph with drum and bugle corps, 1939. JANM 2000.262.2, Bruce and Frances Kaji Collection .. 59
- Figure 8: Excerpt from front cover of Rafu Shimpo, February 6, 1938. George Yoshida is seated sixth from the right in the second row. 60
- Figure 9: “On October 6, 1942, 550 former San Franciscans from Santa Anita Assembly Center arrived. The final contingent of 308 people came from Tanforan on October 15. The Boy Scout band welcomed each incoming bus, and there were welcome signs for the new residents. 63
- Figure 10: Detail from Robert Uragami scrapbook displaying photographs, pamphlets, and patches from Boy Scout Troop 179 Drum & Bugle Corps in the Amache “Relocation Center.” Scoutmaster Roy Uragami’s photograph appears in the upper right, with photographs of the drum corps outside a camp building and at a flag raising ceremony adorning the bottom of both pages. Courtesy of the Japanese American National Museum, Robert Uragami Collection, NEG 120 9 5-6 [99.2.1-3]). 73

Figure 11: “Boy and Girl Scout activities were in evidence at virtually all centers. Photo shows a Boy Scout drum and bugle corps at Santa Anita (California) Assembly Center lead by Girl Scout majorettes.” The twirling tenor drummers referred to by Tonai are the front row of drums. Note the absence of Scout uniforms, which would not have been essential clothing packed by most incarcerated families. Photograph of Santa Anita drum and bugle corps, ca. 1942, fla_album_088, John Flaherty Collection, King Library Special Collections & Archives, San Jose State University, San Jose, CA.	79
Figure 12 (a, b): Amache Boy Scout Troop 179 performing in a camp parade (a) and flag raising ceremony (b), date unknown. James G. Lindley Collection, Densho Digital Repository, Seattle, WA.	81
Figure 13 (a, b): “We’re in the Army Now” original sheet music, 1917. M1.D48, Box 264, No. 28, Sam DeVincent Collection of Illustrated American Sheet Music, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.....	84
Figure 14: Notation of Seinendan bugle calls confiscated by the WRA on February 12, 1945. The second call the memorial song <i>Kuni no shizume</i> (国の鎮め, “Guardians of the Land”) became the object of archival sonification. NARA RG 210, 48, Tule 425 – Box 274, Pro-Japan Organizations.	93
Figure 15: Four confiscated <i>Seinendan</i> bugle calls. Note the labeling of the “Goose-Step March,” <i>Rikugun Hayaashi Koshin</i> (陸軍速歩行進), which was the subject of severe WRA scrutiny. NARA RG 210, 48, Tule 425 – Box 274, Pro-Japan Organizations.	98
Figure 16: Original WRA caption: Bugle Corps of Hokoku Seinen Dan gather at Gate 1 to give proper send off to 125 of their number being sent to Santa Fe Internment Camp March 4, 1945. Photographed by Robert H. Ross. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration and Densho.org.....	103
Figure 17: Imperial Dragons exhibit, as viewed from entryway. Photograph by author.	124
Figure 18: "Through the Years" display timeline graphic. Note the marchers at the bottom facing forward into the future years. Photograph by author.	126
Figure 19 (a, b, c): Decades panels from <i>Imperial Dragons</i> . Photographs by the author.	128
Figure 20: Detail from glass display case in <i>Imperial Dragons</i> . Photograph by the author.	134

Figure 21: Detail of frame from <i>Go For Broke</i> , depicting the Nisei Ambassadors stepping off the starting line and marking time. Note the forward march of all members. Courtesy of Dean Rolando.....	147
Figure 22: The Mandarins logo. Each stroke represents one of the four core values of the organization: Honor, Family, Heritage/Tradition, and Respect. Courtesy of Mandarins of Sacramento, Inc.	173
Figure 23: Detail of the 1965 Ye Wah Drum & Lyras Corps, wearing their first consistent uniform inspired by Chinese <i>tangzuang</i> coats. Note the use of chopstick font script for the corps banner in the foreground. Photo courtesy of the Mandarins of Sacramento, Inc.....	176
Figure 24: Still from the Mandarins 2013 production, <i>Destination America: Journey of the Paper Sons</i> , depicting an interrogation at Angel Island. Courtesy of the Mandarins of Sacramento, Inc.	195

List of Media Examples¹

Media Example 1: <i>Go for Broke: The Nisei Ambassadors Reunion</i> (1990). Directed by Dick Izui, edited by Tina Izui Hill. Courtesy of Dean Rolano.....	146
Media Example 2: <i>To the Edge</i> (1996). Courtesy of the Mandarins of Sacramento, Inc.	185
Media Example 3: Sacramento Mandarins History Night documentary video (2024). Directed by Scott Jow, edited by Joseph Khalifa.....	196
Media Example 4: <i>Destination America: Journey of the Paper Sons</i> (2013). Courtesy of the Mandarins of Sacramento, Inc.....	197
Media Example 5: Field recording of “Year of the Dragon” performance at the Mandarins Friends and Family show, July 2021, Rio Linda, CA.....	202

¹ All Media Examples can be accessed at the following secure folder: [Marking Asian American Time Media Examples](#) Password: MarkTime. Hyperlinks to individual files are also embedded in the text.

List of Abbreviations

AL: American Legion

CHSSC: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

CJHSC: Chicago Japanese American Historical Society

DCI: Drum Corps International

JANM: Japanese American National Museum

JERS: Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study

KMT: *Kuomintang* (Chinese Nationalist Party)

MIS: Military Intelligence Service

NARA: National Archives and Records Administration

VFW: Veterans of Foreign Wars

WRA: War Relocation Authority

Introduction: Mark Time, Mark!

Vignette: “For Over a Hundred Years”

On a muggy July day in 2021, I accompany Daniel Fong in his black Lexus two-door coupe. He is a slim and bespectacled sixty-year-old: a Chinese American, an optometrist, and a board member of the historically Chinese American Sacramento Mandarins Drum and Bugle Corps. He’s invited me to the unincorporated historic worker town of Locke, CA, eager to share with me photographs he found while researching migrant worker communities in the region. As we step out of the car, he expresses his concern that contemporary drum corps performers don’t properly display the US flag, a fact he noted in the Mandarins’ recent Fourth of July parades. “Yeah, I noticed that...the corps didn’t have the flag guarded. We’re going to have to fix that.” As we walk together down the decayed wooden boardwalk of Historical Locke, I almost lose Fong as he ducks suddenly into a large white school building whose entrance is flanked by bronze busts of Sun Yat-Sen and Confucius. As we enter the building (which I learn later to be the Shoong Chinese School), I’m immediately drawn to the black-and-white photographs papering the walls. Upon closer inspection, I can see photographs of what look like young girls some hundred years ago, parading with snare and bass drums through the streets of Locke. As someone so used to the masculinization of percussion and of the drum and bugle corps space, this immediately takes me aback. While I know there were many “All-Girl” drum and bugle corps during the 1940s-50s, the fact that working-class Chinese American girls were some of the first drummers and buglers in this activity is profoundly striking.

Tucked away in the corner of this schoolhouse is a facsimile of a panoramic photograph from 1926. Scattered throughout are drums and bugles in the front of a few hundred Chinese American youths carrying banners of the local business organizations. As we examine it, I can't help but notice the boy scouts in the middle, with their military bugles and drums set down to pose for the camera. And then my eyes drift to the far left. I notice the huge Kuomintang party flag, placed in the same throng as the stars and stripes. As I'm looking once again at the drums and bugles, Fong comes up behind me and proudly declares: "Yeah, the Chinese have been doing this for over a hundred years."

I pause, do a double-take, and think to myself. *He has a point.*

Drum Corps as Asian American and Personal Practice

As the first of many ethnographic vignettes seeded throughout this dissertation to motivate critical discussion, Fong's observations from that day highlight key concerns at the heart of my project. My premise is that for over a century, Asian American musicians have turned to the US American musical tradition of drum and bugle corps performance to develop communal bonds, enact sociopolitical change, and place themselves within broader historical flows of Asian American life.

Reaching this point of understanding required deeply personal, situated interests as a scholar-practitioner in the drum corps scene of the United States. I developed a passion for competitive marching music during my formative years in high school. Under the guidance of many key educators—almost exclusively white, suburban men—I grew to crave the thrill of stepping onto the field of competition, ready to create music in the

pursuit of an idealized but never-quite-achievable perfect run-through. As I grew older, I set my sights on joining one of the handful of competitive drum and bugle corps scattered across the country, with a particular affinity to my favorite, The Cavaliers of Rosemont, IL. After many years of doggedly practicing my mallet percussion skills, I finally auditioned for and won a position to perform with them during the summer. This entailed a full three-month commitment every summer: from mid-May to mid-August each year, I lived, ate, slept, and rehearsed with the drum corps, working to perfect a competitive marching music program as we toured around the country for the latter half of the season. Starting with local competitions in the Midwest, the 150 percussion, color guard, and brass members, fifty-some-odd staff, and six support vehicles and busses traveled across the country, performing as far west as Cheyenne, WY and as far east as Boston, MA. At the end of each season, we came together in Indianapolis for the annual Drum Corps International (DCI) championships. While I knew this was my calling, my identity as an Asian American—specifically a fourth-generation (Yonsei) Japanese American whose maternal grandparents experienced the injustice of incarceration during World War II—never felt attached to my life as a budding percussionist from the suburbs of Chicago.

That all changed in the summer of 2016. My mother—a Japanese American woman in her late sixties, replete with a salt-and-pepper bob and glasses that always rode right up against her eyes—mentioned in passing that she remembered “a Japanese American corps” from Chicago from when she grew up. This ensemble, the Nisei Ambassadors (see Chapter 3), were the children of formerly incarcerated veterans, she mused, asking if I might be interested in learning more. I voraciously began to gather

archival documents from online databases about Japanese and Chinese American drum corps in the United States, finding evidence that a Boy Scouts of America troop from Boston's Chinatown sponsored a local parade unit of youth drum and bugle performers as early as 1920. I soon recognized—much like Fong—that Asian Americans had been “doing this” for a century, and that my own positionality was tied up in long lineages of military music performance. Sure, there were many Asian Americans *in* drum corps, with many in West Coast ensembles that had I met along my journey as a performer in national circuit, but I was completely unaware that Asian American-*identified* ensembles were at the center of many of these histories. This dissertation thus emerged from these personal investments and historical curiosity, as I explored the connection between Asian American communities, marching music, and archival practices. Tracing the presences of Japanese and Chinese American drum corps operating circa 1920 to the present, what follows will examine the shifting racial politics of performance for these Asian American ensembles, noting how these racialized performers have adapted their practices to varied, collective political ends.

Critical Archival Studies and Asian American Drum Corps Performance

As critical archives scholar Michelle Caswell underscores, the “liberatory potential” of community archives is not guaranteed, resulting instead from engaged memory work that combats dominant historical and political narratives. Speaking through her own experiences within her leadership roles at the South Asian American Digital

Archive, she argues that the mission of community archives generally—and Asian American community archives specifically—must be one of resistance (2021, 7):

...if community archives are to fulfill their liberatory potential they must be activated for resistance rather than assimilation or integration into the mainstream. As such, community-based memory workers must go beyond the recuperation of minoritized histories, however important, to catalyze those histories for liberation.

Such resistance is, for Caswell, a response to broader epistemological violences that archives and archival studies enact at the temporal level. Tracing the origins of “dominant Western archival thinking”—and, by association, traditional archival studies—to “linear Christian temporalities that assert the inevitable march of history towards human progress,” she underscores how archives typically ignore “cyclical conceptions of time emerging from non-dominant traditions worldwide, including Hindu, Indigenous North American, Black, and queer temporalities” (ibid., 26). Archives that center such linear historical narratives engage in what she terms *chronoviolence*, the assertion that “the *only* [original emphasis] legitimate way” (ibid., 40) to structure temporalities in the archives is by adherence to the dominant, colonial, and white supremacist relationships to time. Resistance to assimilation and integration, therefore, requires communities to intentionally eschew linear temporalities and instead be open to “a multiplicity of uncertain pasts, presents, and futures” that require “a different orientation to time” (ibid., 26). Crucially, chronoviolence is a racial project: reading through philosopher Charles W. Mills’ concept of “white time,”² Caswell outlines how “dominant Western archival

² Isaiah Matthew Wooden interprets Mills’ argument as one of ownership of time as well: “Significantly, Mills argues, in positioning whites as the masters of their own time, ‘White Time’ also positions them as masters of those nonwhite others they deem time has mastered” (2025, 7). A solution to this, Wooden offers, is the “reclamation” of time: “to reclaim time is to retrieve and relieve it from the restrictions of ‘White time’ and dominant temporalities” (ibid., 15).

concepts are cleaved onto notions of social progress, which in the American context, translates into linear white narratives of racial progress ending in an inevitable post-racial white future” (ibid., 35).

Elsewhere, Caswell’s work offers insight into the contradictory practices of Asian American drum corps ensembles and their symbolic annihilation. Developed during the 1970s within feminist media circles, “symbolic annihilation” describes the elision of marginalized identities from dominant historical narratives through under- or misrepresentation in mediatized spaces (Tuchman 1978). Within archival studies, symbolic annihilation has come to signify what happens when repositories engage in “ignoring or overlooking materials” that treat a given community “simply as if [it] did not exist” (Caswell 2014b, 27). Scholars such as Gabriel Solis (2018) have since applied the term to conceptualize the role of state violence in producing anti-Black imagery that reinforces racist beliefs in Black violence, criminality, and inhumanity. Narrowing in on gross misrepresentations of Blackness in popular media, Solis posits that symbolic annihilation is not just about the politics of representation but is also about the real day-to-day embodied experiences of marginalized communities who suffer the consequences of their misrepresentations the most. The concept of symbolic annihilation accordingly allows for a flexible and expansive analysis of how misrepresentations at the institutional level are experienced in the quotidian lives of those who are left out of dominant histories and forms of representation. Accordingly, my aim in this dissertation is to redress the ongoing symbolic annihilation of Asian American presences and sounds from the drum and bugle corps performance tradition. It is my belief that ingrained underrepresentation

of Asian American contributions may only be rectified through a recentering of the people, stories, and sounds that demonstrate the inherent Asian Americanness of drum corps performance. In doing so, I intend to position drum and bugle corps performance as an inherently Asian American endeavor, resisting narratives that subsume racially minoritized communities into a broader colonial and white US American music tradition.

Marking Asian American Time

For over a century, members of the US American drum and bugle corps scene have performed marching military music as a means of forging community, engaging in local music-making practices, and expressing broader national loyalties and affiliations. While the scene's origins arguably trace back to the US military bands of the late nineteenth century, the movement started in earnest in the aftermath of World War I. Following the mass return of soldiers from Europe, emerging veterans' organizations sought to promote US patriotism and civic values among local youths by offering them opportunities to learn military music and marching in an organized environment. Despite its longstanding presence in US youth music education, the scene as a whole has often occupied what scholar-practitioner Aaron Keebaugh (2002) once termed a "lacuna" in American musical history: outside of a few ethnographic and historical publications (Cole 2011; Odello 2016, 2020; Jorge 2022; Wells 2022) documenting this tradition of military-style music-making, the majority of writing on this youth musical activity stems from community histories (cf. Vickers 2002, 2003).

Within this lacuna of US American drum and bugle corps, Asian American participation has remained an underexamined site of social, cultural, and political music-making. Indeed, Asian Americans have experienced symbolic annihilation from the musical traditions that they have sustained for well over a hundred years. The symbolic annihilation of these sounds from drum and bugle corps history is as much a historiographic issue as it is an archival one. While community-based history-making endeavors have meticulously documented the development of the drum corps tradition from its post-World War I origins to the twenty-first century, they also have worked to establish a master narrative of the scene that often excludes stories of historically marginalized communities, particular those of non-white racialized origin. The broad strokes of this master historical narrative are summarized at length by drum corps historian Rosalie Sward (2002, 98):

After World War I, returning veterans formed drum and bugle corps to function first as a way to keep the veterans involved in a patriotic display of camaraderie and later as a youth activity. These early corps were primarily parade units that grew out of local Boy Scout troops and church organizations such as the CYO (Catholic Youth Organization), and YMCA and with ties to the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) or the American Legion. These early drum and bugle corps played patriotic/military music with an emphasis on marches and marching, with the drums and bugles merely providing the tempo. Later, they developed into musical units where enthusiasm and esprit de corps surpassed artistic considerations of musicianship and showmanship.

Enculturated scholar-practitioners often echo this narrative in their work: in her research on ritualized performance tradition in the scene, musicologist Denise Odello suggests that veterans' groups "actively passed on the military tradition to the next generation" because US youth "would presumably never serve in a conflict of that magnitude" (2020, 4). Similarly, ethnomusicologist and community archivist Dennis Cole reaffirms this historical narrative in his ethnographic account (2011) of drum corps ensembles in the

2000s, a text which remains one of the only monograph-length pieces of scholarship on this musical subculture. Although contemporary community scholars have begun to critically position drum corps as a youth subculture—one in which young members navigate “intersecting racial, class, gender, and sexual identities” to “experience the embodiment of community, empowerment, and sense of belonging” (Jorge 2022, 1)—the scene’s master narrative still profoundly shapes both community histories and research.

The historiographic elision of contributions by racially minoritized communities is due, in part, to the tendency of members of the broader drum and bugle corps community to narrate their musical tradition through a master narrative steeped in US nationalism. While many acknowledge the existence of military music ensembles outside the United States, they also tend to position their own tradition as a uniquely US American development out of post-World War I urban centers. Participants in this musical subculture thus tend to explicate the development of their tradition through varying degrees of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva ([2003] 2018) terms “colorblind racism,” a discourse which simultaneously “denies the claim that race is responsible for alleged injustices that reproduce group inequalities” (Giroux 2003, 198) while upholding the structural and systemic injustices that erase minoritized communities from dominant historical records. This colorblind racism often takes the form of deracialized historical narratives that treat the development of the competitive drum corps scene as similar across all communities of participants. Drum corps scholar-practitioner Jamil Jorge is thus particularly critical of these community historical discourses, stating that “the discernable scarcity of any critical sociocultural analyses” (2022, 12) weakens their

overall attention to key issues of race, class, gender, or other intersecting sites of identification. Even though these marching ensembles of brass and percussion instruments traditionally implicate a conservative, assimilationist political ethos tied to the US American military brass band, I argue that Chinese and Japanese Americans³ have transformed drum corps into a fundamentally *Asian American* practice for more than a century.

Such a sweeping statement does not, however, come without some clarifications. First, Asian Americans are not only racially minoritized group who have turned to the contradictory politics of drum corps performance to negotiate both local needs and national belonging. Indeed, so-called “All-Black” drum corps comprised of Black, Caribbean, and Latinx members played significant roles in the musical lives of racially minoritized youth from the 1930s through the 1970s. Hailing from urban centers such as New York City, Washington, D.C., or Chicago, Black corps operated not as an assimilationist project, but instead as a “form of protest, used to build Black musical aesthetics and identities” (Jorge 2017, 4). Much like these Black ensembles, I propose that Asian American musicians transformed the ostensibly white and conformist aesthetics of this military music tradition towards their own local and coalitional political

³ While contemporary Asian American drum corps participants hail from all areas of the Asian diaspora, this project focuses on Chinese and Japanese American contributions to the drum and bugle corps space for a few reasons. First, the drum and bugle corps movement emerged during the early twentieth century, when most people of Asian descent in the United States hailed from either China or Japan. As such, early Asian American drum corps units tended to center around coastal, urban Chinese and Japanese American enclaves. Second, the increased immigration of Southeast Asian refugees during the 1960s and 1970s, as well as South and East Asian professional migration in the 1980s and 1990s, coincided with a drastic shrinking of the number of drum corps in the competitive landscape. As a result, newer Asian American immigrant communities did not typically turn to drum and bugle corps ensembles as a form of community building and political expression.

sensibilities. Drum corps has been, in other terms, a key performance tradition through which Chinese and Japanese American musicians formed, consolidated, and articulated *Asian American* identities and aesthetics.

Second, for all the ways Asian American performance represents unique political and historical contributions to the broader drum corps community, such participation often reflected elements of the broader master narrative. Indeed, many Asian American youth drum corps originated from local organizations, focusing on militaristic music before later expanding into sponsored, artistic competitive units. Moreover, many Asian American corps ostensibly replicated the white, masculinist aesthetics of the broader scene through their adherence to traditional military band music repertoire and marching maneuvers. Yet it is also my assertion that these ensembles carved out uniquely Asian American histories, spaces, and temporalities within the normative structures of the scene's master narrative that transgressed the assimilative pressures of the broader performance tradition. Moreover, this transformative participation often extended well beyond the years when Asian American youths blared on brass bugles or thumped their mallets into a bass drum: indeed, this dissertation asserts that one of the key modalities by which Asian American drum corps musicians have asserted their presence within this scene is through varied and critical turns to the archives. While Black drum corps alumni have similarly turned towards community-based archival projects to document and forward their historical presences in the scene (Jorge 2017), similar efforts by Asian American participants represent an emergent trend within the broader drum corps community. Whether through ephemeral, personal collections of items from the past, the

imposed violence of state archives, or through intentional community-based archival practices, the histories of Asian American drum corps continue to be told through the archives. And as both tradition-bearers and community leaders, members of these military music organizations have consistently sought to document, record, and historicize their music-making in efforts to—as I term—mark Asian American time.

As an organizing framework, “marking Asian American time” metaphorizes the common practice of “marking time” in drum and bugle corps performance. In the parlance of military bands and drum corps, marking time means marching in place at a steady cadence, often to the beat of a metronome or a piece of music. Crucially, marking time engages temporal, spatial, social, and participatory dimensions of performance: in order to participate in the act of marking time, one must be aware of not only the beat or music to which they are marching, but also of one’s own body within physical space and in relation to surrounding performers. Moreover, the mark time step often precedes the step-off, allowing musicians to coordinate their internal pulse so they can execute music and marching drill in synch with each other. Socially, such coordinated rhythmic movements have the potential to bond human groups together (McNeill 1995). They also, paradoxically, carry with them a disciplinary dimension: as Michel Foucault described, coordinated steps from the European military tradition often operated to produce an ostensibly “natural” body, placing marcher’s bodies in relationship to increasingly minute divisions of time and space that rendered their bodies “docile” to the state (Foucault [1975] 1979, 137; 155). To investigate why so many Asian Americans participated in this US American musical tradition is thus to explore the contradictory terms of racial

politics, identity formation, and embodied performance across the better part of a century, and to examine how Asian Americans have variously marked their presences across this period. This “marking time” has thus been both literal and archival for Asian American drum corps. Indeed, as I describe in the remainder of this dissertation, musicians from across a century of performance tradition have stepped, recorded, gathered, and remembered their music in ways that asserts profoundly Asian American cultural and political values.

That said, I don’t wish to imply that marking Asian American time leads to a completed, coherent, or unified project. Just as the tension between social cohesion on the one hand and state discipline on the other motivates the literal mark time step, the analysis that follows often rides the fuzzy political lines between resistant Asian American political action and assimilative, hegemonic US American patriotism. Furthermore, marking Asian American time sits uncomfortably within the liberatory conceptualization of community archives outlined by Caswell: while it underscores Asian American archival efforts that counteract typical historical narratives of the US American drum corps scene, there is no guarantee that such work is or will be liberatory. Instead, marking Asian American time acknowledges the longstanding dialectic between assimilation/integration and self-determination within Asian American communities and recognizes that community archives offer an avenue for Asian American musicians to navigate these competing forces.

This is because the mark-time step involves the performance of stasis. When called to “Mark Time, Mark!” by an instructor or a drum major, each member marches in

spot to coordinate their musical and visual timing responsibilities across space. Thus, despite the seeming assimilation of the body into a state of discipline, marking time also serves as the beginning of relations across spatial and temporal distance. Marking Asian American time, by extension, is at once a replication of the structures of domination and at the same time the beginnings of critical archival work that disrupts linear temporalities. As such, the literal and archival acts of marking time have long encouraged Chinese and Japanese Americans to consolidate a shared Asian American political sensibility by collectively negotiating these contradictions.

Accordingly, in this dissertation I aim to engage critical issues in Asian American performance, archival studies, and US American music, including the relationships between Asian American music and archival practice, collaboration between Asian Americans and other minoritized groups (cf. e.g., Kajikawa 2012; Chon-Smith 2015; Roberts 2016), and the relationships between local brass ensemble performance and national, coalitional politics (cf. e.g., Snyder 2022; Garofalo et al. 2020). I ask: What does a history of US American band music *sound* like when the archival contributions of Asian Americans come to the fore? What are the relationships between Asian American community drum and bugle corps participation, embodied performance, and archival history-making? How have Chinese and Japanese American drum corps participants variously conceptualized their musical practices as part of a broader negotiation of coalitional US American racial politics? And how might combined critical archival studies, oral histories, and immersive ethnographic engagements illuminate the cultural and political connections between historical and contemporary Asian American drum

corps? I offer an account of critical Asian American archival practices that collectively document the last century of this distinctly racialized performance tradition. I intend to problematize scholarly analyses of Asian American performance by demonstrating how even explicitly nationalistic US American music can (through Asian Americans' embodiments of race and sound) allow musicians the space for self-determination and panethnic coalition while challenging the colonial, imperial, and nationalist ideologies undergirding their musical tradition.

Archival Sonification

Sound represents a contested domain that is implicitly implicated in the archives. As one of the primary modalities by which musicians negotiated their sense of self, sound also expresses political sensibilities and articulates belonging within a community. So, when sounds no longer can be heard in the archival record, who is left out? Who benefits from their absence? And how might researchers redress this symbolic (and often literal) annihilation of sound? Whether through lack of representation or through de-sonified archival practice, the voices, music, and soundings of subjects present in the archives are typically assumed to be gone, only able to be carefully reconstructed with meticulous historical research. Archives scholar and geographer Veronica della Dora (2021) views such reconstruction efforts as a foundational tension that structures listening to the archives as a methodological practice. Because “very little of the sonic past was physically preserved for later historical analysis,” researchers can only “attempt at reconstructing older soundscapes from written archival records.” She continues:

Any reconstruction, however, is bound to be speculative, given the impossibility to recreate the aural experience of the original listeners, or even ‘presume what it was like to hear the past’ (Sterne, 2003: 19). This raises a deeper problem than accuracy: we inevitably listen to the past with modern ears, regardless of how faithful a sound reconstruction is.

Tracing the lineages of Asian American archival impulses in the US American drum and bugle corps scene thus requires critical attention towards the role of sound and listening within archives, along with careful consideration of the ways in which “listening to” or “sounding” the archives productively yet incompletely theorize archival encounters.

Although music scholars have extensively examined the practice of archiving sound, the methodological practice of listening to archival materials has only recently gained attention within ethnomusicological circles. Much of this scholarship centers around the gendering and racialization of listening, problematizing audition as an ostensibly neutral act conducted by the listener. Roshanak Kheshti’s writings on archival listening practices are particularly pertinent in this area, as she proposes that the sound archive emerged in Europe and the United States in the early twentieth century due to the “feminization of listening.” As a result of listening’s “increasing domestication by the gramophone industry and the ascension of the bourgeois woman” (2015, 3), sound recording molded into a feminine pursuit which was then used to structure modernity by bringing the Other “under a form of discursive control” (ibid., 18). Critical concern towards the racialized practices of recording and listening to archives also underpins Jonathan S. Stone’s (2015) analysis of Alan Lomax’s infamous prison recordings in the US South during the 1930s. As he proposes, engaging with these sounds in the present “reveals the ways interpretation, representation, and historical explanation of racial experience reveal the complexities inherent to racial dynamics in the US.” The listener is

thus implicated in the (re)production of racialized subjectivities by attending to the sonic traces of Black performance which was recorded to implicitly define US American music. Taken together, what both Kheshti and Stone reveal is that listening to archives is an intersectional endeavor implicated in the representational politics of sound. While these scholars both cogently offer a race-critical analysis of the relationships between archives, sound, and researchers, both scholars narrow in on sound archives as the space where critical engagements with sound occur. This focus restricts their analyses to the domain of sound recordings and therefore leaves questions unanswered about how other media—such as text or photographs—might also engender forms of listening within the archives. Because of these political stakes, the listening researcher accordingly assumes the role of an active participant in the construction of “temporal projections of past, present, and future” (Birdsall and Tkaczyk 2019, S2). I thus treat listening throughout this dissertation as a process of intertemporal imagining, seeking ways by which imagining the past sounds of Asian American performers makes possible new futures of US American music history. Listening, in other terms, is not a temporally bounded act in this work, but slides between temporalities to (re)produce subjectivities and center Asian American contributions to the historical soundtrack of US military music.

This is not to say that scholars have not attempted methodological approaches that listen to otherwise silent media. In her ruminations on the relationships between images, quiet, and quotidian life in Black communities photographed by state institutions, media studies scholar and Black feminist theorist Tina Campt proposes that “listening to images” permits “access to the affective registers through which these images enunciate

alternate accounts of their subjects” (2017, 5). Crucially, her work rests on the “counterintuition” that “quiet must not be conflated with silence:” whereas silence connotes the complete absence of sonic traces in the visual archive, “Quiet registers sonically, as a level of intensity that requires focused attention” (ibid., 6). While the distinction between quiet and silent photographs seemingly implies that some photographs lack the potential for sound, her overall attentiveness to the multisensorial aspects of photographic engagements demonstrates the efficacy of a sound-based approach to understanding archival holdings. And although her work concerns primarily state-controlled representations of Blackness, her insistence that photographs can engage acts of refusal and sound alternate histories offers a race-critical framework that centers sound as a disruptive force of redress against the structural, colonial quiet built into traditional archives. While Camp’s work provides a launch point for archival sonification, Anne J. Gilliland and Michelle Caswell’s concept of “imagined records” offers an informative model of what such sonic speculation might entail. Building from Caswell’s concept of the “archival imaginary”—“the dynamic way in which communities creatively and collectively re-envision the future through archival interventions in representations of the shared past” (2014a, 49)—Gilliland and Caswell propose that imagined records allow communities to fill in “impossible archival imaginaries” where “the archive and its hoped-for contents are absent or forever unattainable” (2016, 61). An imagined record accordingly “anchors and projects new possible futures, futures which are foreclosed in the absence of the material artifact” (ibid., 71).

Although many projects concerning the “resounding” of archives often incorporate an element of composition or recording, the term *sonification* itself originally emerged in the physical sciences during the 1990s when researchers began to treat non-sonic information as algorithmic music composition data (Lodha et al. 1997; Wilson and Lodha 1996). Rather than perpetuate what Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson terms “hungry listening”—i.e., the colonial approach to hearing that seeks extraction and “prioritizes the captures and certainty of information over the affective feel, timbre, touch, and texture of sound” (2020, 38)—sonification remains a project that attends to the materialities and imaginaries of sound outside of a compositional framework. Accordingly, *archival sonification* is not an attempt at salvaging an idealized and forgotten past, nor is it a practice of merely cataloguing what sounds occurred in a particular time, place, and space in sociocultural context. Instead, archival sonification operates as a methodological intervention to address the challenges of theorizing sonic absences in archives as summarized above. It is, in other words, an extension of Campt, Gilliland, and Caswell’s work that not only listens to the sounds lying underneath the “quiet,” but also actively participates in *reintroducing* sounds back into the archives through auditory imaginaries. Moreover, it seeks to cultivate critical empathy between the researcher and those whose musical presences have become quiet within the holds of the archives.

Archival sonification can take many forms, from soundscaping to imaginary sonic engagements by the researcher with the written records and material cultures of musicians from the past. While specific examples of these engagements weave their way in and out of the remainder of this work, archival sonification is intended to remain an

unfinished toolkit, one that permits a wide range of listenings and encounters. Furthermore, the methodology of archival sonification reimagines sonic worlds specifically as a politics of representation, to give sound back to those whose musical and political presences are no longer audible within the archival record. Archival sonification is thus a dialogic and empathetic endeavor: using the scant information that may be available to them in the written, pictorial, or otherwise ephemeral records of sound, the researcher engaged in resounding the archives must consider their own positionality as a modern (re)constructor of sonic events, and how those constructions may create not just new interpretations of past performances but also set new futurities for these sounds as living practices. By foregrounding the role of the researcher in cultivating an ethics of care towards the sounds and stories of those who are quiet in the archives, archival sonification also inaugurates a transtemporal engagement that acknowledges all sonification projects as a modern, present and future-oriented of past sonic practices.

Archival sonification is thus a necessarily speculative endeavor: rather than “sounding” or “listening to” the past with fidelity, archival sonification encourages the researcher to imaginatively engage across time, space, and media. This rightfully raises questions regarding for whom the listening is done and how these engagements may be created. To begin to address these concerns, it bears noting that archival sonification is not an inherently liberatory practice, instead retaining the potential to reproduce violence inherent in archival encounters. As warned by Saidiya Hartman (1997) in her ruminations on the archives of slavery, the archives remain a space where physical, epistemic, and racialized violences are reproduced. To begin to address these legacies thus requires

speculatively reimagining the archive, even as “critical fabulations” (Hartman 2008) may yet reproduce the very erasures that they seek to redress. What archival sonification takes stock of, then, is the hope that speculation affords “a more agentic, conversational role, by thinking and writing anew about the vagaries of power and conflict, as communicated in dialogue with motley musical practices and experience” (Burnett et al. 2023, 351). Such speculation necessitates ongoing, self-reflexive negotiations of agency and representational power at the level of the researcher, the archives, and the sounds being imaginatively regenerated.

What, then, can be done to listen to sonic practices which were at once a vital part of community building, and which have since been quieted? How might community-based archival practices allow for listening to the archive in ways that transcend the audiovisual modality? And how does one practically enact a practice of archival sonification? Throughout this work, I reflect on moments where the archives of these performance traditions offer little sonic information, which paradoxically permits room for exploration of the possibilities of sounding the archives. Rather than offering a comprehensive cultural history of interwar Asian American drum and bugle corps, my aim is to bring a keen attentiveness to reintroducing sound back into the archival artifacts that document this community-based music tradition. As I explore, sounding the archives of these ensembles redresses the symbolic annihilation of Asian American drum and bugle corps performance by recentering the auditory dimension of their operations as community music organizations. The reconstructed sounds of Asian American military music thus evince a profound sociopolitical engagement with the racial politics of

belonging, despite deracialized master narratives of the scene's development.

Accordingly, the practice of archival sonification is never simply about the construction of imagined pasts, nor is it about "the sound itself." Instead, archival sonification aims to reorient relationships between researchers, archives, and the sonic lives of the people therein, working towards sonic imaginings that reject linear, bounded temporalities.

Drum Corps and Decolonizing Archival Practice

What archival sonification, moreover, activates archival imaginaries that aim to decolonize the drum and bugle corps performance tradition. But to frame drum corps as a decolonizing practice necessitates, in my view, a turn towards community archives as a key space where such decolonizing takes place. Indeed, critical archival studies scholars in the last decade have increasingly turned to communities and their archives for decolonizing methodologies that critique the colonial logics underpinning archival accumulation (Christen and Anderson 2019), attribution practices (J. Anderson and Christen 2019), and data description (Sutherland and Purcell 2021). Admittedly, such constructions of "community" rely upon colonial understandings of group identification that are homogenous, bounded, and politically aligned towards a common expression of self-representation. These assumptions, as heritage studies scholars Emma Waterton and Laurajane Smith explain, may only be undone with a conceptualization of community "that engages with social relationships in all their messiness, taking account of action, process, power and change" (2010, 5). Thus, while I use the terms "community" and "community-based" archives relatively interchangeably throughout this work, I

acknowledge the inherent messiness of these constructs as colonial projects. Accordingly, decolonial archival studies illuminates the challenges of investigating community archives of Asian American drum corps, precisely because it highlights the contradictions of community, racialization, and colonialism that undergird what has been an historically US American militaristic performance practice. By focusing this work on community archives of Asian American performance—even those that follow relatively codified practices of archival science and do not explicitly enact a decolonial praxis—I suggest that marking Asian American time is a decolonial act, albeit an inherently contradictory, messy, and multivocal one. By remaking histories in order to center the contributions of racialized and minoritized communities of Asian descent, Asian American drum corps performers have and continue to mark Asian American time in ways that simultaneously uphold and disrupt the colonial logics of their musical communities.

Chapter Overview

Tracing the lineages of marking Asian American time draws attention to the varied relationships that Asian American drum corps have cultivated vis-à-vis the archives. Accordingly, while this work unfolds in a roughly chronological narrative, I emphasize differing archival approaches and strategies that illuminate the century-long performance tradition of Asian American drum corps.

Chapter 1 listens to the archival imaginaries of Chinese and Japanese American ensembles that emerged in the nascent drum corps movement between 1920 and 1941. I first narrate the emergence of military music ensembles in rural Chinese labor towns in

the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta region, showing how these groups used their performances to support the transnational political efforts of the Chinese Nationalist Party (*Kuomintang*), particularly during the Japanese Empire's invasion of China in the 1930s. I then compare these transnational investments with those of the Los Angeles Boy Scout Troop 379 Drum and Bugle Corps (otherwise known as the Koyasan Boy Scouts), a nationally-promoted Japanese American ensemble whose 1937 tour of Japan highlighted complex negotiations of national identity and racialization. By conducting varying forms of archival sonification with photographs, newspaper accounts, and musical instruments, the chapter ultimately explores how speculative reconstructions and alternative temporalities of sonic practices may offer novel insights into musical sounds which have since become quiet in the archives.

The second chapter shifts focus from sporadic community archives to archives of the state. The incarceration of Japanese Americans during the US involvement in World War II offers key insights into how formerly-incarcerated drum corps musicians responded to their imprisonment through a variety of sonic and political strategies. Proposing the framework of "sonic mobility," I argue that incarcerated musicians formed and re-formed military music ensembles as a strategy of resistance. Overtly and covertly, musicians from both pro-US scout drum and bugle corps and anti-US resistance movements in the Tule Lake camp of California used drum and bugle corps performance to transcend physical, acoustic, and political confinement, transgressing the racial logics of the incarceration in the process.

Asian American drum corps alumni and their efforts to produce community-based archives of their music-making take precedence in Chapter 3, which compares two Asian American drum corps active between the 1950s and the 1970s. I first offer a critical analysis of *Imperial Dragons*, the first US public museum exhibit dedicated to narrating the history of an Asian American drum and bugle corps. Through oral histories and close readings of the exhibit, I show how former members of the Los Angeles Chinese Drum and Bugle Corps marked Asian American time in ways that both sustained and undermined the often linear, teleological temporalities of archives and museums. This completed project offers a contrast to ongoing efforts by the Nisei Ambassadors, a Chicago-based ensemble, to build a large public museum exhibit dedicated to their corps' legacy. While both the L.A. Chinese and the Ambassadors maintain similar organizational histories of their development, the differences in their approaches to documenting and sharing these histories underscore the varied strategies that ensembles have taken to mark Asian American time.

The final chapter brings community-based archiving into the ethnographic present by exploring issues of racialization and identity in the Sacramento Mandarins Drum and Bugle Corps. As the only historically Asian American ensemble to continue competing in the modern US American scene, the Mandarins offer a unique insight into the shifting means by which Asian American organizational identity is constructed and renegotiated over time. Drawing from long-term immersive ethnography within the group, I narrate how Asian American alumni of the Mandarins have worked to explicitly foreground Asian American cultural identity in the organization even as the group becomes decidedly

less Asian American in both its membership and performance practices. By examining varied forms of history-making and archival practice that emphasize the corps' Asian American heritage, I argue that key actors within the Mandarins work to *re-racialize* the corps' cultural identity, despite varied shifts away from these markers in the contemporary competitive landscape. Moreover, I suggest that key actors within the Mandarins look back to the past performance practices of older Chinese American drum corps—such as those of Locke outlined in Chapter 1—to draw a distinctly Chinese American performance lineage that spans past, present, and future.

Asian American interactions and engagements within the archives thus take center stage—or better yet, are placed on the 50-yard line—throughout this text. Whether by tracing Asian American presences in the archives, tracking Asian American archival practices, or outlining overlooked contributions to contemporary military band histories, the archives will be treated here as a multitude of spaces that span temporalities and afford Asian Americans the opportunity to enact critical history-making practices in their often complicated and ambivalent efforts towards self-representation. Archives are, in other terms, *the* key site where Asian Americans have marked Asian American time across a century of performance practice and musical tradition.

Chapter 1 - Stepping Off: Archival Sonification and Transpacific Politics in Interwar Asian American Drum Corps

On February 7, 1932, at 1:30 pm, a crowd of thirty-three Japanese American boy scouts gathered in front of the Daishi Mission Buddhist Temple at 133 North Central Avenue, Los Angeles. Only a mere three months ago, mission Reverend Taïdo Kitagawa met with scoutmaster Sadamu “Sam” Y. Eejima from South Central L.A.’s Japanese Methodist Episcopal Church Troop 64 to establish a scouting program in his own congregation (Koyasan Beikoku Betsuin Buddhist Temple 2006, 3). Now, the membership of the newly established Troop 79 sat at eighteen boy scouts, many of whom were second-generation Nisei hailing from families living in the heart of L.A.’s “Lil’ Tokyo” (*Rafu Shimpō* 1932a, 6). After parading Troop 64 through the streets of Los Angeles’ burgeoning Japanese American community, Eejima stopped in front of his new home at the temple to take a group photograph. Roughly fifteen members of Troop 64’s year-old drum and bugle corps placed their military instruments down, all neatly in a row. As a symbol of their complex negotiations of US citizenship and Japanese cultural identity, the scouts had emblazoned their calfskin bass drum head with the scouts’ fleur-de-lis, backgrounded by the crossed flags of the United States and Japan. The members stared stoically at the camera, sitting behind their instruments as famed photographer Toyo Miyatake snapped the shutter (see Figure 1). Later, they entered the temple for speeches by dignitaries from the Japanese Chamber of Commerce, local scouting councils, and the *Rafu Shimpō*, L.A.’s bilingual Japanese American newspaper. In the *Rafu*’s pages the next day, a brief note would appear alongside the description of the day’s events: “The program ended with the Great Scoutmaster’s prayer and taps [sic]. The

remainder of the afternoon was turned over to entertainments and refreshments” (*Rafu Shimpō* 1932b, 6).

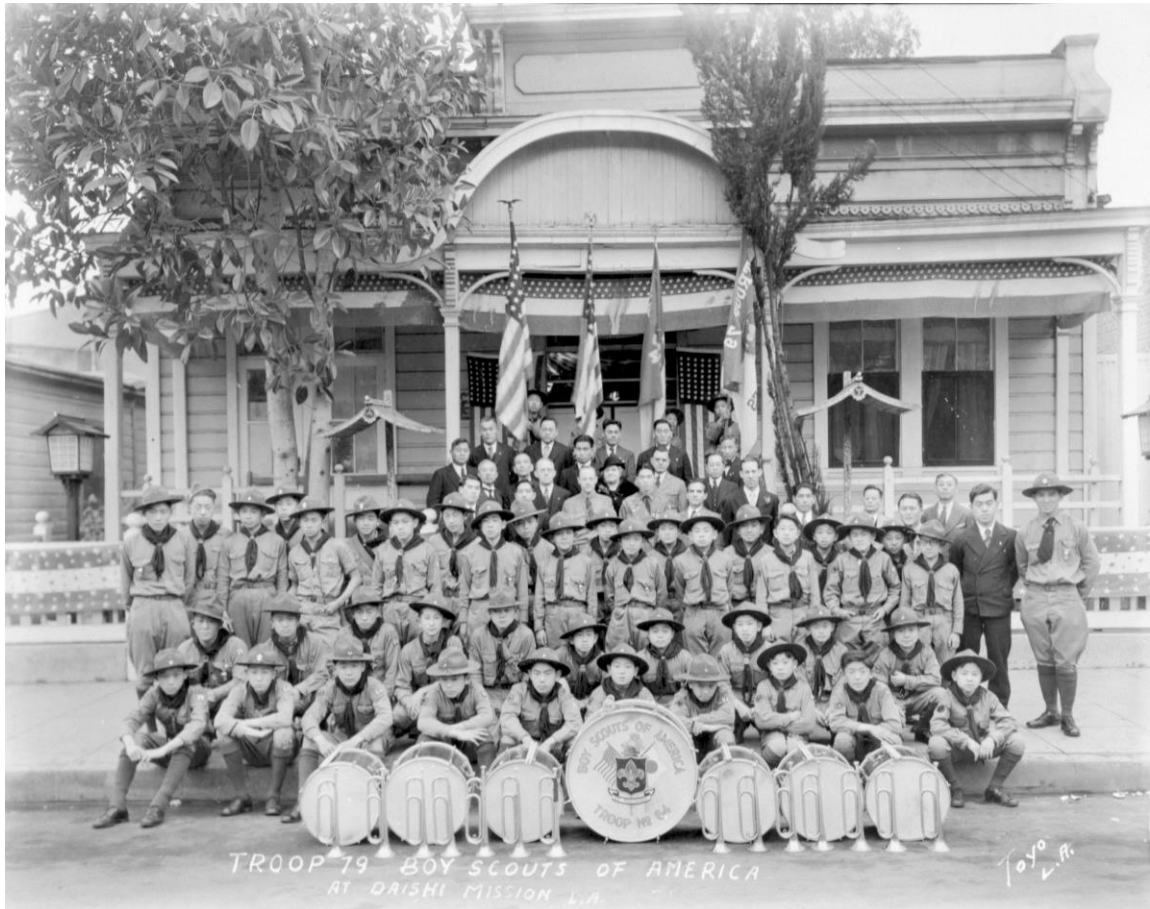


Figure 1: Troop 79 Installation Ceremony photograph, 1932. Troop 64 provided music for the installation festivities with their drum and bugle corps, whose equipment is pictured. Photo by Toyo Miyatake and courtesy of the Japanese American National Museum, JANM NEG 120.19.40 98.338.3, Mas Fujimoto Collection.

Although few participants that day knew what the future held for these local boy scouts, the installation marked a key moment in the developing drum and bugle corps scene of Southern California. While Japanese American veterans sponsored troops beginning in the late 1920s, Troop 64 was the first Little Tokyo outfit to field a drum and bugle corps as part of its advanced scouting programs. The corps maintained a strong presence in the Japanese American community during its early years, performing in local

parades and on the radio for KRKD and the Japanese Cultural Broadcasting Society as early as 1933 (*Rafu Shimpō* 1933a, 9). Within a year of Troop 79's installation, Eejima would garner the services of renowned local bandmaster (and Troop 64 instructor) Seiichi Nako to establish a new corps at the temple. Renumbering it as Troop 379, Nako taught military music to the group for their appearances at local festivals and national holiday parades throughout the year. At the same time, leadership at the older Chuo Gakkuen Japanese school Troop 197 in Boyle Heights established their own drum and bugle corps, calling upon Nako to provide his music education services in the middle of a banner 1934 year which saw membership increase to forty-seven members (Troop 197 Chuo Gakkuen 1938, 7). Accordingly, Japanese American youth musicians in Los Angeles had, by 1935, established a widespread practice of performing US American military music, with three active ensembles appearing in local, regional, and national parades as ambassadors of their burgeoning interwar communities.

Yet despite these frequent public performances in urban settings, the historical silence surrounding these Asian American military music ensembles is profound. At a literal level, the archival records of pre-World War II Asian American drum and bugle corps are almost completely devoid of sound: while newspaper, photographic, and oral history accounts in community-based archives provide evidence of their operations, there remains little to no known audiovisual records of these performing troupes. What, then, can be done to listen to sonic practices which were at once a vital part of community building, and which have since been lost? And how might community-based archival practices allow for listening to the archive in ways that expand what we think of as the

audiovisual? In this chapter, I consider the possibilities that emerge when one takes seriously the task of sounding through archival silence, of enacting *archival sonification* (see Introduction) within the limited archives of interwar Asian American drum and bugle corps ensembles. By listening to and re-sounding archival holdings at the Japanese American National Museum and newspaper accounts of the *Rafu Shimpō*, I argue that interwar Asian American drum corps used the ostensibly US American drum corps performance tradition to navigate shifting cultural identities and political allegiances during a period of extreme exclusion, setting the stage for transpacific political activism and music-making in the process. Juxtaposing the emergence of this tradition against the grand historical narratives that pervade the scholarship on the drum corps movement, I consider how Asian Americans were excluded from the histories of this tradition, and how attending to sonic practices—indicated yet unheard in the archives—highlights the cultural and political implications of this Asian American performance practice.

Drum Corps and Transpacific Performance

A core premise of this chapter is that the drum and bugle corps movement in the United States activated a variety of transpacific Asian diasporic communities with varying social, political, and cultural reasons to support youth military music activities. Indeed, members in these ensembles performed their ostensible assimilation to the United States while maintaining sociopolitical ties to the people and politics on the other side of the ocean. While later generations of performers may not have experienced a direct kinship with or experience of migration, the roots of their communities typically tied

back to distinct transnational communities with social, cultural, and political ties around the Pacific. Asian American drum corps thus emerged from a distinctly transpacific lineage of performance, inspiring current and former participants to trace this lineage in their efforts to mark Asian American time (cf. Chapter 4).

Yet invoking the transpacific here thus requires a bit of qualification, since my use of the term is in tension with its ongoing theorization by Asian Americanists. This tension derives from the fact that transpacific discourse both productively decenters the Americas when conceptualizing Asian diasporic experiences yet reproduces settler colonial logics. Janet Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen write that transpacific studies, as a field, hinges on contradictions produced by competing visions of the Pacific as “a space of exploration, exploitation, and expansion,” and as “a contact zone” defined by “alternate narratives” of transnational and translocal interactions. This productive tension, in their view, motivates the key concerns of transpacific research: while “the transpacific can be conceived as a complex network of actually realized power and domination among many countries...the latent possibility of opposition, resistance, and counterhegemonic thinking is also to be found, dispersed among many populations and locales” (2014, 3). It is this concern towards the contradictions of identities shaped by the Pacific, and their potential for varying degrees of oppositional formation, that informs much contemporary Asian American music scholarship, including work by scholars such as Kevin Fellezs (2007, 2019), Christine Mok, and Aimee Bahng (2017).

However, it is this same concern with identity and subjectivity that has elicited settler colonial critique of the transpacific. In their assessment of the relationship of the

term “transpacific” to Asian American Studies, Erin Suzuki and Aimee Bahng point to the problematic “grammar of possession” undergirding the word’s theorization. Namely, the transpacific as a category is always presumed to be subsumed within a broader Asian Americanist framework, with the transpacific subject constructed as illegible outside of Asian American culture *a priori*. Accordingly, the term transpacific “has been operating as part of a broader ‘transnational turn’ in Asian American studies without fully attending to the epistemological and historical distinctions that have differently shaped Indigenous and migrant relationships to the Pacific.” The ramifications of this unmarked settler logic are, in their view, an elision of the Pacific as a place of Oceanic and Indigenous life, effectively rendering it a watery *terra nullius*. Addressing this settler logic thus requires reorientation. In their view, a move towards “a transpacific studies that also engages more directly with Oceanic, Indigenous-centered epistemologies” might produce “alternative mappings and understandings of the region that not only emphasize passage *through* or *across* the oceans, but...[engage] *with* the complexities of the local cultural, historical, and environmental specificities of the many spaces and places that comprise the region as a whole.”

Given these well-taken criticisms, how can a study of mainland, East Asian American military music performance possibly engage transpacific frameworks? My initial response is that I activate the transpacific here not as a literal physical and sociocultural reality, but as a theoretical orientation that informs my attitudes towards the militarism inherent in drum and bugle corps performance. Indeed, I make no claim to focus my work on Indigenous epistemologies or even on Oceanic cultures: outside of this

chapter, I keep the evidentiary basis of this dissertation squarely within urban—and often West Coast—Japanese and Chinese American communities that remain the overdetermined historical foci of Asian American studies.

What a transpacific orientation *does* accomplish for me, however, is “a move away from settler nation-state facing frameworks by emphasizing the intimate entanglements of militarism, racial capitalism, empire, and settler colonialism, and the ‘transits of empire’ they subtend” (Suzuki and Bahng 2020). Mary Talusan’s (2009, 2021) research on the Philippine Constabulary Band models how such an orientation can trace Asian American military music traditions. Talusan interrogates the inherent contradictions raised by the racial politics of US imperialism in the Philippines, militarism through the lens of musical performance, and collaborations between native Philippine musicians and Black bandmaster Col. Walter H. Loving exemplify a clear, transpacific framework of inquiry. Arguing white US American listeners approached these sounds with an “imperial ear” that “reduced the musicality of the [Constabulary] Band members, and by extension, all Filipinos, to a ‘natural’ state of being” that operated as “a signifier of American benevolence and discipline” (2021, 6), Talusan traces how the convergence of racialization, empire, and militarism influenced both performance and listening practices surrounding the Constabulary band as they toured the United States at the turn of the twentieth century.

Taking inspiration from Talusan’s attention to these confluences, I examine how contradictory transpacific relations allowed Asian American drum corps musicians to forge complex responses to their racialization in the US while simultaneously affording

them the opportunity to engage in acts that affirm their diasporic identities. Thus, while this project does risk falling into the trap of umbrella-terming the transpacific under the category of Asian American culture like Suzuki and Bahng suggest, it also presents an opportunity to decolonize the US American marching music tradition by shifting attention towards performers who have consistently challenged the presumptive US American patriotism and imperialism of drum corps performance by turning this music towards Asian American political needs.

Vignette – Continued

Standing in the Shoong Chinese school on that July day in Locke (see Introduction), I touch the nearby wall, its fading white paint indicative of a restoration long since past. Closing my eyes, I imagine the sounds of bugles reverberating through the walls, their vibrational energies transferred into the wall and—across nearly a century—to me. I try to hear something that I cannot...but still, I try to imagine the cacophonous sounds of blaring brass and rumbling drums. Frustrated, I open my eyes back up. Fong and I move on.

In the Gambling Hall museum further down the road, we find the original print of that photo hung on a wall, barely scrutable in the dingy light of a restored building that is clearly still sagging into the banks of the Sacramento River inch-by-inch. Fong reiterates: “Seems like we’ve been doing this a long time.”

Three years after our Locke excursion, I’m with Fong again as we travel to the nearby town of Isleton, California. Winding our way up the river and past the now

familiar sign marking Locke, we head into downtown, the silence of the road palpable as dust road shoulders mark a clear separation between the modern main street and the historic late-nineteenth century buildings dotted along the roadside. We park in front of a narrow white two-story building with Chinese script written above the door. As we walk inside, the president of the historical society, Lynne Basz, greets us. She is a frail white woman with short grey hair and glasses that give off a certain wisdom that comes only with experience and age. Fong and I chat with her, explaining that we came down from Sacramento for the day while reminding her of an earlier phone call I placed inquiring about music in the region. Speaking in her informed, soft voice, she asks whether I am interested in the history of the music in the town or if I am interested in other things as well. I explain my interest in drum corps, and how I found the photos at Locke of the Chinese school children playing with military band instruments. I say that I also hope to learn more about *Kuomintang* (Chinese Nationalist Party, or KMT) activity in the area. She leads us up the leaning staircase at the back of the renovated hall—once the location of the Bing Kong Tong fraternal organization and the Isleton Chinese language school—and into an open area.

The space is small, with wooden floors and walls holding small display cases of pottery, mahjong tiles, and photos. Along the walls are placards with written descriptions in English, Chinese, and Spanish explaining the history of the town's founding by white settlers. The photos along the wall surprise me: I had wrongly assumed that most of the area comprised of Chinese migrant workers, but in reality, the town housed white, Black, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino families who were segregated on different sides of the

city and into different schools across the street from each other. On the open floor are clear glass displays focusing on the Asian American communities that populated the town of nearly eight thousand during the 1920s and 1930s, holding framed photographs with descriptions showed various clubs and organizations holding official photos of their meetings. The walls are covered with beautifully embroidered silver silks depicting scenes from Chinese folklore, and in the corner, hidden away from the small shrine at the far end of the room, is a narrative history with photographs of Toy Teu Quen, the president of the Bing Kong Tong who helped establish and build the building in 1927 following a fire that razed the original building to the ground in 1926.

As Lynne continues her tour, Dan peers closely at a photograph of General Tsing (Cai Ting Kai), a KMT general, and his 1934 visit to the US as part of an anti-Japanese imperialism fundraising mission. As we peer at the photograph, he notes two boys standing right behind the esteemed general, placed in front of an American flag and a KMT political banner. Their names, according to the overlaid paper name tags, are Courtlan Chow and Ed Jow. He turns to me and says “Courtlan Chow...that name sounds familiar from when I was growing up in Sac.” Other names become familiar to him: the photo is the property of Marion W. Wong, a local businessman who Dan had at least heard about. As we peruse around the room, other photographs of schoolboys from the 1930s reveal a young boy among the Chinese Americans. Dan stops me: “He was the director of Mandarins.” I look at a little boy from the combined schools panorama of 1937. His name is Warren Tom.



ton



Figure 2 (a, b): Detail from panoramic photograph of General Tsai Tin Kai's visit to Isleton, November 24, 1934. Warren Tom, former director of the Sacramento Mandarins, is pictured in (b), first row. Isleton Historical Museum, photo by author.

Sonifying Chinese Nationalism in Locke, CA

For a performance practice so often associated with the US Americanism of urban youth, it is telling that some of the first Asian American drum and bugle corps in the United States explicitly supported a Chinese nationalist movement not typically associated with the broader drum corps tradition. Nestled among the asparagus farms and levees of Northern California's Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, the unincorporated town of Locke, California served as one of the earliest sites of Chinese American drum and bugle corps activity along the West Coast. Prior to the 1920s, the town served primarily as a destination for itinerant laborers to spend their hard-earned money after tending the nearby agricultural fields or working on levees dotting the Sacramento River. After the completion of the transcontinental railroad, migrant farmers and levee workers from the Sze Yap⁴ and Zhongshan regions of Guangzhou settled along the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta during the 1870s, forming multiple segregated Chinatowns by the turn of the century. Sze Yap laborers settled for the most part in Rio Vista, while the Zhongshan communities lived in nearby Courtland. The two regional factions then split the Chinatowns in Isleton and Walnut Grove, with extreme political and economic rivalries leading to conflict. With the destruction of both the Sze Yap and Zhongshan portions of the Walnut Grove Chinatown in a 1915 fire, however, Zhongshan businessmen "Charlie" Lee Bing, Tin San Chan, Wing Chong Owyang, and five others approached local businessman George Locke Jr. to rent land along the east riverbank. Previously, fellow

⁴ Spellings here are used according to transliteration traditions within the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. See (Gillenkirk and Motlow [1987] 2006).

Zhongshan merchants had established a saloon, gambling hall, and boarding house near the Locke family property. But with the new per-building rent agreement, the Lockes cleared a portion of their pear orchard to form the workers' town of Lockeport, which soon shortened to Locke (Chan [1987] 2006). Within a decade, nearly six hundred permanent Zhongshanese residents and over one thousand seasonal laborers lived in the town, building a series of restaurants, gambling halls, brothels, markets, and tenement buildings.

Like many of the other Zhongshan-majority districts in the Delta, Locke served as a hotbed of Chinese Nationalist Party activity. Bing, Chan and many other prominent community figures had become members of the KMT while in the US and held regional chapter meetings of the Nationalist Party in Courtland before establishing activities in Locke as well. Ping Lee, son of Lee Bing, recalled in a 1987 oral history interview how the KMT's popularity stemmed in part from residents identifying Sun Yat-Sen with their regional Zhongshan identities:

Most of the time [my father would] be talking politics in his headquarters in Joe Chow's place—political headquarters. He was [Kuomintang] Chairman of the district for a long, long time. District was called the Delta. They had lots of people; you can see their pictures in the museum when Dr. Sun [Yat-Sen] died and all that...My father was a rich man, so he gave a lot of money to the cause. A lot of overseas [Chinese] gave a lot of money to Dr. Sun's revolution. Dr. Sun was a Zhongshan, you know.

(Gillenkirk and Motlow [1987] 2006, 36)

The residents of Locke thus maintained transregional economic and political bonds with the KMT during the height of Sun Yat-Sen's nationalist movement, setting the stage for drum and bugle corps performances that intersected with this transpacific activism.

It was within this context of itinerant labor and Chinese nationalism that some of the earliest Asian American drum and bugle corps performances took place. While the

historical record contains few precise dates, photographic and oral historical evidence places drum and bugle corps performances in Locke and the greater Delta region by the mid-1920s. In 1926, Locke opened its first Chinese language school with the donated funds of Joe Shoong, a founder of the West Coast chain of National Dollar Stores. This school served as a site of youth music education and Chinese American support of military-style drumming and bugling.

The panoramic photograph described in the Introduction's opening vignette (see Figure 3) offers ample evidence that various groups of Chinese youth in the Delta performed military-style drum and bugle music at or near the school. In the photograph, three separate sets of military drums and bugles are arranged in front of three separate groups. The first, on the far left, is placed in front of a group of schoolgirls holding both an unfurled Chinese Nationalist Party flag and an American flag. While none of the girls are holding musical instruments, other photographs from similar periods of Locke's history suggest that the girls of the Chinese school practiced and performed on these instruments, transgressing the assumptive masculinities of the military music space. The second set of drums is placed right in front of a set of boys in scouting garb, their full-brimmed hats and puttees standing out alongside their wooden drill rifles. This suggests that, much like the broader national development of the drum and bugle corps activity, the rise of scouting contributed to the development of military music in Locke and the broader Delta region prior to 1926. The final set is placed in front of the school building with older male and female students, some wearing sashes or sporting banners in support of the day's festivities.



Figure 3 (a, b, c): Detail from panoramic photograph of Shoong Chinese School opening. Locke, CA, 1926. Photographs by author.

Taken as a whole, the image suggests a profound communal investment in military music education among the Chinese American working-class communities of the period. Moreover, the visual record implies that even in the relatively small populations of these Chinese American labor towns, drum and bugle performances comprised a primary performance modality through which significant Chinese cultural events and political messages could take place. While the image offers no information about the performance repertoire and student organizations, what is apparent is that military-style music became a cornerstone of public celebrations and festivals in the worker town over the ensuing decade.

Later visual records evidence how drum and bugle music shaped the sociopolitical lives of Locke's Zhongshanese population through explicit connections to pro-KMT political rallies. Eight years after the opening of the Shoong School, on November 24, 1934, KMT leaders in the delta welcomed General Tsai Ting-kai of the 19th Route Army to Locke as a part of his international press tour following the Japanese invasion of Shanghai. Local leaders viewed the area as a stronghold of the Chinese nationalism, with Locke representing a call for working-class support of KMT resistance to imperial Japanese expansion. While few written records of the Locke visit exist, photos of the event show the presence of military-style instruments at the ceremony, suggesting that Chinese students of the area performed parade tunes for the visiting KMT dignitaries. In one large panoramic commemorative photograph of the event (see Figure 2 above), hundreds of Chinese American youths can be seen seated in front of General Tsai's main stand, each of them wearing a uniform topped with a military-style side cap. Once again,

three separate sets of military drums—likely the same as or similar to the drums in the 1926 image—sit propped up in front of the throng, with two boys in front of the main grandstand harnessing the drums and appearing to tap a rhythm. Other boys on the right side of the image hold a variety of drumsticks, suggesting that most of the performers were boys from the Locke school or from surrounding Chinatowns.

Oral history of the event corroborates the school's crucial involvement in the festivities that day. Effie Lai, a San Franciscan who married into a Locke farming family, detailed in a 1986 oral history interview how the Locke School played a major role in the day's festivities:

I was one of the welcoming committee...[Tsai] was on tour because he was a hero; he fought the Japanese at Shanghai in 1932. He came to visit us and he came to Locke, the main center of the celebration, and went up to [Chinatowns in] Isleton and Walnut Grove, Courtland too. There was a big meeting where all the Chinese school, we went over to Stockton to get the uniform, and we all have a big parade in back, where the vegetable garden is; we build a big platform there, behind the old man's home there...And all the schoolchildren watched with their banners, and I took care of the Chinese school, the children's uniform.

(Quoted in Gillenkirk and Motlow [1987] 2006, 77–78)

Accordingly, drum and bugle performances—likely by musicians trained in the Shoong school—provided the soundtrack for transpacific resistance to Japanese imperialism. By providing the martial fanfares to accompany explicitly pro-KMT political rallies, Chinese American drum and bugle musicians thus engaged in an explicitly transpacific practice that challenged the centrality of US American political life in the nascent drum corps movement. In other terms, playing for Chinese Nationalist Party dignitaries signaled the importance of drum and bugle music to Chinese American political activism and cultural identity at time when such identity was under attack on both sides of the Pacific.

And yet, even as these two panoramic photographs highlight various communal practices of military music-making in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta during the interwar period, they also underscore a particular historical silence. Indeed, much of the existing scholarship (Gambirazzio 2009; Kagiwada 1982) on Locke and the surrounding Chinatowns focuses on the town's post-World War II decline and preservation of the town as the self-proclaimed "last rural Chinatown in the United States." Local museums in both Locke and Isleton provide little commentary on the musical lives of the Chinese delta workers as well. Indeed, many of the photographs described in the vignette are posted without commentary on the walls of the Shoong School and the Isleton Museum, placed as evidence of broader cultural activities in the region during the interwar period. Given the relative historical silence surrounding these practices, my experiment with archival sonification offers a route—imaginary, fragmentary, and speculative though it may be—into more comprehensively engaging with the sonic realities of Chinese nationalist communities in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

A few attempts at archival sonification demonstrate some of the critical potentials and shortfalls that the methodology provides in the specific context of Locke. Creating a speculative narrative of the sounds surrounding the sonic moment in which the shutter snapped—much like that of the introductory Troop 79 installation—leaves the possibility of negotiating the inherent messiness of such archival imaginaries. Returning to both the 1926 and 1934 panoramas, what is striking is the relatively stoic and silent demeanors expressed by the hundreds of photographed subjects. In both, most of the youth performers and marchers face camera, mouths closed as their participation in the parades

and festivities is marked for posterity. And yet, there are opportunities to still imaginatively recreate sounds in the moments surrounding the single instant of the photographs. Were the students joking with each other in Cantonese, or fiddling on the drums before one of the adults shouted at them to be quiet for the photograph? The 1934 General Tsai rally photograph seems to suggest so; the young boys hold sticks in their hands, as if to eagerly await the end of the photo shoot so they can go back to adding to the cacophony of the rally. Accordingly, placing sound at the forefront of the image emphasizes the inherent *infidelity* of sonic histories that archival sonification attempts to creatively resound. Attending to the sonic dimensions of the photograph and its performances thus highlights the cacophony of sound that would have taken place on the day of the school's opening and at the KMT rally. The sonified archival image does not confer a snapshot of an ideal musical moment, but instead into the inherent messiness and multivocality of such projects.

Archival sonification of these under-documented practices also emphasizes the material realities of sonic life. In this instance, sonification relied on an imagined physical mediation of sound across temporal divides: by touching the wall and “hearing” the sounds of instruments and musicians who had long since become silent in the historical record, I attempted to “hear” the material, vibrational energy of sounds that would have shaken the walls of the school building some century ago. Listening through the hushed breeze inside the school building that day was thus an exercise in both re-sounding and in re-spatializing this musical tradition. Moving away from the two-dimensional photograph inside the Shoong school and to the three-dimensional restored

school building, it was clear to me that imagining the ringing of horns and the beating of drums in the space conveyed a vibrational reality that remained merely implied within the panoramic photographs. As a site of cultural transmission through language education, the fact that the Shoong School also reverberated with the sounds of military music—perhaps a mixture of Chinese and US American influences, though I simply don’t know—emphasizes the importance of these practices to creating space for burgeoning interwar Chinese Americans to experience cultural belonging in the face of significant labor exploitation and political exclusion. My copresence within the space—reconstructed and thus not the same space as pictured in the 1926 photograph—further underscored the inherent messiness of this spatialization: rather than recreate a faithful representation of military bugle sounds in the same physical and sociocultural space as these earliest musicians, I engaged in an incomplete (and frustrating) effort to develop a sonic empathy mediated by physical presence in a space of historical significance to Locke’s former residents. As such, this initial effort at archival sonification underscored the materiality of such projects: these sounds were not just *here*, but *here* in a particular space at a particular time with particular associations between Chinese cultural identity and newfound US American music influences.

Thus, the process of archival sonification—speculative and imaginative as it is—foregrounds the lived material realities of these performers. By imagining how the music played nearby and within the confines of the schoolhouse, sonification opened an empathy with the daily musical lives of musicians whose sounds are long lost. And while I don’t claim to have “heard” this music clearly, such lack of historical sonic “fidelity”

indicates that the process of sonification is always circumscribed by the positionality of the person *doing* the sonification in the present. Rather than see this as a tainting of an idealized historical past through the researcher's mediated experiences, I instead see this as the most necessary step towards enacting any meaningful resounding of the quiet past. By attending to the archives as a space for transtemporal contact that is shaped *a priori* by those enacting the speculation, archival sonification recognizes that the process of history-making is necessarily shaped in the present and is mediated through the available records of the past. It is, in other words, a call to co-create history-making, a troublesome yet good-faith effort at ethnographic empathy across time and space.

Archival sonification thus reinforces how drum and bugle corps performance allowed youth in Locke to sound out their complex loyalties on a transpacific stage. By resounding their Chinese nationalist politics on military instruments, Chinese American youths in the Delta region simultaneously asserted their musical and cultural belonging in the United States while underscoring their sociopolitical activism in a post-Exclusion and Johnson-Reed Act Chinese diaspora. Drum corps performers thus challenged the presumptive perpetual foreignness of Chinese Americans in the US while also engaging in transpacific resistance to Japanese imperialism.

Sonifying the Archives of Early Japanese American Drum Corps

Vignette

On June 28, 1937, eighteen Japanese American boy scouts from Troop 379, Troop 145 of the Maryknoll Mission, and Pasadena's Troop 12 boarded the passenger steamship

Chichibu Maru bound for Yokohama. Although Japan's military was a mere six months away from entering Nanjing, relations between the US and the nascent empire were still stable enough to allow international travel across the Atlantic. Observers in the Japanese American media were proud to be sending off their boy scouts as a sign of international goodwill: only the previous day the *Rafu Shimpō* proclaimed that their departure to the International Scout Jamboree would be "one of the biggest send-offs ever accorded to any one group" in the community (*Rafu Shimpō* 1937, 8). This was by far the troops' biggest endeavor: under the direction of scoutmaster Susumu Igauye and assistant leader Jutaro Narumi, the scouts would visit twenty-eight cities over the better part of July and August, touring US and Japanese military schools, public broadcasting stations, and Buddhist temples before allowing scout members to visit relatives still in Japan. Troop 379 members would also bring their music equipment across the Atlantic to serenade dignitaries at the Imperial Palace and the US embassy, marking their "Goodwill Tour" with the sounds of the martial music that they had learned in the states under Nako's baton. As they gathered on the deck, the scouts and their families posed for a quick photograph to mark the occasion (see Figure 4). Some still had their bugles with them, hidden from the frame by the bodies crammed together on the deck; one scout playfully placed the steamers' flotation ring around his face, smiling directly at the camera as his photo was taken. After the photo opportunity, the scouts and their leaders left harbor. Seventeen days later, the Japanese boy scouts' first tour of Japan commenced.

Nearly eighty-five years removed from that June day, I am flipping through a large binder of developed photograph negatives at the Japanese American National

Museum when the sight of khaki scout uniforms and lifeboats catches my eye. Looking through the photo, I'm at first doubtful whether this photo depicts members of Troop 379 and their famed drum and bugle corps. The negative is miniscule, measuring only perhaps one inch on each side, with some mild fuzziness throughout the film. Even with a magnifying glass, it's nearly impossible to make out the letters on the flotation ring giving the ship's name. But as I scan over the orderly lines of wide-brimmed hats, I can barely make out the brass tubing of a bugle in one child's hands. While the photograph's date isn't certain, the prominence of the Japan tour, combined with the infrequent use of steamships by Japanese American scout organizations, suggests that this photograph is indeed of the 379 corps members departing for Japan. As I take another look at the miniature image, my desire to know what the ship deck sounded like that day started to become a personal obsession. What was the sonic experience of being on the pier? Did the musicians fiddle around with their instruments, blurting out a short cascade of bugle calls or a few drum rolls? A whole cacophony of instrumental and environmental sounds that have since faded away flood back into my imagination.



Figure 4: Detail of Troop 379 scouts aboard the Goodwill Tour ship, 1937. JANM NEG 120, 8, 47C : 93.15.27. Kei Kokubun Collection.

Meandering our way back into the stacks, the assistant rolls out a delicate panoramic photograph measuring at least two feet across. Taken at the Second Biennial Convention of the growing Japanese American Citizens League, the image depicts nearly a hundred Japanese American boy scouts sitting cross legged in front of a marble white building with a great arching doorway and neoclassical pillars in the background. Dignitaries from the JACL stand behind the scouts dressed in pressed suits and light dresses with matching hats, and in the very back the lowered troop flags of Troops 64, 79, and 197 accompany three US flags, each held by a boy scout from the respective groups. At the time the photograph was taken, only Troop 64 had a drum and bugle corps, and their equipment is neatly displayed out in front of the scouts sitting on the left side of the image. As I squint at the fuzzy edges of the image, I make out the bass drum's crest: indeed, it is the Troop 64 insignia. Although the scouts are seated, the very presence of the drum—along with the rest of Troop 64's military-issue music equipment—suggests that they had paraded before the JACL took their picture. As we cover up the photograph, I hear in my mind the sound of bass drum, the wooden shell creaking as a boy scout extricates himself from its straps and placed it intently on the grown to face the camera, careful not to chip the wood on the pavement as he did so. I wonder what his day must have been like, lugging that piece of equipment around Los Angeles in the blazing July sun. Did he even understand what the parade was about?



Figure 5: Troops 64, 79, and 197 assemble for the Second Biennial Convention of the Japanese American Citizens League in Los Angeles, CA, June 1932. Japanese American National Museum, Ikey Kakimoto Family collection (98.120.1; JANM, 13, FF, 3 FO)

In the case of the Japanese American communities of Southern California, drum corps carried with it an implicit politics of belonging in US American society. Sponsoring a drum corps was one way that Japanese American veterans articulated their community's belonging in the broader US American cultural landscape. Having one's children participate in a drum corps could therefore signal the broader family's willingness to assimilate US American cultural values. World War I veteran Hitoshi Fukui exemplified just how complex the politics of Japanese American drum corps during this period could be. As one of the earliest committeemen of Troop 379, Fukui resettled in Los Angeles following the war and helped his father Soji run a Japanese American mortuary in the Boyle Heights neighborhood (Fukui Mortuary 2004). Having experienced overt racism as a member of the US armed forces, Fukui became politically involved in the local Japanese American Citizens League (*Rafu Shimpō* 1931) and the Japanese American-led

Commodore Perry American Legion Post #525. These organizations promoted the broad cultural assimilation of Japanese Americans into the dominant political sphere (Lyon 2020) and quickly backed the Troop 379 corps as a marker of Japanese Americans' success as US American citizens. Under the leadership of Fukui and Eejima, the Daishi Mission boy scouts would gain national recognition for their scouting activities, winning presidential honor medals in 1933 and 1934 (*Rafu Shimpō* 1934, 6). The drum corps was thus part of an overall project of projecting Japanese Americans' patriotism to a national audience. At the same time, drum corps participation afforded profound engagement with local Japanese American communities through diasporic cultural events. Troops 64, 379, and 197 were frequent guests at local activities, ranging from the spring Cherry Blossom Festival (*Rafu Shimpō* 1933c) to the *matsuri* festivals dotting the summer calendar. The presence of drum corps in these settings therefore indicated that participants maintained profound connections to Japanese cultural traditions while performing US American political ideologies of assimilation.

Yet as a burgeoning youth activity in the broader Japanese American community of interwar Los Angeles, these drum and bugle corps' musical practices remain noticeably quiet. The absence of direct references to sound marks the newspaper records of these ensembles: in many accounts, only marginal or off-handed references to music are made, and often in a sentence or less. A few representative examples are included below:

The Drum and Bugle Corps of the Daishi Mission troop presented a few selections under the direction of Scoutmaster Sam Y. Eijima. At the close of the court the Daishi troop was highly praised for their achievements and good showing.

(*Rafu Shimpō* 1933b, 6)

Awards are to be made when a tri-annual Court of [Honors] of the Metropolitan district is held at John Adams Junior high school on Friday evening, June 23. At this Court of Honors, the drum and bugle corps of Troop 79 will make its first public appearance under the direction of S. Nako, the troop instructor.

Troop 79 has also been asked by the Scout headquarters to participate in the Independence Day celebration of the American Legion at the Coliseum on the evening of July 4. The Daishi scouts are planning to stage a lantern parade with its drum and bugle corps leading.

(*Rafu Shimpō* 1933a, 9)

Nisei students will take an active part in the Jamboree program to be presented at Roosevelt high school this Friday April 15, at p. m. to raise money to send children of the East Los Angeles district to camps this summer.

With Leo Carrillo acting as Master of Ceremonies, gala program of singing, dancing, musical and variety entertainment will be offered.

Highlights of the program include the following nisei: Troop 197 Drum and Bugle corps George Seno, Roosevelt high singer; Amy Kojima and Hiro Shirakawa in dance numbers.

Accordion Rockets from the Ricchio school; Stevenson Jr. high band; Russian chorus from International Institute; Roosevelt high championship tumbling team. Mexican dancers from Brownson House, and other numbers will be presented.

Admission will be 25 cents for adults and 10 cents for children.

(*Rafu Shimpō* 1939, 6)

While these records reveal the types of cultural events that L.A.'s Little Tokyo drum corps participated in during the 1930s, they do little to illuminate the sonic worlds which these ensembles helped create. Such historical quiet suggests that local observers for the *Rafu Shimpō* were concerned less with the exact sounds being produced and more with what the drum corps themselves represented: the ideal Japanese American citizen whose embodied performances reflected an unwavering loyalty to the US state. Drum corps were therefore paradoxically rendered quiet within local media: although their appearances in the community garnered extensive coverage, their sounds were more of an afterthought in the view of patriotic Japanese American observers.

This quiet underpinning these newspaper accounts presents a particular challenge to archival sonification: How can sound be added back into these histories with so little acoustic evidence? While perhaps unresolvable, one potential answer to such a question emerges by attending to the sonic experiences of the musicians who produced sounds

now rendered quiet by time in the archives. Such a project of sounding their experiences requires affective engagements across material culture and archival documentation, ones that invert the silencing power of the archives by drawing sensorial connections across varying representations of historical sounds. Infrequently, written records do describe the sounds that originally accompanied the now-quiet archival record. Explicit repertoire selections make the archival sonification of Japanese American drum corps possible by providing an imagined soundtrack to accompany the archival encounter. In the 1932 Troop installation that I described above, “Taps” played a prominent role. With some effort, the opening strains of the iconic bugle call might be imagined reverberating through the wooden structure of the Daishi Mission on that February day in 1932. Likely played by one of the advanced members of the Troop 64 drum corps, the brassy blare of the G bugle would have carried profound significance for military personnel in the room like Fukui, for whom the call would have been a familiar part of their daily life in the US armed forces.

In other circumstances, the reconstruction of musical sounds requires more attention to the medium by which audiences experienced the sounds now rendered quiet in the archives. Take, for example, the radio appearance of the Troop 64 scout corps referenced above, now excerpted in greater detail:

As a climax to the Boy's Week which was observed throughout the country, the Japanese Cultural Broadcasting society will feature the Japanese boys of the southland by presenting the Troop 64 Drum and Bugle Corps under the direction of S. Nako. The boys will be heard during the regular broadcast of the society over station KRKD on Monday evening, May 8. This Japanese bugle corp [sic] is known to be the only one of its kind in Los Angeles and has a large number of players. Of this group 10 boys were selected to appear in the radio program. The drummers are Tom Hayakawa, George Saito, Lloyd Kinoshita and Kazu Saito while the buglers are Joe Abe, Tom Uragami, Robert Obi, Katsumi Yamada, Arthur Mitshi and Masao Furukawa...Tune in station KRKD from 9:30 o'clock.

(Rafu Shimpo 1933a, 9)

Here, the sonic traces of this event reverberate far beyond the music itself—the static and hum of local radios, the muffled sound of the drums punching through the airwaves, the accompanying blares of the six bugles playing likely in unison or simple harmony—all of these sounds revivify that single evening otherwise rendered as a quiet event by the textual archive. In turn, the sonification of this radio appearance illuminates the corps’ relationship to the local community: while anyone might have tuned in at 9:30 pm that evening to serendipitously hear the buglers playing away on some military call or cadence, the most likely people to encounter those sounds would have been those in Los Angeles’ Little Tokyo tuning in to hear the Japanese Cultural Broadcasting program. In this case, then, the available textual documents evince the role of drum corps sounds in creating an imagined community (B. Anderson [1983] 2016) negotiating a complex set of cultural and national affiliations. And as these brief examples show, the relationship between text and sonification is necessarily ambivalent, leading to an ever-expanding set of possible interpretations and reconstructions. Even in circumstances when the produced sounds are made explicit, there remains much room to imagine the broader cultural and political significations these sounds carried with them.

Encounters with the archives of Japanese American drum and bugle corps performance are therefore fleeting and incomplete. Histories of symbolic annihilation render these traditions relatively inaudible in the histories of US American music broadly and in the drum and bugle corps scene specifically. Yet it is this very incompleteness in the record, these very absences in the archives, that motivate my process and method of sounding the archives. As detailed through the multiple encounters possible when

employing archival sonification, the archives as a space need not be eternally quiet. Whether by imagining the sounds implied by textual or photographic traces, embodying the choreographies of sound that performers once engaged in, or bringing sound literally into the archival space, archival sonification provides a flexible means for reconstructing the sonic worlds of archives. In doing so, it provides a form of representation—no matter how tenuous and imagined—that redresses the silence of the archives by re-sounding those voices and practices which constituted the basis of community identity and national belonging for these musicians. Archival sonification thus expands beyond the specificities of Japanese American military music ensembles during the 1930s; it provides a set of approaches and ethical orientations that politically re-sound the past in the present while looking towards the future. It is, in other words, an ethical orientation towards developing understandings and affective connections that revivify the archives of ostensibly lost sounds and voices whose revitalization requires an empathetic intercession on the part of the contemporary archival researcher. In this collapse of a linear temporality, the past becomes audibly present, imagined though it may be.

Conclusion: On George Yoshida

Within the realms of Japanese American jazz historiography, saxophonist George Yoshida holds a particularly prominent position as a community historian and performer. Born in Seattle, Yoshida grew up surrounded by music: his mother worked as an organist for a local church while his father played choral music records and listened to music on the radio. After moving to Los Angeles' Boyle Heights neighborhood in the mid-1930s,

Yoshida enrolled in Theodore Roosevelt High School, where he participated in the school's orchestra as a saxophonist before graduating in 1940.⁵ Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, he was incarcerated along with many of his musical peers at the Poston, AZ concentration camp, where he played baritone sax for the camp swing band, the Music Makers. Entertaining younger Nisei audiences with swing arrangements of popular tunes was his favorite pastime "at camp," which inspired him to document the similar experiences of incarcerated Japanese American jazz musicians later in life. In 1997, as director of the Nikkei Music History Project, Yoshida published his seminal collection of memoirs, oral histories, and music biographies *Reminiscing in Swingtime: Japanese Americans and American Popular Music, 1925-1960*. To this day, Yoshida's book stands as a key historical text documenting the contributions of first and second-generation Japanese Americans to the development of jazz's popularity in the interwar period. Moreover, his work illuminated a tradition of Japanese American swing band musicians that is now arguably one of the most studied areas of Japanese American music-making during the 1930s and 1940s (Asai 1995; Waseda 2005, 2017; Barbour 2014, 2018; Saporiti 2016).

The life and musicological contributions of George Yoshida might seem an odd place from which to conclude my intentionally fleeting ruminations on the historical silences of Asian American drum and bugle corps performance traditions. Yet it is his life story that—perhaps more than any other—exemplifies the symbolic annihilation of these

⁵ Archival evidence of biographical details provided on George Yoshida may be found in JANM's George Yoshida Collection, 2000.400.1-13.

musical practices and opens up multiple potentialities for archival sonification. This is because Yoshida's participation in the Troop 197 Chuo Gakkuen Drum and Bugle Corps is a quiet sidenote of his biography, seen in sentences such as "He was a drummer in the local Japanese American Boy Scout troop's drum and bugle corps" (S. Kim 2020) with no further elaboration. Despite this relative silence surrounding his participation in the local drum corps scene, the community-based archives of the Japanese American National Museum evidence Yoshida's strong personal investment in the scout corps during his high school years in Boyle Heights. In his donated collections at the Japanese American National Museum, one can find Yoshida's Troop 197 scout identification cards, merit medals, and troop newsletters detailing the drum and bugle corps' activities.

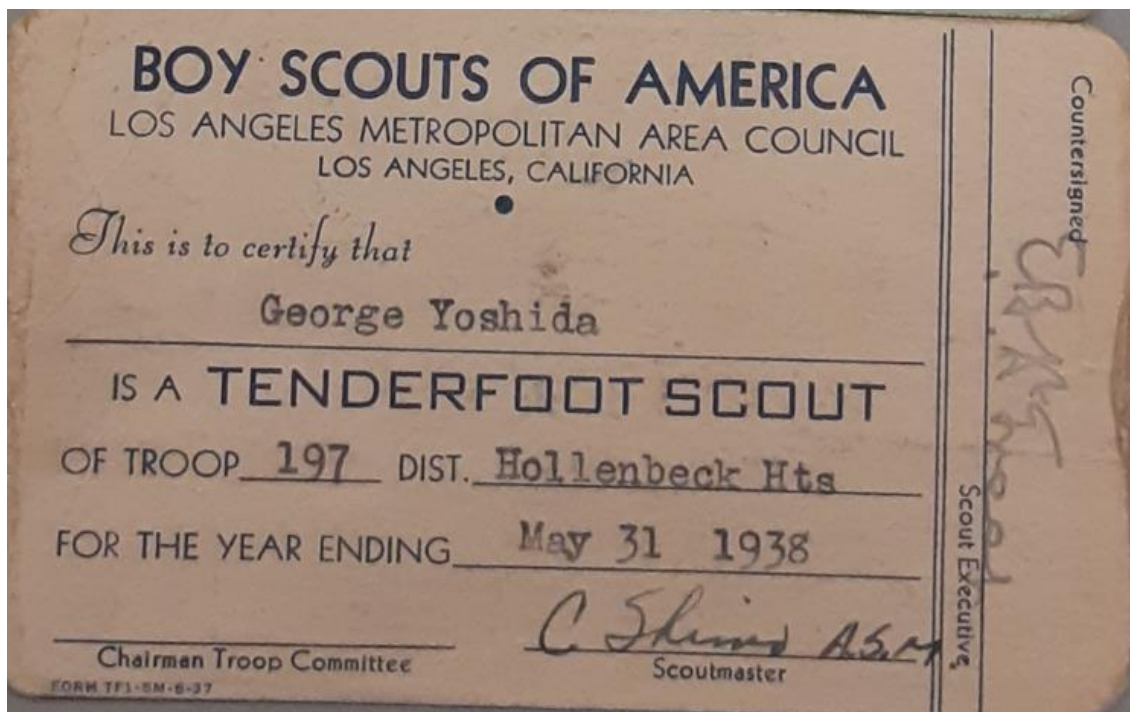


Figure 6: Boy Scouts of America Troop 197 identification card for George Yoshida, 1937-8. Signed by Assistant Scoutmaster Cedrick Shimo. JANM 2000.400.8.

Elsewhere, in the collections of fellow Nisei jazz musician Bruce Kaji, photos of Yoshida's corps from 1939 show the troops in a narrow band shell with the drum and bugle corps equipment placed in front of the standing members. The caption running beneath their impeccably stacked drums and straight bugles indicates that the photo was taken at the unit's eleventh anniversary celebration in 1939, right when Yoshida was entering his second year as a member.



Figure 7: Troop 197 Chuo Gakkuen Boy Scouts 11th Anniversary photograph with drum and bugle corps, 1939. JANM 2000.262.2, Bruce and Frances Kaji Collection

Similar photographs of the full 197 outfit can also be found in the pages of the *Rafu Shimpo* from the same period. In one detailing the exploits of the local scout troops and their drum corps for the 28th National Scout Week, a full troop photo of 197 appears at the bottom of the page, with Yoshida placed directly in the middle of the second row.



Figure 8: Excerpt from front cover of Rafu Shimpo, February 6, 1938. George Yoshida is seated sixth from the right in the second row.

While these archival materials offer further insight into the life Yoshida led as a high school Nisei prior to World War II, a certain archival quiet still pervades.

Unlike the internationally recognized Troop 379, few if any parade photos exist of Yoshida and the troop playing together. Nowhere is there a picture of him at a parade, banging away on one of the group's custom field drums. It would seem then that the drum corps sounds of George Yoshida's musical life doubly quiet: absent both from contemporary records and from most accounts of his life story, his sonic production as a member of the Chuo Gakkuen troop would seem to be lost to memory.

Vignette

As I sit inside the collections room of JANM, pondering just how I might “hear” Yoshida outside of his contributions to Japanese American jazz, I flip to his commencement program from Roosevelt High School. Printed midway through the program are four selections delivered by the orchestra on his graduation day of June 26, 1940. I soon found myself searching the internet for the first piece, a waltz entitled “*Así es la vida*” (“Such is Life”). After tracking down a 1922 audio recording by the Orquesta Internacional (a pseudonym for the Victor label’s International Novelty Orchestra directed by conductor Nathaniel Shilkret). I press play. The smooth strains of the orchestra run through the headphones, the hiss and crackle of the shellac cutting through the saccharine triple time of the opening statement. As I continue to listen, the strains of a saxophone cut through the rest of the ensemble, carrying the melody through moments of punctuated *staccato* phrases or languishing glides down a major scale. Glancing back at the photographs of Troop 197, I can’t help but sense an incongruity between the music I am hearing and the driving, incessant thunder of the drums that Yoshida would have played while in the corps. As the concluding coda fades away into the incessant white noise of the 78-rpm recording, I imagine the faintest sound of a snare drum tapping along to the constant ONE-two-three of the waltz.

My mind wanders. Perhaps Yoshida, during one of his weekly rehearsals with the troop corps, played the waltz pattern of “*Así es la vida*” on his drums while fooling around with his Nisei drum corps peers. Or maybe he brought his saxophone to a music rehearsal and played a few riffs while waiting to start up the military maneuvers with the

corps. While obviously speculative, I sense that Yoshida's musical sounds are somehow closer to being heard in that moment. By literally bringing the sounds of his musical life into the archives, an auditory archival imaginary is developing, making the sounds of his drum corps experience somewhat more audible out of the pervasive quiet of the materials surrounding me.

As the descendant of Japanese American grandparents who lived in Boyle Heights on December 7, 1941, what happens next in this historical narrative, both for Yoshida and for hundreds of other Japanese American scout musicians from these local military music ensembles, is all too familiar to me. In many ways, the incarceration of over 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II disrupted and fractured the music communities cultivated by scout drum corps during the 1930s. And yet in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, drum and bugle corps music-making became perhaps one of the most crucial and underexplored battlegrounds for negotiating the politics of incarceration. As Chapter 2 explores, the music tradition steeped in US American patriotism and imperialism—the one where Yoshida, Kaji, and other loyal Nisei honed their music skills during the interwar period—would become a key site of resistance to the illegal incarceration of Japanese American citizens at the hands of the US government. Drawing once again on practices of archival sonification, I explicate how both pro- and anti-US American units turned to military music as a site for political commentary and critique in response to their mass imprisonment.

Chapter 2 - Sonifying Mobility: Drum and Bugle Corps Performance During the Japanese American Incarceration

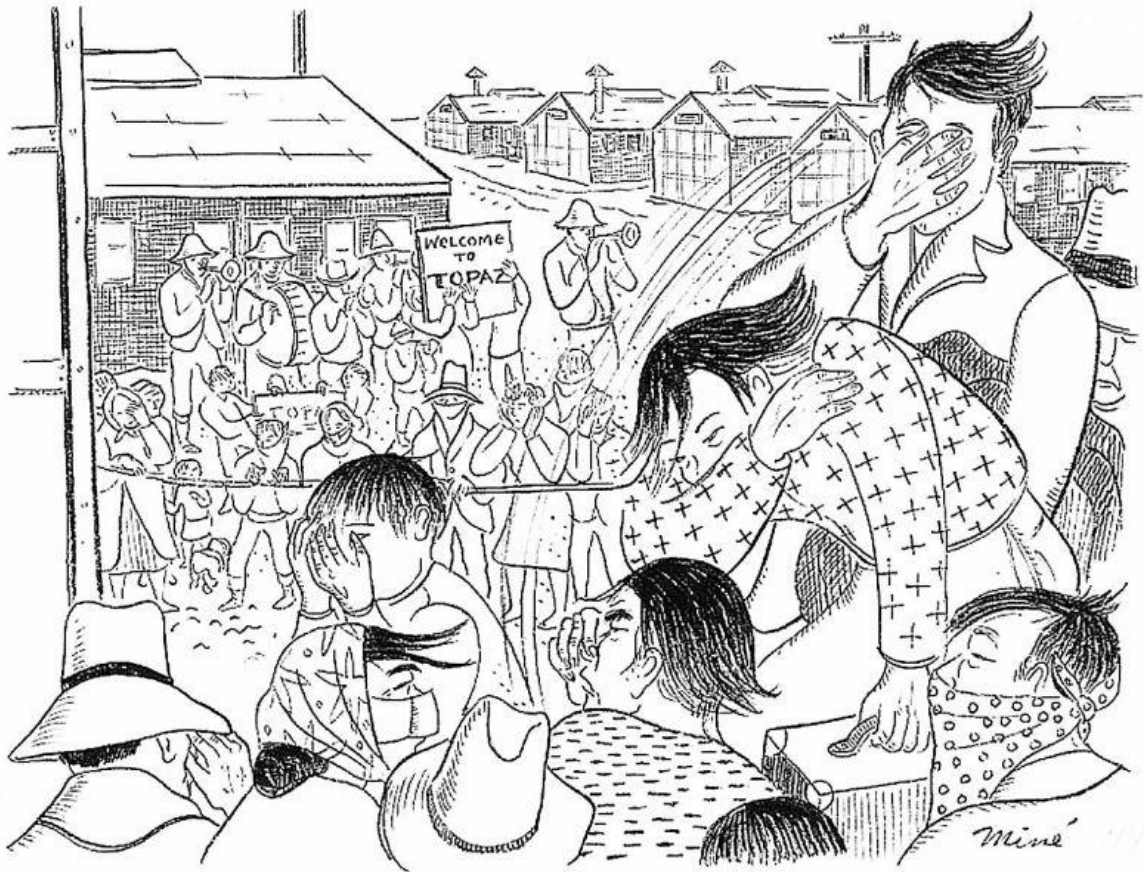


Figure 9:

“On October 6, 1942, 550 former San Franciscans from Santa Anita Assembly Center arrived. The final contingent of 308 people came from Tanforan on October 15. The Boy Scout band welcomed each incoming bus, and there were welcome signs for the new residents.

Mass meetings of welcome were held at the different mess halls. The project director and other officials, including the drum and bugle corps, were on hand to give each new group an impressive showing.”

Miné Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 2014 [1946], 144

(Courtesy of Japanese American National Museum, Gift of Miné Okubo Estate 2007.62.123)

When Nisei artist Miné Okubo published her seminal graphic memoir *Citizen 13660* in 1946, reviewers “from an elite spectrum of liberal voices”—including War Relocation Authority (WRA) chief Dillon Myer—lauded her book as representative of a maligned but indomitable American spirit (Hong 2014, xi). For such bureaucratic readers,

Citizen 13660 represented the triumph of Japanese American patriotism, endurance, and loyalty, justifying the supposed necessity of “evacuation” away from the West Coast. In a similar vein, the “Boy Scout band” Okubo observed welcoming people to the camp could have been read by WRA officials as a marker of successful Americanization. Indeed, these earliest arrivals to Topaz hailed from San Francisco’s premier Japanese American scout drum and bugle corps, Troop 12. Founded in 1933, Troop 12 quickly emerged as a staple of the interwar Japanese American community. Like their L.A. counterparts (see Chapter 1), they performed in local parades, festivals, and special ceremonies for visiting Japanese dignitaries. By the eve of the attacks on Pearl Harbor, Troop 12 was well established as a community music organization, known especially for their appearances in San Francisco’s prestigious Chinese New Year’s parade. Once incarcerated under the WRA, many of the boys from Troop 12 ended up in Topaz, eventually reforming a drum corps while imprisoned. Thus by the time Okubo recorded their musical exploits in *Citizen 13660*, drum and bugle corps performance had been an established form of Japanese American musicking for nearly a decade, one that marked an incomplete project of national belonging whose political valences shifted drastically after December 7, 1941.

Since its initial publication, Okubo’s first-hand account of her incarceration has been increasingly read through the lens of resistance and its relationship to the racialized body. Ethnic studies scholar Vivian Chin, for instance, argues that the book reads as a litany of embodied protests, refusing to succumb to the US military’s desire to read the Asian American body as foreign and Other. “*Citizen 13660*,” she insists, “documents the ways in which edicts based upon essentialist notions of race that demonized the

‘Japanese’ body were resisted by Japanese American internees through gestures and through invention” (Chin 2004, 23). But this reclamation of resistance in Okubo’s writings and drawings is necessarily incomplete. As Asian American literature scholar Christine Hong writes, “the publication of *Citizen 13660* so soon after the war was contingent on a nexus of structural factors, including WRA support, that complicate its recovery as a self-evident critique of government wrongdoing” (2014, xii). These tensions between embodied critique and an uneasy compliance pervade this chapter, in which I selectively trace the emergence and proliferation of Japanese American drum and bugle corps performance during the World War II incarceration.

Rather than offer a sweeping master narrative of this wartime phenomenon, I focus instead on the ways in which Japanese American musicians marked their positions within a national politics of belonging by using their bodies in politically complex ways. What did it *mean* for Japanese American youth to embody the movements and music of a military that ultimately scattered them across ten “relocation centers” throughout the United States? How did their performances enable certain mobilities—social, political, and physical—that were otherwise foreclosed to them through the mechanisms of their imprisonment? And how might sonifying these historical performance practices offer insight into their political resonances? In this chapter, I argue that drum and bugle corps performance afforded incarcerated Japanese Americans a degree of “symbolic mobility” (Asai 2023, 19) to selectively contest the terms of their confinement. I propose that members of these ensembles performed military music in ways that granted them mobility and access to physical and acoustic space beyond the violently-upheld borders

of the camps. I further assert that these practices may be re-sounded through multimodal processes of archival sonification. That is, by recentering sonic experience in the (admittedly always partial) reconstruction of these performances, the mobilizing potential of these practices may be better understood.

This chapter contains three major sections. The first concerns the theoretical and historical stakes of these drum corps ensembles and their performances. After first situating drum and bugle corps performance within the broader realms of music during the incarceration, I consider how a focus on mobility might recoup some of the political valences of a practice performed under the political and physical confinements of the incarceration camps. The second section focuses on how ostensibly “Americanized” and patriotic boy scout troop drum corps nevertheless enacted their own critiques of incarceration through ambivalently resistant means. Archival sonification of the material and photographic remnants of these practices underscores, I suggest, the political potential of these practices to both tacitly support and covertly protest the incarceration. This section draws upon the oral histories of Minoru “Min” Tonai—a teenager who performed with the Troop 179 Drum & Bugle Corps of the Granada/Amache camp—to further propose that the Americanization projects of the WRA did not fully quell efforts by incarcerated musicians to protest their imprisonment. The final section examines the practice of bugle corps performances by members of the pro-Japan *Hokoku Seinendan* (報國青年団), a fraternal organization covertly organized by “No-No” dissenters after their segregation to the Tule Lake, CA camp. By sonifying transcriptions of their bugle calls and marches that were confiscated by the WRA, I propose that military music

performance permitted a large degree of political, physical, and symbolic mobility for these protesting musicians, even in the face of extreme restrictions and crackdowns by US military authorities.

Incarceration, Mobility, and Archival Sonification

In her analysis of Japanese American wartime incarceration and performance, Susan Asai notes that music offered incarcerated a degree of agency to process both the racial ideologies of their imprisonment and their own shifting cultural identities. As she asserts: “The coupling of race and music [in the camps] considers the intensely racialized experience of the incarcerated that affected the aesthetic and political choices some Japanese Americans made either in steering more sharply toward their Japanese heritage or toward their Americanness” (Asai 2024, 123). For her, these agencies crystalized around different musical communities of descent, dissent, and affinity (Shelemay 2011), with each type of musical community navigating unique political, generational, and cultural terrains to address the traumas and daily struggles of incarceration. As many scholars on artistic expression in the camps have noted, these communities coalesced around a variety of musical practices: while the WRA’s Americanization projects encouraged a high degree of western art music programming and record listening activities (Robertson 2017), inmates also had limited freedom⁶ to perform *koto*, *shakuhachi*, and *taiko* in festivals, plays, and holiday celebrations marking key Japanese

⁶ While the WRA’s primary objectives with cultural programming centered on Americanization, officials did allow some Japanese cultural performances as a way of appeasing older generations of incarcerated (Asai 1995).

cultural events and holidays. Incarceration thus provided what Minako Waseda (2005, 172) has termed “exceptional opportunities” to engage in musicking practices spanning a range of cultural, racial, and political meanings.

In the substantial scholarly literature on music in the camps, agency and musicking are strongly associated with incarere jazz dance bands, because their assertions of a cosmopolitan Nisei identity are often read as political refutations of the logics of perpetual foreignness undergirding the incarceration. As I discussed at the end of Chapter 1, jazz saxophonist George Yoshida’s *Reminiscing in Swingtime* provides perhaps the most comprehensive historical study on such Japanese American jazz musicians, both before, during, and after the incarceration. In between his personal ruminations on the camps, interviews with other musicians, and social commentary on the importance of jazz to second-generation Japanese Americans, Yoshida argues that jazz bands grew out of a desire for the semblance of normality:

It is no wonder that in this physically and psychologically depressed ambience, dance bands spontaneously and swiftly came into being. The vacuum created by the need for sustenance of hope, for distraction and for the uplifting of wounded spirits was satisfied for many by music and dance. Artists are healers—youthful Nisei provided the balm to disheartened souls. Youngsters who earlier had acquired some ability to play musical instruments joined together in an attempt to recreate the great sounds they heard over the radios in their barracks late at night.

(1997, 124)

Asai, a longtime friend and collaborator with Yoshida, similarly argues that jazz provided the possibility of survival and agency within the psychologically traumatic experiences of daily life in the camps. “[J]azz-making,” she asserts, “provided a remedy for Japanese American youth against crippling social and psychological damage. The role of musicking was one of spiritual and cultural renewal and, in some instances, resistance” (Asai 2023, 18). Jazz dance bands thus remain a cornerstone of the musical

historiography of Japanese incarceration, evincing for many practitioners and scholars the unique political challenges faced by Nisei Americans looking to negotiate their Japanese and US cultural heritages.

Considering the agencies of incarcerated Japanese American musicians requires, I propose, a critical attention towards mobility. Mobility studies scholar Peter Adey defines mobility as more than literal or symbolic forms of movement and agency, but as a concept that transcends mere physicality:

“[M]obility, at least for me, is a relation...mobility is a way of addressing people, objects, things, and places. It is a way of communicating meaning and significance, while it is also a way to resist authoritarian regimes. For some it is a desperate passageway full of hope. For others it is banal and forgettable. It is a way to bond with one’s friend, while it could be the means to threaten a boundary. In a certain sense then, mobility appears much like a notion such as space or time.”
(2017, xv)

Key to Adey’s definition is the notion of mobility as intersubjective and relational, placing people, objects, places, and--as I would argue—sounds into connection with each other. It is therefore somewhat politically ambiguous and ambivalent, having the potential to enact change and resistance but not a *de facto* salve against oppression. On the surface, the severe oppression and policing of the WRA may appear to imply a particular immobility, wherein inmates’ spatial, political, social, and cultural relations were heavily dictated by state forces. Yet as theorist Giorgio Agamben writes, the camp itself offers the very terms of possibility by enacting the “state of exclusion.” Rather than representing a judicio-political anomaly, concentration camps enact an inclusive exclusion built into the structure of the state: what is seemingly *excluded* from the state is actually *included* in its juridical structure through its supposed exclusion. As he proposes:

One ought to reflect on the paradoxical status of the camp as space of exception: the camp is a piece of territory that is placed outside the normal juridical order; for all that, however, it is not simply an external space. According to the etymological meaning of the term exception (*ex-*

capere), what is being excluded in the camp is *captured outside*, that is, it is included by virtue of its very exclusion. Thus what is being captured under the rule of law is first of all the very state of exception. In other words, if sovereign power is founded on the ability to decide on the state of exception, the camp is the structure in which the state of exception is permanently realized.

(Agamben [1994] 2000, 39; emphasis original)

Thus, while this state of exception is hegemonically rationalized as the right of the state, it paradoxically enables opportunity: “It is only because the camps constitute a space of exception—a space in which the law is completely suspended—that everything is truly possible in them” (ibid.).

While Agamben, for his part, suggests that the power of such possibility lies with the repressive state apparatus—i.e., “the government, the administration, the army, the police, the courts, the prisons, etc.” (Althusser [1971] 2014)—Asian American Studies scholar Meredith Oda asserts that incarcees experienced forms of mobility and power themselves. In her archival work, Oda shows how Japanese American prisoners moved between spaces, both contained by and exceeding the camps, as social beings. As she argues, incarcerated Nisei by 1943 and 1944 often left and returned to their respective camps based on family financial needs, libidinal economies, and occasional personal pleasure (Oda 2021). Even within the camps, they reconstructed a semblance of prewar social life by starting clubs, constructing schools, and attending social dances and festivals. And while these forms of physical and social mobility often required WRA approval—for, say, family visits, job seeking, Boy Scout expeditions, etc.—some, like the various “fishing clubs” of young bachelors who covertly exited and returned to the camp to fish in nearby streams, were conducted covertly (Chiang 2010). By framing incarceee experience in terms of mobility—i.e., the social, cultural, and political relationships between people, space, and movement—Oda accordingly positions the Japanese

American incarcerated as an agentic explorer of possibility. Rather than “awaiting the only possible outcome” of death (Downey 2013, 122), she insists that incarcerated existed as social beings that moved within and beyond the camps, and thus transformed them into expressive, liminal spaces *for* life.

Building on Oda’s insistence on the relative mobilities of the Japanese American inmates, I propose that these mobilities were experienced and performed in the sonic registers of drum and bugle corps performances prior to and during the incarceration. Sounding out a complex politics of belonging and exclusion, youth musicians from along the West Coast used their military bugles and drums to generate certain agencies beyond the “symbolic mobility” expressed by Asai. Marching music, in other terms, allowed incarcerated musicians to become socially, culturally, physically, and acoustically mobile in ways that transcended their confinement. In the remainder of this chapter, therefore, I focus on archival and oral history documentation of both pro-American and pro-Japan military music ensembles, offering glimpses into sonification of their archived musical practices. These inquiries suggest that the mobilities generated by imprisoned Japanese American musicians transcended specific political orientations, offering a notable range of political affordances in the face of vastly different WRA responses.

Vignette

Later in my trip through the JANM collections (see Chapter 1), I amble through the dimly lit cupboards when the collections assistant points me toward the faded wooden shell of a bass drum. Emblazoned across the calfskin head is the familiar shield of Troop

64. A gift of Robert Uragami, the drum stayed in the family long after his father Roy stopped working as a scoutmaster and the corps disbanded. As I look over the hand-painted crest adorning the drum, I'm reminded of the palimpsestic political meaning of its crest. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the drum received a very specific facelift: members, fearing the implications of keeping the Japanese flag depicted in the 1932 installment photograph, replaced it with a second copy of the Stars and Stripes. While I cannot physically touch the drum following its restoration,⁷ its sheer size leads me to imagine its punchy rumble when struck.

Meandering our way back into the stacks, the assistant pulls out a large brown scrapbook, yellowed from years of family possession. Right away I recognize this as the Robert Uragami scrapbook which includes photos of his father Roy leading Boy Scout Troop 179 in the Amache/Granada prison camp in Colorado. I'm drawn immediately to a set of photos of the ensemble that Roy Uragami reconstituted in the camp. In two photos—one of the members posing in front of a nondescript camp building and the other at an outdoor flag raising ceremony—the bass drum is visibly present, hiding entire people's bodies behind its large head and tensioned rim. Though fuzzy, I can make out the two US flags painted on the drum. The drum strikes me as a vexillological palimpsest, representing the very real consequences of these performers navigating a multitude of cultural identities at a time of severe scrutiny.

⁷ The drum's restoration can be viewed on JANM's YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/TO5828275Ec> (accessed on April 29, 2026).

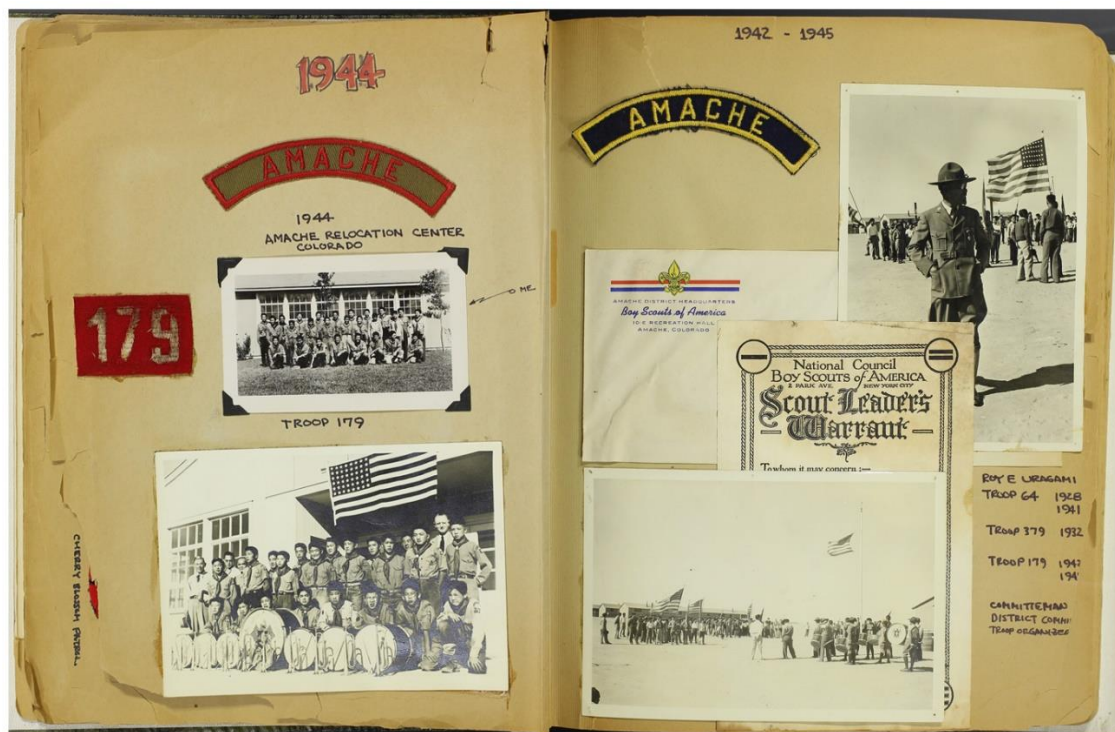


Figure 10: Detail from Robert Uragami scrapbook displaying photographs, pamphlets, and patches from Boy Scout Troop 179 Drum & Bugle Corps in the Amache "Relocation Center." Scoutmaster Roy Uragami's photograph appears in the upper right, with photographs of the drum corps outside a camp building and at a flag raising ceremony adorning the bottom of both pages. Courtesy of the Japanese American National Museum, Robert Uragami Collection, NEG 120 9 5-6 [99.2.1-3]).

Finally, we return to the main collections area to view item 2007.41.2: the bass drum mallets that the scouts of Troop 64 used to strike their crested bass drum. They are thin with leather straps attached to the end to enable visual flourishes in between drum strokes. The felt, old and dirty, is compacted. Yet as I grip the mallets in my gloved hands, I can sense the sheer power that a boy scout could produce by whipping them into the thumping calfskin head. I swing them back and forth, taking care to handle them gently and avoid dropping them. In my mind's ear, I can hear the thunderous boom of the bass drum with each strike of the air drum. I find myself pondering about how far those bass drum impacts would reverberate through the streets of interwar Little Tokyo or the

emptiness of Amache, how it might have signaled to residents in both contexts that the drum corps was on parade.

In the aftermath of the Pearl Harbor attacks, the US government immediately sought to limit Japanese American mobility broadly, and drum corps performers' mobility specifically. FBI agents detained and dispersed nearly 5,500 Japanese nationals—mostly male Issei (first-generation) community leaders—in the hours and days following the attacks, placing most of them into Department of Justice “internment camps” or federal prisons. Following President Roosevelt’s issuance of Executive Order 9066, over 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry were imprisoned across ten concentration camps, sixteen temporary assembly centers, and dozens of additional sites of incarceration. While drum and bugle corps had previously flourished under urban Japanese American veterans and religious organizations during the interwar period, this forced removal and dispersion effectively halted all community scouting activities. Many corps left their possessions, including their instruments, uniforms, and badges, in the care of the WRA, uncertain when they would get them back again. Even as troops began to reconvene, their performance opportunities remained quite limited: rather than play at a variety of community festivals and national conventions, performances were now restricted on the calendar to ceremonial flag-raisings and national holidays. A San Francisco Chronicle article from May 25, 1942 recounted an early flag-raising ceremony at the Tanforan “Assembly Center”:

Japanese aliens and citizens hoisted their new American Flag for the first time yesterday at the Tanforan Reception center.

The entire encampment pledged allegiance to the Flag as it was raised on its new staff to the accompaniment of “colors” played by a drum and bugle corps of Japanese Boy Scouts of America. (San Francisco Chronicle 1942)

Pro-assimilationist observers at the Japanese American Citizens League nevertheless spoke glowingly of these performances in their *Pacific Citizen* broadsheet, lauding them for their demonstrations of Japanese American patriotism and peaceful compliance. In an early article, an uncredited author noted how “Nearly 10,000 evacuees at the Tulelake [sic] center gathered for flag-raising ceremonies by the Boy Scout troop which has already been organized there” (*Pacific Citizen* 1942).

Restrictions remained even as musicians were relocated to the main incarceration camps in California, Idaho, Arizona, Colorado, and Arkansas. When parading, members of drum corps were often escorted under WRA and military police supervision. In a memo from May 30, 1943, scout leaders from the Amache camp Troop 179 reported to WRA officials on the corps’ Memorial Day parade festivities as follows:

All Troops were assembled on May 30 at 9 [a.m.] in front of the [block] 8H flag pole for the Memorial Day Parade and Flag Ceremony at which Ed. M. Tokunaga officiated. Troop 162 marched in with the colors. One minute of silent prayer was observed after which the Scout Oath and Law were led by Ed. Tokunaga.

Escorted by the Amache Interior Police the Scouts marched to the accompaniment of the Drum and Bugle Corps of Troop 179 and paraded all over the camp. Beginning from 8H flagpole down K street, down 6th Street, up F street to 12th Street, from 12th up to K Street, down K to 10th Street, from 10th to L Street, Down L, left turn to K Street, and back to the 8H flag pole. At 10:15 Troop 179 played Taps after which the Scouts were dismissed.

Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study [JERS] Records
BANC MSS 67/14 c, folder L5.401

As the memo suggests, performers’ mobility and sonic production were prescribed within the camp’s standardized blocks and perpendicular street intersections. Such spatial configurations of state control (Scott 2006) were at once foreign and familiar to urban youth drummers and buglers accustomed to long parades through city streets. Youth musicians thus had to effectively reorganize their sonic relationships to space and orient

themselves within new acoustic territories—the “shifting environments, structures, and other absorptive and resonating elements that enclose, modify, and otherwise mediate the sounds in given timespace, *and* the distinct places whose boundaries and characters are constituted by sounding and listening” (Daughtry 2015, 126, emphasis original). Yet within these forms of state control over acoustic space, the members still traveled around much of the camp mostly unimpeded, sending their sound in all directions beyond the camp borders. Thus, even in restriction, drum corps performance enabled a sonic mobility that transcended the ostensible divisions between inside and outside the camp.

“Play as Loud as You Can”: Drum Corps and Sonic Mobility in Amache

Given the disruption of communities, spatial relations, and sonic environments, drum corps members articulated a mobility in the concentration camps that was, at best, made possible only through leniencies granted by WRA officials. What possibilities, therefore, did performers have to assert an agentic mobility? One answer, I propose, emerges through an examination of performance practices that both defined and exceeded the camps’ acoustic territories. That is, when drummers and buglers were permitted to play in spaces *outside and excluded from* the camp—that is, ostensibly outside the state of exception and the physical barriers of the camp—they sonically performed an agentic mobility of resistance.

To further unpack this assertion, I turn to the oral history testimony of Amache Troop 179 drummer and drum major Minoru “Min” Tonai. At various points, Tonai has served as president of the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center, board

member of the Japanese American National Museum, and president and treasurer of the Japanese American Korean War Veterans⁸ (Johnston 2020). He also worked for many years as the president of the Amache Historical Society, overseeing the restoration of the Amache “Relocation Center” and meeting with local, state, and federal politicians to gain National Historic Site status. Tonai remained heavily invested in the transmission of his experiences and memories so that the Japanese American incarceration is remembered by future generations of US Americans. When I interviewed him in 2021, Tonai was one of only a few living alumni of a Japanese American incarceration camp drum and bugle corps.

Tonai was born in San Pedro, California on February 6, 1929, the fourth of five children raised by his father Gengoro and his mother Toyone. He spent his childhood in the community of Japanese American fishers and cannery workers on Terminal Island, off the coast from Los Angeles. When he was seven years old, his parents moved the family to the mainland to give their children better schooling opportunities. Coming home one day from school in the fall of 1941, Min was startled to discover two FBI agents speaking with his mother in Japanese. As Tonai later recounted in a 2010 oral history interview for the Japanese American history archive *Densho*, the men were FBI agents who came to inquire about his father’s social and political activities:

...[my father] was a fisherman, all those kind of things, and he was a vice president of the, of the Wakayama *Kenjinkai*, their prefecture association, he was vice president of the Japanese retail produce association. And he was deaf, but they, because he had a business they wanted...because he had a fairly large business, he had a dozen stores and things, that they wanted him to be a vice president for the name only, 'cause he couldn't, he couldn't participate in a lot of these things. And

⁸ After returning from Amache to Los Angeles, Tonai enlisted with the US Armed Forces during the Korean War and served as a medic in both Japan and the Korean Peninsula.

he also—I took *kendo*, my brother and I, younger brother and I took *kendo* before the war, and, and then he was the vice president of that association.

...

They were just interrogating him to find out if there were anything else and if all these things were true, to make sure. And so, as many people know, there was a [sic] ABC list of potential enemy aliens and he was on the A list, 'cause on December 7th, somebody rang the doorbell at eight-thirty in the evening. They were FBI agents, wanted to see my father. My father was waiting for 'em.

(Tonai 2010)

It would be three years before Tonai saw his father, as the FBI shipped the family patriarch between federal prisons. Following the enactment of Executive Order 9066, Tonai and the rest of his family were detained at the Santa Anita Assembly Center in Arcadia, CA, where they slept alongside many other incarcerated families in horse stalls.

It was at the Santa Anita racetrack that Min remembered first hearing a Boy Scout drum and bugle corps (see Figure 11), one which consisted of members from both the Centenary Methodist Church Boy Scout Troop 64 and the national renowned Troop 379 of Daishi Mission Koyasan Buddhist Temple (see Chapter 1):

It's purely entertainment. 'Cause, you know, I had no dream of joining [the corps], but I-I thought—to me, uh, the tenor drum looked like fun, 'cause they would twirl the batons and then play. So that, to me, was a...was, uh, exciting, and fun. I said “Gee, if I were ever in that, that's what I'd like to play,” is what I thought. And, uh, 'cause it was more flamboyant than the other things.

After Tonai and his family were sent to the Amache prison camp in Granada, Colorado, he met scoutmaster Roy Uragami, founder of both Troop 64 and 379, and joined the newly formed Amache Boy Scout Troop 179. Boy Scouts played a prominent role in Tonai's social life in Amache, and he recalled how Uragami fought WRA administrators to allow the troop to go on camping trips and hikes in the surrounding hillsides a mile southwest of Granada, Colorado:

What we also got to do, uh, before everybody else—they let us go camping in the Arkansas River, which was about four-and-a-half miles away from the front gate of our camp... We got permission to go to the Arkansas River and go camping overnight. We'd go on Saturday and come back on Sunday...[we'd be] having a great time: going to the river, going swimming in the-in the river.



Figure 11: “Boy and Girl Scout activities were in evidence at virtually all centers. Photo shows a Boy Scout drum and bugle corps at Santa Anita (California) Assembly Center lead by Girl Scout majorettes.” The twirling tenor drummers referred to by Tonai are the front row of drums. Note the absence of Scout uniforms, which would not have been essential clothing packed by most incarcerated families. Photograph of Santa Anita drum and bugle corps, ca. 1942, fla_album_088, John Flaherty Collection, King Library Special Collections & Archives, San Jose State University, San Jose, CA.

These excursions represented some of the few occasions where inmates were granted permission to leave the camp and experience less restrictive forms of mobility, a freedom almost certainly allowed because of the Boy Scouts’ promotion of Americanization cultural practices (cf. Honeck 2018). These hiking trips were not the only Scout functions that Tonai fondly remembered: inter-troop competitions in signaling, knot tying, and survival skills were another significant part Tonai’s scouting experience, as well as dances and social functions with Amache’s girls’ clubs.

They [the girls' clubs] would sponsor dances. And our troop had guys that liked to dance. So, we used to go to their dances and...they would provide the luncheon. And, uh, we had a good time, a very good time. And then, later on, I said, you know, "We've been getting invited to these girl—these two girls' clubs, uh, all the time—that we should reciprocate and...uh sponsor a dance and have them come.

For Tonai, then, the Boys Scouts was a social pursuit and a recreational activity, of which the drum corps comprised a minor component of his overall scouting experience. A strictly summertime activity, the corps rehearsed—according to the incarcerated-run *Granada Pioneer* newspaper of July 3, 1943—on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays at 2:30 p.m. after summer school let out for the day. During practice, the corps conducted basic marching maneuvers in a block, with Min joining the rest of the drummers in the back of the ensemble. They were often called upon by social clubs for summer festivals (July 7, 1943), national holiday parades (July 1, 1944), military funerals at Amache's small corner cemetery, and flag ceremonies. The corps' fanfare thus sonically and visually marked culturally significant events and spaces. Whether marching around the camp, the beat of a drum cadence, or standing at attention at the central high school flagpole to play "Taps," members of the Troop 179 drum corps accompanied, performed, and reshaped the ceremonial and memorial flows of camp life, reaching a broad audience of camp internees along the way through their sonic production.

One of the primary social functions that the corps also fulfilled was sending off newly enlisted Nisei men pinned to fight in the all-Japanese American military units such as the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, 100th Infantry Battalion, or the Military Intelligence Service (MIS). For these performances, members were allowed to leave camp for a nearby train where they delivered Nisei volunteers a musical salute from the drum corps, often playing the World War I tune "You're in the Army Now." These

performances warrant further consideration, given their complex political and cultural implications in the contexts of wartime cultural production and Japanese American incarceration. To do so requires a brief detour to explore the meanings of “You’re in the Army Now” in 1940s American popular culture.



Figure 12 (a, b): Amache Boy Scout Troop 179 performing in a camp parade (a) and flag raising ceremony (b), date unknown. James G. Lindley Collection, Densho Digital Repository, Seattle, WA.

Composed in 1917 by bandleader Isham Jones, the song—originally titled “We’re in the Army Now”—is squarely in the key of G major, evoking US military music due to its associations with the G military bugle (Pirtle 2002; Osheroff and Zinko 2002). Opening triadic flourishes harken to an arpeggiated bugle call, and the lilting instrumental lead-in hints at the ruffs and flourishes of military drums (see Figure 13a). The melody is mostly diatonic and ranges across a major ninth (D4-E5), belying the song’s intended popular audience with relatively simple melodic and harmonic language. Lyrics written by publisher Tell Taylor with the assistance of Ole Olsen convey the simultaneous excitement and tongue-in-cheek resignation of new recruits, presumably white rural farmhands, about to head off to war. Given the song’s initial associations with pre-World War I militarism and nationalism in the United States, it is perhaps unsurprising that “We’re in the Army Now” saw a resurgence in popularity in the months leading up to Pearl Harbor. While the song was embedded into the US American popular conscience and musical memory well before the 1940s—particularly through its association with the 1925 film *The Big Parade* (May 2005)—“You’re in the Army Now” was made popular once again in 1941, appearing in at least two major motion pictures: *You’re in the Army Now*, starring Jimmy Durante, and *You’ll Never Get Rich*, featuring Fred Astaire and Rita Hayworth. The song also made brief appearances in a *Merrie Melodies* cartoon (“Rookie Revue”), as well as in two dance band releases by Carson Robinson and His Orchestra (Bluebird B-11415-B as “I’m in the Army Now”) and Frankie Masters and His Orchestra (Okeh 6155 [30066]).

WE'RE IN THE ARMY NOW

Words by
TELL TAYLOR & OLE OLSEN
Marcia

Music by
ISHAM JONES

From the
Now you

looks of things we've got to join the arm - y, Un-cle Sam-my means to do just what he
see the boys as they go marching by you, In their un - i - forms and col - ors they look

says _____ It won't be long be - fore we're in the trench - es, A fight - ing for the
grand _____ To the tune of Yan-kee doo-dle has a dan - dy, They're marching for the

poco rit

Dear Old U. S. A. _____ So when an - y - thing goes wrong, We'll sing this lit - tle song.
Dear Old Yankee land. _____ So when an - y - thing goes wrong, We'll sing this lit - tle song.

poco rit

International Copyright Secured

Copyright MCMXVII by Tell Taylor.

All Rights Reserved

CHORUS * - + Extra verse at bottom of page

We're in the arm-y now We're not be-hind the plow * We'll nev-er get rich a
 We're in the arm-y now We're not be-hind the plow * We're glad we're here that's
 We're in the arm-y now We're not be-hind the plow * The time has come to

dig-gin' a ditch We're in the arm-y now We're in the arm-y now, Sup-pose you wonder
 why we cheer We're in the arm-y now We're in the arm-y now, Sup-pose you wonder
 make things hum We're in the arm-y now We're in the arm-y now, Sup-pose you wonder

how, + But don't you fear, You'll soon be here We're in the arm-y now. We're now.
 how, + We'll fight for right, With all our might We're in the arm-y now. We're now.
 how, + So come a - long, And join our song We're in the arm-y now. We're now.

* A loyal heart
 { Can do his part.
 + The world will know
 { And we can show.

* We'll do our share
 { No matter where.
 + Our U.S.A.
 { Needs us today.

* The U-Boat war
 { Has gone too far.
 + We'll do what's right
 { Of course we'll fight.

* The time has come
 { To make things hum
 + We're going in
 { To fight like sin.

* We'll eat pork and beans
 { With appetites keen.
 + The grub is fair
 { Why should we care.

* We could sing all night
 { That wouldn't be right
 + We're losin' our pipes
 { For the Stars and Stripes

H. S. TALBOT CO.
 Music Printers
 Chicago.

Figure 13 (a, b): "We're in the Army Now" original sheet music, 1917. M1.D48, Box 264, No. 28, Sam DeVincent Collection of Illustrated American Sheet Music, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

Thus, by the time Min Tonai and the members of Troop 179 played “You’re in the Army Now” for departing enlisted Nisei, the song was a relatively natural fit for the corps in a few regards: first, it was likely on the minds and ears of many US Americans, both inside and outside the confinement site, making it a popular selection to return to; second, it had deeply embedded associations with US patriotism while maintaining a veneer of comedy, giving the corps an upbeat tune to “play off” Nisei enlistees; and third, the song’s simplified triadic melody in G major (also used in the swing band and film versions) gave the corps’ amateur musicians a relatively easy song to learn on Troop 64’s rudimentary valveless G bugles.⁹

But “You’re in the Army Now” took on broader signification in the specific performance context outlined by Tonai. For him, the song critically sounded Japanese American agency and national belonging at a time of sociopolitical crisis, through a politics of sonic mobility:

And particularly, when the guys, went into the service—a mile-and-a-half away from the camp was a railroad—railhead—which was Granada. Gren-Ah-Da, Gren-Ay-Da, California [sic]. And we would go there, 4 o’clock in the morning. So we had to get up ‘n leave earlier, go out there, that’s where the train would leave. And we would play the dr- and we would play, uh, different tunes, particularly “You’re in the Army Now.” And that [clears throat]...and it’s 4 o’clock in the morning! And Mr. Uragami said “Play as loud as you can!” And I didn’t know—we-we would wake up the town people—the town had 350 people—we *would wake them up!* I thought: “Gee, it’s...that’s not nice,” you know? We’re being, we’re waking ‘em up. I later found out why he wanted us to do that. He wanted the town people to know that “We, too, are sending our sons to war to fight for our country.” I mean, I mean, uh, we were, we were teenagers, we didn’t think about those kind of things. *Great idea.*

(Vocal emphasis italicized)

For him, performing “You’re in the Army Now” provided an outlet for young Japanese Americans to boldly sound off their loyalty by intervening in the relatively isolated

⁹ According to Tonai, the corps retained both the old Troop 64 equipment and a set of “plastic” Tenite bugles made due to brass resources being diverged towards the war effort (Pirtle 2002).

soundscape of Amache and Granada. When Uragami instructed the corps to “Play as loud as you can,” Tonai felt it was not only for Nisei enlistees, but for the surrounding town of Granada, that the corps played their music. Uragami’s instructions thus constructed a listenership that made the act of sounding politically meaningful, allowing members of Troop 179 the agency to sound their mobility across acoustic territories usually rendered off-limits by the WRA. Being asked to play loudly was not only a marker Japanese American patriotism in Tonai’s view, but also a territorial claim that extended their performance beyond the confines of their restricted sonic and physical environs.

Vignette

Two years after my interview with Tonai, I find myself swinging my hands once more to the imagined drum cadence, the bass drum mallets loosely in my hand. I begin humming “You’re in the Army Now” in the space, envisioning the Troop 64 (or should I say the Troop 179?) bass drum in the cold morning air of Colorado, its head stretching and becoming inarticulate as the damp mountain air seeps into the head. Admittedly fanciful and conditioned by my own experiences as a Yonsei scholar-practitioner within the contemporary competitive drum corps scene, I am struck that my personal rendition of “You’re in the Army Now” feels decidedly immobile, contained to these archival shelves. And yet this sonification feels right in this moment. Sitting with the discomfort a bit, I conclude my ethnographic foray into the archives by placing the mallets back into the box.

Hearing mobility through archival sonification remains an incomplete project of becoming. Yet as Susan Asai asserts, sound remains one of the key domains through which incarcerated mobilities may yet be better understood:

Shared musical activities were a demonstration of the Niseis' desired assimilation into mainstream US culture. Antithetical to their immobility as incarcerated, camp life offered Nisei opportunities to learn and play music, actualizing dreams denied to many due to a lack of time, resources, or teachers in their prewar communities. Performing American popular music of the day gave Japanese American youth a sense of agency, a means to represent themselves as Americans and counter being regarded as enemy aliens. The racial and political reasons for their imprisonment intensified the efficacy of American popular music for Nisei, enabling them to strongly stamp their American identity.

An intensely social activity, performing afforded Nisei a sense of mobility and an avenue that neutralized their sense of loss after having their lives unjustly severed from mainstream society. (2023, 31)

What sonification does, therefore, is to ease the tension between the immobile and the mobile. By sounding in the presumed physical and epistemological silence of the archives, sonification turns attention towards a new paradox of im/mobility, that of past sonic practices that used to permeate acoustic territory but have since receded into the confines of archival spaces. By slowing down to reimagine what these past soundings may have engendered politically, emotionally, timbrally, and corporeally, sonification begs the researcher to sustain these dialogic explorations of sound, space, and belonging.

Sonifying Dissent: “No-Nos” and Bugle Corps Music in the Tule Lake Prison Camp

Punishable Activities

Regulation No. 1

The use of bugles or any other instruments or devices for signals, alarms, or other unauthorized purposes except the present method of announcing mess call is prohibited.

(WRA Internal Security Directive for the Tule Lake Center)
JERS Records, BANC MSS 67/14 c, folder R1.10

Instructions for Blowing Bugle

Purpose

Buglers must devote themselves: to unselfishness in Public-service based on the spirit of the Empire.

(Anonymous memo of the *Hokoku Seinendan*, seized in a WRA raid at Tule Lake, February 12, 1945)

Translated by Robert H. Ross¹⁰

National Archives and Records Administration [NARA] RG 210, 48

Tule 425 – Box 274, Pro-Japan Organizations

Until this point, I have assessed the role of patriotic—or at least US-sympathetic—drum and bugle corps ensembles in the sonic life of music “at camp.” This is due to their pervasiveness across camps (eight out of ten of the main “relocation centers,” in my estimation, had a drum corps) and because many of the extant interwar ensembles were run by Boy Scout or Girl Scouts of America troops whose Americanizing projects were often sponsored by local and regional chapters of the assimilationist Japanese American Citizens League. Yet an entire set of military music performances were also carried out by Japanese nationalist groups in the Tule Lake segregation center by musicians who were deemed by the US government to be disloyal and anti-American. The presence of these dissenting pro-Japan sounds thus fundamentally shifts any analysis of drum and bugle corps performances during the incarceration, demonstrating that military music was not unilaterally viewed as a positive, Americanizing force by the WRA. Put into the “wrong” hands, a bugle became not a symbol of loyal compliance, but of an existential threat to the camp and to the US state. The rest of this chapter thus

¹⁰ Robert H. Ross grew up in Japan as the son of missionaries, learning the Japanese language from a young age. Following Pearl Harbor, the WRA employed Ross at Tule Lake as a reports officer, translator, and official photographer. During the war, Ross submitted photographs of prisoner conditions to the Northern California ACLU to demonstrate the violation of incarcerated human rights (National Park Service 2015).

considers how WRA officials in Tule Lake listened to military music as a foreign threat, and how musicians within these nationalist circles found ways to mobilize in dissent. Moreover, it marks the challenging ambivalences of archival sonification, as it can bring the researcher into critical empathy with musicians of contrasting or even competing political orientations.

Following the so-called “Loyalty Questionnaire” of January 1943, WRA officials “segregated” over twelve-thousand incarceratedees deemed to be disloyal to the US into the Tule Lake camp. This “disloyal” designation typically rested on the inmates’ answers to Questions 27 and 28 of the survey, which asked respondents if they would swear allegiance to the United States, forswear the Emperor of Japan, and be willing to fight in the US armed forces. Many of the “No-Nos”—so named because many of them answered “no” to these two questions—were Issei or Kibei, transnational Japanese citizens who were in the US prior to the war to either be educated or gain enough personal wealth to return to home to Japan. No-Nos were thus of many different political orientations and loyalties that lay somewhere between the US state and the Japanese empire. Nevertheless, they were grouped with a small contingent of Japanese nationalist factions in Tule Lake for the remainder of the war, held mostly until late 1945 or even as late as 1947. Camp restrictions were much more stringent for the No-Nos, with WRA administrator Raymond Best often imprisoning people without due process in an internal jail known as the “stockade” (Lyon 2024). This fomented a US citizenship renunciation movement among the No-Nos, and by late 1943, a “Resegregation Committee” was formed to lobby the WRA for repatriation back to Japan with the help of the Spanish

Consul in San Francisco. Wishing to make their agenda of repatriation and Japanese nationalism clear, the committee was renamed as the *Sokuji Kikoku Hoshidan* (the association for immediate repatriation and service in the motherland, or simply *Hoshidan*) in October of 1944. At around the same time, ultra-nationalist young men among the No-Nos formed the *Hokoku Seinendan* (“The Young Men’s Association to Serve the Nation,” or simply *Seinendan*), a group formerly known as the *Sokoku Kenkyu Seinendan* (“Young Men’s Association for the Mother Country Studies”) (Kumei 1996, 73–74). It was this latter group that would eventually form a well-organized bugle corps that performed against WRA directives throughout the camp.

Little has been written regarding the musical exploits of the minority pro-Japan factions of Tule Lake. Admittedly, this is because files regarding the camp were more restricted during and after the war. In a telling classification, many of the documents recording the bugling of Tule Lake dissenters were categorized not under the “Community Activities” archival folders for the camp, but within the copious “Internal Security” documents detailing arrests, imprisonments, and WRA policing policies. In her groundbreaking history of the incarceration, historian Michi Weglyn makes only an offhand reference to the very presence of protest military music in Tule Lake. Writing of the broader activities of Japanese nationalist groups, she notes merely the following: “It did not take long before Tule Lake’s cultural revivalism entered an out-and-out patriotic phase. Under resegregationist influence, early morning calisthenics metamorphosed into militaristic marching and drilling to the fanfare of a bugle corps, with Rising Sun emblems stenciled on sweat shirts and sweat bands” (Weglyn 1976, 233). American

Studies scholar Minako Waseda offers a bit more commentary on Weglyn's work, but incorrectly labels the bugle corps as an outcropping of the *Hoshidan* and not the *Seinendan*: "Wearing headbands with the rising-sun emblem, they marched around the blocks beginning at five o'clock in the morning to the fanfare of a bugle corps and militaristic music" (2005, 195). Accordingly, the sounds and marches of the *Seinendan* have become an historiographically quiet practice, due in part to both WRA and US governmental censorship and a concomitant lack of research concerning the topic. It is within this nexus of restriction and immobility that, I argue, archival sonification may activate politically complex reimaginings of dissent in Tule Lake.

Vignette

I pull out another gray, acid-free archival box from the dolly cart placed next to my chair. Glancing out the windows of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in Washington, D.C., the Navy Memorial across the street beckons me as tourists traverse its circular maw to pass into coffee shops further beyond. Coming back to the files, I open up another NARA box of WRA files from Tule Lake and begin thumbing through. This is Tule 425 – Box 274. As I skim through its contents like the dozens of boxes from before, I finally strike something that has been heretofore unfamiliar: the dots and stems of musical notation. As I paw through both the handwritten and mimeographed copies of this music, I can't help but notice all of the English annotations in the margins, written by WRA translator Robert H. Ross as he tried to decipher the political intent behind each piece. Something is off about these musical

notations though: they are only 4 lines, with no note placed on any of the spaces. Looking at the scrawled key on the top of the page, I soon realize that this is a bugle-specific notation, with the fundamental (often the pitch C) given the Japanese vocable “Do” and written a line below the staff, with the following G, c, e, and g given “To,” “Ta,” “Te,” and “Chi” on each ascending line, respectively. I immediately stop what I’m doing and celebrate this notational find by going to an online piano application. Dredging back through my aural skills lessons of yesteryear, I play in my headphones the fundamental pitch of “Do” (C) while I hum discretely and softly a bugle call written on the page. I look around, hoping to not rouse the ire of the archivists sitting at the request desk. Years later, I learn that this piece, *Kuni no shizume* (国の鎮め, “Guardians of the Land”) is a ceremonial god worship song within the standard repertoire of the Japanese Army and Navy, originally composed by Japanese court musician Shiba Fujitsune (Tsukahara 2013, 232–33). But at this moment, all I can hear is the faint imagined strains of a bugle in the distance of my mind. Later, when I reach my hotel, I try again to sing this tune, using the Japanese solfege vocables. My intonation suffers from the unfamiliar notational and vocalic systems, but I eventually hack my way—poorly—through the whole piece. I sit with the screenshots of the scores, thinking about how incarcerated likely transmitted these calls aurally to avoid detection from US authorities.

What do such imagined soundings offer for recuperating a musical practice vilified and censored by the state? At a foundational level, the political soundings of pro-Japanese forces in Tule Lake were always subject to being quieted, the bugles themselves

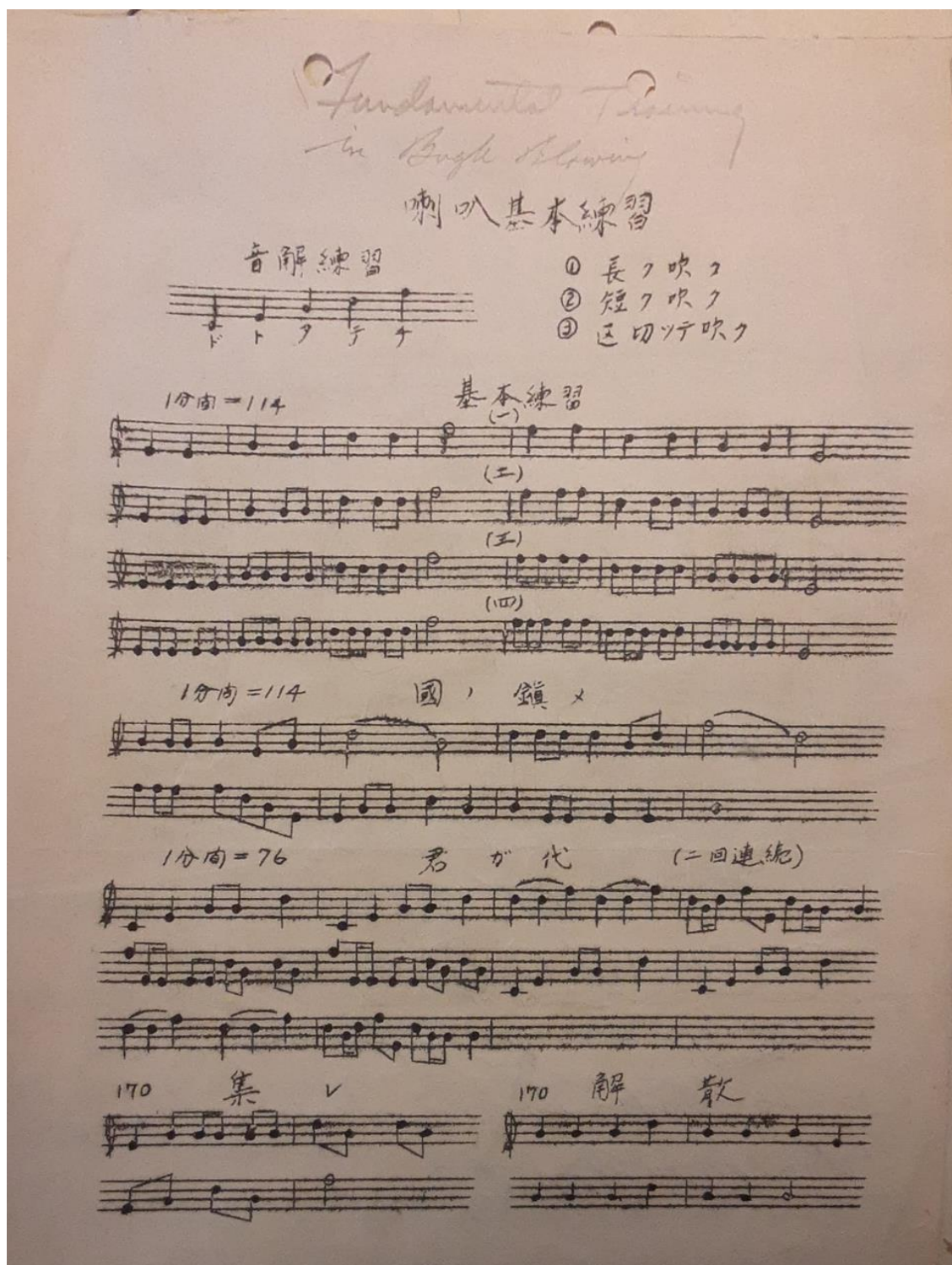


Figure 14: Notation of Seinendan bugle calls confiscated by the WRA on February 12, 1945. The second call the memorial song *Kuni no shizume* (国の鎮め, "Guardians of the Land") became the object of archival sonification. NARA RG 210, 48, Tule 425 – Box 274, Pro-Japan Organizations.

removed from the possession of those who dared to dissent in a public, overt manner. Yet confiscated documents from the *Seinendan* paint a much clearer picture of the extent of bugle corps performances in Tule Lake and evidence how music-making gave incarcerated musicians a modicum of physical, political, and sonic mobility.

As the *Hoshidan* grew in the latter half of 1944, members asked the WRA to deliver six purchased bugles to the camp. Camp administrators initially allowed the purchase of the instruments during the months of November and December. At the same time, *Hoshidan* members covertly printed and distributed *Hokoku*, a Japanese-language newspaper used to articulate the beliefs of the pro-Japan repatriation movement. The first references to the organizing of a bugle corps appear in the back pages of the first issue of the short-lived periodical, published November 21, 1944:

9. The Dept. of Bugle is made under the Dept. of Physical Culture

A. Instructor	Muneaki Fujio
Head	Shigeo Sakaguchi
Vice	Satoru Nishimura

B. It is decided to buy 12 bugles by the Central officials' meeting.

C. Those who want to enlist to the said Dept. apply for the office of the *Seinen dan*.

Translation by Robert H. Ross
NARA RG 210, 48, Tule 425 – Box 274, Unauthorized Publications

Crucially, the bugle corps was part of several broader movements within the organization: first, the encouragement of Japanese military-style calisthenics to promote physical, moral, and national strength; and second, the promotion of Japanese folk, nationalist, and military songs “to inspire more patriotic spirit [original emphasis].” Between the 21st and 27th of November, the underground offices of the *Seinendan* opened up their doors each night at 7:30 to interested buglers, each one encouraged to “not forget pencil and

notebook.” Soon each of the eight wards of the camp had its own bugle leader, put in charge of organizing performers within their blocks.

By early winter, more bugles had entered the possession of *Seinendan* members, and the first organized protest performances commenced. *Seinendan* members first demonstrated the night of December 6th, marching around in the evening hours. Bigger plans were afoot for the following days, as the second issue of *Hokoku* outlined:

The Program to be held at 6:00 A. M. on December 8th.

1. The marching in of the “Elite Guard,” accompanied by bugle corps. These are young men of military age who are known as “Daiin”
2. Ceremonial bow to the east.
3. Silent prayer for the winning of the war.
4. National Anthem “Kimigayo”.
5. Opening Ceremony announcement.
6. Main talk “Apologue”. (Relating of events to convey a moral)
7. National Navy Song.
8. Banzai, three times. (Long live the emperor)
9. Marching out ceremony of the “Elite Guard”, accompanied by Japanese Army Bugle Calls.
10. Dismissal.

Translation by Robert H. Ross
NARA RG 210, 48, Tule 425 – Box 274, Unauthorized Publications

As Alicia Barbour (2018, 2017) has argued, an examination of music in the camps vitally exposes how WRA officials understood music as an indicator of incarcerated loyalty. Such “listening for loyalty” is perhaps made no more clear than in the constant policing of bugle sounds and bugle players’ mobility in Tule Lake. Administrators initially viewed the bugling activities as unpopular among the incarcerated but followed them closely. In a Community Activities bulletin of December 7th, uncredited WRA official noted that “Most people, of the 18,000 here, are not inured to the fascism and cheer more sober and thoughtful stands while chafing against the goose-stepping and the blowing of plastic bugles.” Yet the *Seinendan* continued to mobilize and build out their

membership despite ongoing curfews and suspicion from governmental forces. Music selections by the *Seinendan* appeared to be mostly of military signaling and function. In the translated transcriptions of the calls, R.H. Ross noted how most of the written songs corresponded to different steps and maneuvers. One with straightforward duple-based rhythms and an opening ascending line sounded emergencies and served as calls for *Seinendan* members to gather or be wary of WRA internal security forces. Meanwhile, the more dotted rhythms and skipping lines of the advance signal beckoned buglers to march forward. Another short signal called for members marching with the bugle corps to mimic a bayonet charge, presumably with their bugles in hand.

Camp leadership soon exercised particular animus to the “troublemakers” of the *Seinendan* bugle corps, labeling them as the worst of the No-Nos. In his final report on the Tule Lake camp, former project director Raymond Best narrated how the *Seinendan* “greeted” Department of Justice Secretary John Burling to discuss citizenship renunciation and repatriation in 1944:

The shaved-head buckaroos of Hokoku Seinen Dan welcomed Mr. Burling with special fanfares of bugles in the dawn and with massed demonstrations of goose-step marching and Japanese calisthenics in mid-forenoon of Sundays. At first Mr. Burling did not hear, or see, but when he did he was impressed. He was convinced Tule was a keg of dynamite and told the Project Director so. He did not realize these displays were advance window-dressing for an organized stampede of machine-made renunciation, which his own activities were to abet. Indications were that in time he came to that conclusion, but it was too late.

JERS Records, BANC MSS 67/14 c, folder R1.10

Following these protests, buglers became a primary target of WRA internal security arrests. Following weekly Sunday protest parades in the early morning hours, Internal Security police would round up people found with bugles and detain them for presumed subversive and disloyal behavior.

Perhaps no piece of repertoire was subject to such extreme scrutiny than the so-called “Goose-Step March,” a pejorative name given by WRA officials to the Imperial Army forward march signal *Rikugun Hayaashi Koshin* (陸軍速歩行進) (see Figure 15, bottom transcription). As a popular march performed in Imperial propaganda, *Rikugun*’s distinctive upper tessitura figures and prominent use of sixteenth-based rhythms would have indexed the might and eminent victory of the Empire for ultranationalist musicians in Tule Lake. Moreover, its march cadence tempo enabled the mobilization of protesting bodies through the synchronization of their movements. The march thus quickly became a cornerstone of the *Seinendan* calisthenics protests, with instructors teaching the march to neophyte buglers using both oral tradition and the hand-written 4-line transcriptions. More than any other piece, this short march melody was seen by WRA officials as indicative of the nuisance posed by the protesters. Many would refer to the group pejoratively as “goose-steppers,” viewing their embodied musicking as disloyal, their high-stepping indicative of unassimilable Otherness and adjacent to Nazism.

Rikugun thus became the piece by which WRA administrators assessed the strength of the ultranationalist repatriation protest movement. In his final report on the Tule Lake camp, former project director Raymond Best described how the *Seinendan* “greeted” Department of Justice Secretary John Burling in late 1944, noting how the bugles and goose-stepping convinced Burling that “Tule was a keg of dynamite.” Crucially Best’s report highlights the confluence of physical and political mobilization that the march entailed. In the WRA’s view, what had once been a mere nuisance had ballooned by early 1945 into a struggle for the camp’s soul.

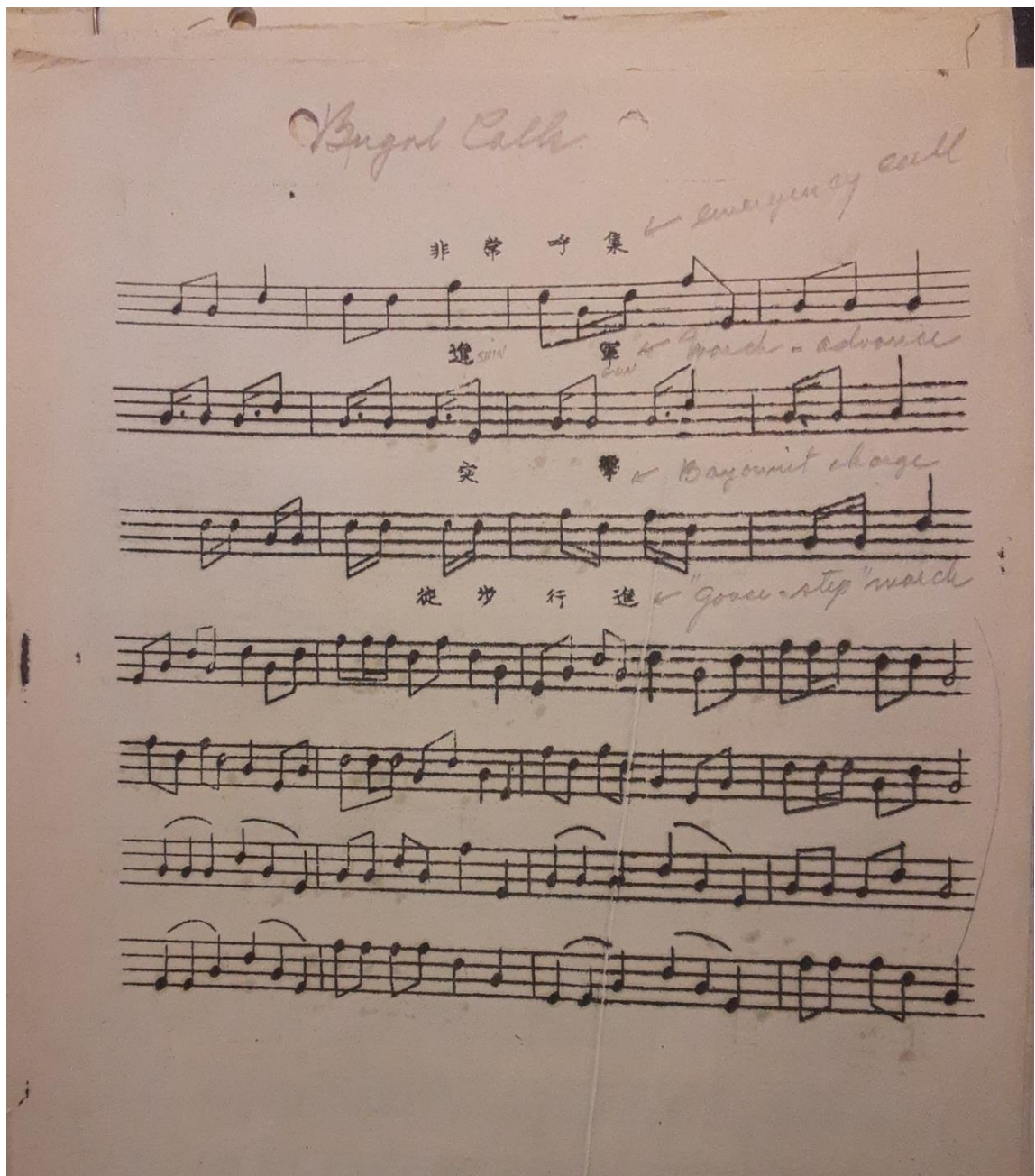


Figure 15: Four confiscated *Seinendan* bugle calls. Note the labeling of the “Goose-Step March,” *Rikugun Hayaashi Koshin* (陸軍速步行進), which was the subject of severe WRA scrutiny. NARA RG 210, 48, Tule 425 – Box 274, Pro-Japan Organizations.

When leaders *Seinendan* leaders Ernest Kinzo Wakayama and Zenchiro Tachibana were removed from the camp, the bugle corps organized protesting morning marches to oppose the WRA. On February 12, 1945, WRA officials responded by raiding the offices of the *Seinendan*, confiscating many documents pertaining to the running and organization of the bugle corps. In his recounting of the events leading up to the raid, L. G. Pearson of the WRA Police Investigations Unit specifically noted that it not only disrupted not only pro-Japan sentiment, but also their musical protests as well:

Immediately thereafter a replacement group sprang up with new officers, committee members, etc., of the Seinen Dan and the Hoshi Dan (closely related societies with a more or less common purpose, i.e. – service to Japan and the emperor) and this second group carried on with fervor, bugles, and marching.

...

It may here be stated that the two societies...contain less than 30 percent of the residents of the Tule Lake Colony...Many of the educated and more thoughtful Japanese of this latter [political neutral] group have indicated to Officer Turnbull and myself their disapproval of the marchings, bugle blowing, etc.

...

This morning, Monday Feb. 12, 1945, feeble toots from scattered bugles—somewhat off key—were detected in the colony, and a rather pitiful endeavor was made by the remaining radicals to pull together the remnants of the “glorious movement”.

JERS Records, BANC MSS 67/14 c, folder R3.72

Pearson’s glee at the isolated bugle sounds indicate that the dissenting group’s musical sounds were viewed by WRA officials as a sign of proportionate political strength. While the previous months of protest marches were viewed with racialized fear of a yellow horde, sounds deemed disjunct and “out of tune” suggested for the officials that their policing was not only squashing political activity, but the sonic production was heard as an index of this organizing as well.

With their leaders removed and organization belongings under the control of the WRA, the influence and popularity of the *Seinendan* waned within the camp.

Nevertheless, the corps continued to play their weekly Japanese military bugle calls while parading around the camp. In a letter to Raymond Best in March of 1945, non-*Seinendan* residents of Block 82 demanded the administration step in to end the musical protests:

Dear Mr. Best:

Will you please do something with the Block 82? We the resident of the Block 82 being severely annoyed by the Hokoku-seinendan who making much noise with the trampets and chattering early in the morning, and also they are using our Block office for their office. All the babies are becoming nervus. We just can not stand with these peace breakers.

Please do something with them for us. We are unable to do anything, if we ask them “please be quiet for our babies” maybe they won’t let us alive or maybe they dump us in the darkness without anybody knows.

We are waiting for your pressure before long.

Very truly yours,
Block 82 Residents

(All spellings original)

NARA RG 210, 48, Tule 425 – Box 274, Pro-Japan Organizations

Wishing to rid themselves of the bugling protests once and for all, camp leadership approached *Seinendan* leaders in early April with three propositions to cease all protest activities. Proposition No. 1 called for members of the *Seinendan* to stay in the camp and abide by camp regulations that forbade their political activities (bugling, calisthenics, etc.). Proposition No. 2 suggested that if members were to live at the center and now follow Proposition No. 1, state force would be used to stop the bugling and other political activities. The third proposition allowed “all male members 18 years of age and over be transferred by the Department of Justice to an internment camp and that the members of the [H]oshi Dan and the male members of Seinen Dan under 18 years of age continue to live in the center but discontinue their activities.” As a stipulation of Proposition No. 3, those wishing to renounce their citizenship could receive a hearing and begin the formal process for repatriation without indefinite confinement. Many *Hoshidan*

and *Seinendan* members took the offer of Proposition No. 3, which included the following stipulations:

- I. "I will not take part in, nor will I assist or encourage group marching, Taiso, bugle blowing, shouting, banzai-ing, or washoi-ing.
 - II. "I will not wear the Hoshi Dan and Seinen Dan emblems, arm bands or head bands."
- JERS Records, BANC MSS 67/14 c, folder R1.15:2

A further restriction was that bugles had to be turned in as part of the plea bargain, though many refused to give up their music-making and instead joined the contingent of people willing to face police force:

Leaders of the Proposition No. 3 group, prior to entrainment, turned in to the Administration three bugles, which they identified as all in their possession and all that they could get their hands on. They asserted that some of the original Ward 8 (bulk of No. 3 group) buglers had deserted after the agreement was made and had joined with the Proposition No. 2 group, thereafter concealing their bugles from the Proposition No. 3 element.

JERS Papers, BANC MSS 67/14 c, folder R1.15:2

Refusing members of the *Seinendan* attempted to continue their weekly Sunday protest marches around the camp but found it difficult to do so. Project Director Dillon S. Myer recounted in a weekly report to the national WRA offices in Washington how the truce appeared to lessen musical activity, indicating for him a victory for US authorities over the disloyal "troublemaking" of the Japanese nationalists:

The dawn ceremonies were attended by even less people than usual. Those who had signed the Proposition No. 3 agreement and automatically been released from it by expiration of the time limit, still maintained it. They did not demonstrate. The lessening of the demonstration by the others conceivably could have been due to uncertainty regarding Proposition No 2---force. Came the time for the usual mid-forenoon demonstration, and the Taiso participants dwindled even more. There were only 16 buglers and 132 marchers, more than three quarters of them under 20 years of age. The demonstration distinctly was a fizzle, coming off a bad second to baseball practicers who got there first in the portion of the firebreak recently used for these manifestations and forced the demonstrators to retreat almost to the perimeter fence, where the chief spectators were seagulls in the open fields beyond.

JERS Records, BANC MSS 67/14 c, folder R1.15:2

The remaining protesters saw an even more severe crackdown and their instruments unwillingly confiscated:

There still was defiance, however. Monday morning Internal Security picked up five young buglers, impounded their bugles, and turned them loose after obtaining their names and addresses. One of the buglers was the son of [Sakutaro Kakuda], Hoshi Dan leader who put up so tough a front at this trial that he was sentenced to the Klamath Falls jail instead of the Project Jail.

...

The parents of the five bugling boys were called into Internal Security headquarters and warned that they would be held responsible for the activities of their sons, under the Special Project Regulations. They were defiant, all declaring they had encouraged their sons to bugle and would continue to do so.

Three of the girls whose bugles had been taken from them in an ironing room just prior to the emperor's birthday also turned up at the Internal Security headquarters Monday to demand return of the instruments. They were very indignant when they were turned down, and went back into the colony with defiantly snapping pigtailed.

This activity hatched a rumor in the town of Tulelake [sic] that colony residents had rioted because they had been "deprived of their musical instruments." The Reports Officer retired this from circulation Tuesday.

JERS Records, BANC MSS 67/14 c, folder R1.15:2

Intriguingly, these documents of the instrument confiscation suggest that women may have also aided the protesting buglers or even performed the calls themselves. Though existing photographic documentation (see Figure 16, for example) only depicts the men of the *Seinendan* performing the protest marches, these cursory references to women buglers suggest a more complex performance of gender and protest, one that extends beyond the WRA's efforts to mostly portray the dissenting musicians as fanatical, foreign, and dangerously masculine.

Over the span of six months then, the *Seinendan* mobilized, sounded, then ceased their music-making. During their period of activity, musicians used their bodies, voices, and instruments to offer not just the subtle critiques of Boy Scout drum and bugle corps, but direct sonic confrontations with the US military state. In a very literal sense, their music was physically mobile, marched around the camp, permeating acoustic territories. Sonically, their bugles were omnipresent, blaring, and insistent on voicing varying political stances to other inmates and WRA officials. Yet by V-J Day, Myer and the WRA administration had effectively squashed bugling and protests from the Tule Lake camp.

Whereas most of their Americanized drum and bugle corps counterparts in the other camps had returned to their West Coast centers or relocated to other urban locales by war's end, members of the *Seinendan* remained imprisoned well into the late 1940s. Heard as disloyal rabblers, they nevertheless represented the last organized military music ensembles in the Japanese American incarceration camps.



Figure 16: Original WRA caption: Bugle Corps of Hokoku Seinendan gather at Gate 1 to give proper send off to 125 of their number being sent to Santa Fe Internment Camp March 4, 1945. Photographed by Robert H. Ross. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration and Densho.org.

Conclusion

It is perhaps fitting that Okubo references the Topaz boy scout drum and bugle corps twice in her book, both in circumstances where mobility was at stake. In the first instance, she describes being transported under armed guard from Tanforan to Topaz, greeted after a grueling train ride and bus transfer by the sounds of a “band” of “former

Boy Scouts from Berkeley” (Okubo [1946] 2014, 123). In the second (excerpted in the epigraph), she observes across time and space: the boy scout “band” performance is no longer a special occasion to her, for it is now a regular act of spectacle and fanfare used to greet those whose mobility, like hers, is dictated by the WRA. As in the many newspaper examples placed throughout the previous section, the scout drum and bugle corps performers accompany repressive actions of the state, creating a soundtrack of Japanese American immobility. And yet, as entertainers greeting new incarceratedees at the entrance to the camp, they mediate between that which is within and beyond the camp. In this liminal space that transcends an imagined dichotomy between included/excluded, one can easily imagine the sounds of the drums and bugles reflecting off the bus, past the huddled incarceratedees, and out into the beyond, outside the confines of the page. Okubo thus thrusts the reader into moments of ambivalent (im)mobility, which can simultaneously be read as expressions of state control or subversive counter-hegemonic performance (or both at the same time).

As I have outlined this chapter, it is through these projects of sonification that the ambivalent im/mobility paradox of Japanese American incarceration might be addressed, that incarceratedee mobilities of all registers might be better understood. Reinserting the sonic back into these archives, even ones structured by state violence, constitutes a critical interrogation of the archival grain and its reverberations into the present. This is not to merely state that sonification necessarily or intentionally looks to read “against.” Here I heed archives scholar Andreas Zeman’s skepticism of this trend in archival studies. Zeman specifically refutes the assumption that the colonial archive necessarily overlooks

and attempts to hide the historical and epistemic violences it enacts, instead suggesting that archives of oppression can still “improve our knowledge” (2023, 208) about the violences attested to in the documents. Ann Laura Stoler’s insistence on the power of reading with the grain also merits attention in this matter, as she demonstrates that such a step enables an ethnography of the archive. As she states:

I treat archives not as repositories of state power, but as unquiet movements in a field of force, as restless realignments and readjustments of people and the beliefs to which they were tethered, as spaces in which the senses and the affective course through the seeming abstractions of political rationalities. I take sentiments expressed and ascribed as social interpretations, as indices of relations of power and tracers of them.

(2010, 32–33)

Archival sonification is thus not a project that always liberates voices. While I did seek to produce a certain empathy with the people whose sounds are no longer audible, my attempts to hum the bugle call were, ultimately, made possible through a lens of state control that sought to keep those calls muted. Moreover, these documents directly attest to the state violences that sought to hear incarcerated sounds as disloyal, as indicators of a racial essentialism and perpetual Otherness. Sonification, therefore, offers an incomplete constellation of relations within the archives, seeking sonic understanding both with and against the grain.

Despite this seeming limitation—and the ongoing limitation of fabulation conditioned by the researcher (in this case, conditioned by my positions as both the grandson of incarcerated “loyals” and a US drum corps community historian)—sonification still offers, I believe, a reprieve from the absences these musics sometimes experience from the historical record. As Hartman (2008) suggests, fabulation of past violences is always incomplete and ethically fraught *a priori* and is always limited to the

imaginaries shaped by violence. Thus, while mere “recovery” of the past is not the intention of this method, sonification emphasizes that these events once were materially near and present phenomena: that the booming of a bass drum’s calfskin head really did wobble back and forth in the cold air of a Colorado predawn; that the blaring of an emergency call roused protesters out of their tarpaper shacks and into the fireways of a Northern Californian prison camp. In other terms, it makes the mobility not just “symbolic,” but sensed; not merely performative, but performed; not known overtly, but felt ambivalently.

Such ambivalence, I would argue, lies at the core of understanding the sonic lives of incarcerated. Writing on jazz performance in the camps, Deborah Wong has remarked on this very politics and the tensions engendered when one attempts such closeness:

The real triumph of the liberal multicultural project is that some Japanese Americans [in the twenty-first century] try to hear themselves in the ways they have been told they sounded. Resistance can only ‘sound’ in certain ways. It is sentimentalized and made easy and accessible. It takes forms with which we are already comfortable. It allows us to separate ourselves from the misdeed and the injustice, and to maintain a distance that enables our liberal humanist subject position. It makes them (Nisei in the camps) into us (eager consumers of social injustice) by stating that they felt what we would feel, did what we would do. It doesn’t account for historical or ethnographic distance; it doesn’t allow Nisei responses from 65 years ago to be unfamiliar.

(2009, 13)

While sonification does attempt a modicum of “closeness” that Wong eschews, it does so in ways that underscore the very ambiguities and contradictions that she asks us to live within. Physically swinging the bass drum mallets emphasizes the embodied realities of marking Asian American time, of using sound to assert one’s position in broader historical and political flows; it also emphasizes the very impossibility of recreating that sound, of the limitations of mimicry. Humming a Japanese bugle call in idiomatic solfege

reveals entire ways of transmission and knowing while it also highlights the interventions of state control in the archival sonification encounter.

The concept of symbolic annihilation accordingly allows for a flexible and expansive analysis of how misrepresentations at the institutional level are experienced in the quotidian lives of those who are left out of dominant histories and forms of representation. Admittedly, not all sounds made by inmates were subject to such annihilation. Indeed, the obsessions of the WRA over hearing disloyalty in the *Seinendan* bugle corps provide ample evidence to refute the idea that state archives ignored these practices. But as their relative silence within the histories of music “at camp” suggest, the music of Japanese American drum and bugle corps remain an incomplete record, relegated for the most part to the realm of paper and ink. As detailed through the selected vignettes of archival sonification, the legacies of these performance practices need not remain quiet. Whether by imagining the sounds implied by textual or photographic traces, embodying the choreographies of sound that performers once engaged in, or bringing sound literally into the archival space, archival sonification provides a flexible means for reconstructing the sonic worlds of archives. In doing so, it provides a form of representation—no matter how tenuous and imagined—that redresses symbolic annihilation, re-sounding those voices and practices which constituted the basis of complex cultural identities and politics of national belonging. Archival sonification thus expands beyond the specificities of Japanese American military music ensembles; it provides a set of approaches and ethical orientations that politically re-sound and re-mobilize the past in the present.

Following the end of World War II, formerly incarcerated musicians experienced a newfound mobility, many relocating with their families to newfound Japanese American communities along the east coast and in the Midwest. This physical mobility set the foundation for new musical communities bonded not only through descent, but through the affinities engendered by the rise of Asian American political consciousness. In Chapter 3, I examine how two musical communities—the L.A. Imperial Dragons and the Chicago Nisei Ambassadors Drum and Bugle Corps—embodied these shifting cultural identities and racial politics at the dawn of the Asian American Movement.

Chapter 3 - Marking Time in the Community Archives of Postwar Asian American Drum Corps

As the aftershocks of World War II became Cold War tensions, Asian American communities once again turned to drum corps as an outlet to negotiate their complex belonging in a shifting political and cultural landscape. In West Coast Japanese American communities, the participants in incarceration camp drum corps (outlined in Chapter 2) returned to regional and national touring: within a decade of V-J Day, both the Koyasan Scouts of Los Angeles Troop 379 and their San Franciscan counterparts in Troop 12 resumed their local and state drum corps performances. Chinese American communities, though never subjected to incarceration, similarly reestablished their drum corps ensembles in the postwar period, even as the overall influence of the Boy Scouts of American waned in lieu of more grassroots community drum corps programs. Out of this resurgent postwar interest in militaristic marching music, and on the eve of this critical juncture in Asian American history, groups like the Seattle Buddhist Boy Scouts (later named the Seattle Imperials), the Wah Mei Chinese Drum Corps of Chicago, and the Sacramento Mandarins (see Chapter 4) formed.

While many Asian American drum and bugle corps graced the competition field from the 1950s until the 1970s, I turn my attention in this chapter to two ensembles from this so-called “Golden Era”¹¹ of drum corps: the Los Angeles Chinese Drum and Bugle Corps (a.k.a. the “L.A. Chinese” or “L.A. Imperial Dragons”), and the Chicago Nisei

¹¹ Members of the North American drum corps community mark the “Golden Era” of drum corps from roughly 1946 to 1971, between the ending of World War II and the founding of Drum Corps International. This era is characterized, in elder community members’ eyes, by a boom in participating field competition ensembles across the country, and by peaking veterans’ organizations memberships.

Ambassadors. Both organizations provide productive comparison for a variety of reasons. At a surface level, both groups followed aspects of the master historical narrative of the drum corps scene. Indeed, both groups formed during the 1950s, beginning as local ethnic youth organizations in their respective urban centers. Then, after establishing a racially diverse, panethnic membership in the 1960s, both rose in regional and state competitive circuits, experiencing a period of national competitive relevance by the early 1970s before shrinking and folding. Thus, throughout a critical juncture in Asian American history marked by the Asian American Movement, these Chinese and Japanese American communities formed and dissolved distinctly panethnic coalitional identifications (Espiritu 1993) through the well-established, *Asian American* tradition of military music performance. Finally, both organizations maintain active alumni bases in the present, with members engaged in formal and informal community-based archival practices through reunions and other events.

Despite these similarities, the varied strategies by which both groups define their legacies highlight the political dynamics and critical challenges of such projects. Rather than offer comprehensive historical accounts of these units, I attend in this chapter to how members of these groups have actively produced historical accounts “on their own terms” (Flinn et al. 2009). Drawing from oral histories with former members, participant observations, and close readings of their community-based archives exhibits and displays, I posit that these alumni mark Asian American time—and crucially, proto-Asian American Movement time—through acts of memory work that combat symbolic annihilation.

Moreover, I suggest that such community-based archiving and public history efforts problematize linear histories of these ensembles, rearticulating Asian American pasts and presents through acts of history-making. To this end, I show how community archives initiatives led by the Dragons and the Ambassadors provide a seemingly Western temporal progress narrative, focusing on the respective corps' nominally humble beginnings and subsequent blossoming into nationally competitive units. And yet, critical interrogation of these narratives reveals slippages in these linear temporalities, particularly in the narrativization of the corps' respective dissolutions. These exhibits offer an alternative history of the US drum corps scene that simultaneously highlights Asian American integration within the space while also acknowledging the shortfalls of the linear historical narrative. I further propose that Asian American drum corps communities like the Dragons and the Ambassadors mark Asian American time in ways that both replicate and resist linear temporalities, leaving space for new and uncertain potential pasts and futures. Marking time, in other words, looks both backwards and forwards, forging new understandings of Asian American identity and belonging through the lens of military music performance.

After grounding the work of marking Asian American time through the corpus of critical archives scholarship by Michelle Caswell, I then intersperse close readings of *Imperial Dragons*—a permanent exhibit at the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California organized between 2013 and 2019 by alumni of the L.A. Chinese Drum and Bugle Corps—with oral history accounts of the project's formation and execution. I suggest that while the exhibit reproduces the limiting structures and logics of traditional,

non-liberatory archives, it also fulfills the critical potential of marking Asian American time by subtly critiquing the foundational premises of this epistemological orientation. I then detail ongoing efforts by the alumni of the Nisei Ambassadors to produce a similar historical exhibit, ruminating on the historiographic challenges and critical possibilities of their ongoing work.

Imperial Dragons: Asian American Musical Memory in Community-Based Museums

Vignette: Imperial Dragons, Online and In-Person

I am scrolling through my social media feeds in the middle of the day when I find a series of black and white photographs. One glance at the immaculately uniformed Asian American performers in the photograph tells me right away that this is the L.A. Chinese Drum & Bugle Corps' history page, a site that I've followed for well over five years at this point. Thinking back to the COVID-19 pandemic, I remember how I would scroll through their page reading digitized photographs of their newsletters, named at various points the *Sound Off!* or the tongue-in-cheek *Yellow Pages*. At this point, I haven't made significant inroads into speaking with their alumni. On a whim, I reach out via a private message to the main page account, explaining that I'm an Asian American former drum corps performer with interests in Asian American drum corps history. Within a day, a message shoots back, and we set up an email thread. On the other end is Linda Ching-Ikiri, one of the co-moderators of the page and a former member who now works on the corps' alumni history projects. We set up a video conference call for the next day. Linda's face is thin but strong, her straight salt-and-pepper hair falling powerfully off both sides

of her face. Throughout our conversation, she outlines how the L.A. Imperial Dragons have worked over the last decade-and-a-half to put together their museum display at the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California (CHHSC), an exhibit I've always wanted to see but have been unable to due to the long-term post-pandemic closure of the museum to the public. She quickly puts me in contact with other alumni, including Cliff Uyeda, who she describes as the "main driver" behind the project. Excited to speak with Linda and some of her newly-provided contacts, I sign off from the call.

A year later, I find myself weaving through L.A. traffic. After calling the CHSSC in the early morning to ensure they are open, I have spent the last hour and a half driving out to L.A.'s historic Chinatown. Along the way, I remember back to that videoconference with Linda. Things got busy in the interim; I hadn't spoken with all of the contacts I had wanted to. As I drive west, I feel a certain dread knowing I should have gotten on the road sooner. Located at 415 Bernard Street, the turn-of-the-century home that houses the CHSSC is so small compared to the surrounding houses and abandoned shopping center that I miss it completely and have to circle back around. After leaving my car in the graffitied parking garage, I make my way down the abandoned mall's elevator before crossing over Bernard to the house. I'm not even sure if the museum is open yet, but a small door is left curiously ajar. The building has a certain musk and scent as I pull up, as if dust came out to greet me before entering. Cracking open the door and stepping inside I'm immediately greeted by an energetic Chinese American elder, short in stature and with salt-and-pepper hair. After introducing herself as a member of the Society, she asks what I'm looking for at the museum.

“I’ve spoken over the phone with your archivist, Eugene [Moy]. I’m interested in seeing the L.A. Chinese drum corps display.”

“Eugene is busy helping another person with a research project they were doing, but you’re welcome to check out the exhibit yourself.”

She then points me to the small room on the right side of the corridor, a room that feels like I could traverse the entire space in about five paces in any direction. In the middle of the floor sits a non-descript wooden meeting table with two chairs, dwarfed by the sheer clutter of the room surrounding it. Display panels are plastered all over the walls, dense with exhibit labels full of crowded small text, just to fit everything in. Off in a corner, a glass display case holds a veritable potpourri of corps ephemera: badges, buttons, documents, programs, all smashed together on three shelves with 1960s valve-rotor baritone and soprano bugles placed bell-down on the top shelf outside the case. A mannequin is placed right next to the window, the intense heat and light of the southern Californian spring illuminating its white blouse and red sash. Drums are stacked neatly in another corner, with an unreachable shelf holding additional uniform parts, shako hats, and feathered plumes. I look up above the panels and their hanging lights illuminating their texts. Plastered on a card with all manner of fonts and spacings, I know that this is the space I was searching for:

Imperial Dragons: *The story of the*
Los Angeles Chinese Drum and Bugle Corps
1954-1977

(Color and italics original)

When it comes to the preservation of community memories and stories, alumni of the L.A. Chinese Drum & Bugle Corps are consistent and persistent. For well over a decade now, former members of the corps have maintained active alumni groups and online spaces dedicated to uploading, sharing, and discussing corps history (a practice common with other Asian American drum corps alumni groups as well). Since 2011, former members and broader members of the broader public have gathered at the corps' official Facebook page "Los Angeles Chinese Drum and Bugle Corps, aka Imperial Dragons," which itself represents a community-based archive of digitized audiovisual materials, program books, newsletters, and photographs held by performers across the drum corps community. Beginning in the 1990s, key alumni also maintained a website, no longer accessible, as an official space for corps history and small donations towards the corps' historical projects. Presently, the corps even has its own StoryMap online exhibit (Tsai 2024), hosted by the CHSSC. But unlike other Asian American drum corps alumni organizations, the L.A. Chinese stand as one of the only ensembles to plan, construct, and open a permanent community archives and museum exhibit.

As one of the only public displays in the country concerning Asian American drum and bugle corps performance practices, *Imperial Dragons* highlights the critical issues at the heart of marking Asian American time. Yet as I explored in vignette, the museum display is not a mere recounting of historical facts and oral histories. Instead, it is a palimpsestic space whose constricted confines and relatively small scale still engage a modal and sensorial overlap between history, material culture, and memory production. In this section, I examine more closely *Imperial Dragons* and the circumstances behind

its creation through the work of members of the corps' Legacy Committee. Drawing upon oral history interviews with members of the Committee and my own ethnographic encounters with the museum exhibit and its builders, I underscore how efforts at marking Asian American time often require coordination with Asian American community-based organizations, and such collaborations enable critical history work that transcends the mere recounting of corps historical narratives. Additionally, I posit that such work enables sensorial history-making that projects future temporalities for Asian American community-building.

Historical Background

Like many of their urban Asian American counterparts, the L.A. Chinese Drum & Bugle Corps started as a local music organization with a strong focus on youth music and US American civic education. Born in 1934 and growing up in Madison, WI, corps founder and first director William "Bill" Lee first gained experience in the drum corps world as a member of the nationally competitive Madison Explorer Scouts Drum & Bugle Corps. Following his family relocating to Los Angeles' Chinatown in 1950, Lee joined multiple military music organizations, including the Los Angeles Police Department's Auxiliary Police Boys Band. He soon befriended John Hom, another member of the youth band, and within the next few years he suggested that Lee bring together a drum and bugle corps based out of Hom's Chung Wah Chinese School. Founded in March 1954 with the support of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, the Chung Wah Drum and Bugle Corps gained roughly twenty-five

members from both the school and the surrounding community, many coming from the Boys Band where Lee played. Like their compatriots in the Los Angeles Japanese American community (see Chapters 1 and 2), the nascent corps engaged in complex local, national, and transnational political negotiations, performing in both July 4th celebrations, Mexican Independence parades in September, and Chinese New Year's parades within the span of six months. By this point, membership had blossomed to forty members. Lee soon brought the group to compete in field competitions under the support of first Hollywood American Legion Post 43 in 1955, and then under Glendale Post 127 beginning in September of 1956 after the Hollywood post formed its own ensemble (Tsai 2024).

Over the late 1950s and early 1960s, the corps transformed from a local music organization into a regional competitive group, placing in state and national American Legion competitions. As more Chinese American families moved to the suburbs, the corps began to attract a handful of Caucasian color guard members from the communities surrounding Chinatown. Conflicts amongst the parents ensued, as many saw the corps shifting away from its local youth mission and towards a more competitive purpose. Lee soon departed as director in 1962, taking much of his staff with him, forcing the corps to revert to local parade and exhibition performances. Corps father Phil Kwan quickly replaced Lee as director and returned the corps to state drum corps competitions despite the heavy change in staff. Navigating both Lee's departure and a tragic, fatal bus crash that took two parents' and one member's lives in 1964, the corps continued to grow in both size and competitive prominence. Lee returned as director in 1968, renaming the

ensemble the Imperial Dragons and growing the corps beyond regional and state competitions. After earning its first national drum corps finals in 1970—finishing seventh in a field of twenty-two at the American Legion National Championships in Portland, OR—the corps went on its first national tour in 1971, competing in the independent World Open national competition in Lynn, MA. The 1970s also marked a key collaboration between the corps and the Japanese American community of the Los Angeles area, as the corps gained sponsorship from the Japanese American Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Nisei Memorial Post 9902 in order to compete in VFW drum corps competitions as well. By the middle of the decade, however, corps membership dropped as youth left the Chinese American communities of Los Angeles for academic or professional pursuits. Lee’s family restaurant business was also struggling, and in 1976, he left the corps for the final time to assist his family. In the face of waning interest and lack of funds, the corps disbanded—like many community-based organizations of the period—in the fall of 1977. Despite multiple attempts to resurrect the corps, no efforts came to fruition (Linda Ching-Ikiri, email correspondence with the author, February 15, 2024).

The Legacy Committee

Historical memory and community-based practices of remembering have defined the L.A. Chinese Drum & Bugle Corps and its alumni base. While members and their families kept their own personal archives of corps memorabilia, photographs, home videos, documents, and other paraphernalia, the dissolution of the corps marked the

beginning of organized, concerted efforts to remember the corps' history and legacy through intentional and collective acts of community-based archiving. Beginning in the early 1990s, local alumni and parents of the L.A. Chinese realized that some funds from the now-defunct organization remained, leading to the organization of an informal committee to create a reunion picnic in 1992. Over the ensuing decades, corps alumni hosted reunions at local picnic areas and restaurants, creating a core set of engaged alumni who were dedicated to marking the history of their organization. While these reunions drew needed attention to the history of the corps within former members' family and community circles, the core base of the reunion committee recognized by the 2000s that an aging alumni population might lead to the loss of historical memories of the organization and its importance to the Chinese American community of Los Angeles. Accordingly, the reunion committee reformed into the Legacy Committee in 2010, with the explicit purpose of formally preserving the corps' history through a community-based archival and museal initiative.

The committee's initial efforts at proposing a public history exhibit on the drum corps faced uphill challenges. As she later recalled in an interview, Linda Ching-Ikiri emphasized that multiple community museums were skeptical of the costs and space requirements, but that the CHSSC ultimately took the leap of faith and agreed to house the Legacy Committee's project:

We came up with an outline and pitched it to the Chinese American...Museum [of Los Angeles] but their leadership thought the development costs would be too great. The Chinese Historical Society of Southern California could not help with development costs, but agreed to house the exhibition once it was completed and provided the venue for planning meetings and focus groups.

(Email correspondence with author, February 15, 2024)

Accordingly, it became the job of Ching-Ikiri, Cliff Uyeda, and others to front the funds and labor needed to put together a permanent display at the CHSSC. Members of the Legacy Committee spent the first few years tracking down alumni and appointing motivated members with historical responsibilities for each decade. In 2013, committee members from the earliest years of the organization reached out to Don Quon, a soprano bugler who joined the corps in its infancy at the Chung Wah Chinese School. Like many from the initial period of the corps, Quon first joined through a personal connection with Bill Lee:

I started in middle school, playing drums, and then trumpet. And so then, outside of school, I joined the Los Angeles Police Department Boys Band, which was part of the Auxiliary Police Youth Group. And that's where I met Bill Lee, the founder of the drum corps. And so he was also a member of the Police Band, and he asked me one day to come down to rehearsal and see if I would join. So, I did, and that was 1953.

(Interview with author, September 17, 2024)

Quon's familiarity with Lee and his participation in the corps during the 1950s made his input incredibly exciting for the committee, and he was soon put in charge of documenting the corps' first decade as part of the committee's attempts to distribute the workload of preserving over twenty years of historical material. Quon would soon become a key figure in the corps' marking of Chinese American drum corps history, as he became the primary contact point for 1950s alumni to reach out to for interviews or sharing documents.

Such early efforts to document the corps' history typically developed from conversations with the ensemble's first members, who were already engaged in individual acts of history-keeping and documentation. Scrapbooking served as a key modality of memory work through which members marked their presence in the corps during their

time as performers. Elisabeth Chung, a tenor drummer from the original 1954 corps, recorded the corps' history from its founding until 1957 through a personal scrapbook that incorporated pictures, explanatory captions, and rosters of members from the first few years of the ensemble. As Quon remembers,

And so at that time [2013], somebody had me contact with Elisabeth, and she says "Well, I have a scrapbook, this should be very helpful in putting together the history together for the museum." And finally, since I was representing the first decade of the drum corps, then I became the owner of the scrapbook [chuckles]. And by that time [gestures hands as if carefully picking through papers] it was falling apart, pages were falling apart. Cliff [Uyeda] was very good at helping to reconstruct all that. And so, that's the form that I have that scrapbook in now.

(Interview with the author, September 17, 2024)

For all their eagerness to assist in the Legacy Committee's project to put together the exhibit, however, many alumni also felt a need to retain control of their personal archives. When Quon went to ask Chung if she would donate the scrapbook as part of Quon's efforts to document the 1950s, she refused on the grounds that it might be lost. As such, the committee steered towards less possession-based forms of documentation,¹² digitizing and uploading many documents with owners' consent to the newly formed social media group page.

While digital spaces moderated by committee members served as an initial space for alumni and drum corps community members to contribute materials to the overall project, the main thrust of the work became distilling the oral and documentary histories into a compact timeline and decade-focused museum display panels. Doing so required

¹² Resistance to possession-based forms of archiving and provenance mark decolonial and Indigenous interventions into recent public history and archival studies scholarship (Lonetree 2012, 2019). While members of the Legacy Committee did not explicitly use decolonial discourse to describe their own practices, parallels and influences from decolonial archival projects cannot be overlooked.

members of the Legacy Committee to draw upon family contacts and volunteer labor from alumni and their friends to see the project through. As Ching-Ikiri later explained:

Because we were trying to preserve the funds that remained, we were a shoestring operation and relied mainly on volunteers. We were fortunate that one of our members owns a print shop and was able to do the exhibition boards we needed (my husband was a graphic artist and did the production work). Cliff Uyeda...was the main driver—he did the lion’s share of the work (scanning photos and reviewing recordings) and kept all the rest of us going when we flagged (no pun intended!).

It turned out to be an 8-year long project and we held one final Corps-sponsored reunion in 2018 at the CHSSC to formally introduce the exhibition.

(Email correspondence with author, February 14, 2024)

The reunion thus served as the culminating event marking both the over two decades of corps history and nearly the same amount of time spent transforming the history of the Imperial Dragons from an interesting historical note of the Los Angeles Chinatown into an integrally recognized part of the community’s musical legacy. While other community-based digitization efforts persist on the corps’ social media pages, *Imperial Dragons* stands as a model of public-facing drum corps history work. Moreover, it demonstrates how the process of marking Asian American time in the drum corps community has often fallen to the passionate volunteer efforts of alumni concerned with historical memory and often requires years or even decades of grassroots organizing and work to put together public-facing material. Accordingly, *Imperial Dragons* represents a key site for understanding the relationships between public memory work, historical memory, and the role of community-based archiving for Asian American drum corps.

***Imperial Dragons* at the CHSSC**

At a surface level, *Imperial Dragons* replicates much of the archival epistemologies that Caswell critiques in her analysis of liberatory community archives.

Upon initial inspection, the exhibit room at the CHSSC offers a relatively straightforward, linear chronological account of the L.A. Imperial Dragons. The entire exhibit is housed in a small room within the society's primary museum space, occupying what appears to be the former living room of the historic house. As such, the room extends no more than fifteen feet in either direction, with a single window looking out into a courtyard outside. Upon stepping into the room, visitors are confronted with a multitude of collected archival artifacts placed out in the open: vintage valve-and-rotor bugles stand atop a large display case, against which a short mannequin sports the corps' traditional white uniform with red sash and plume (see Figure 17). Along the ground, more musical instruments lie about, including multiple drums and large contrabass bugles which are roughly comparable in range and size to a concert tuba. Along the walls, members of the Legacy Committee places seven panels outlining the corps' history: one introductory overview of the exhibit, a large timeline of events in the corps' history, the three panels developed by each decade branch of the committee, two panels explaining the broader scene and parent contributions to the organization, and a final biographical panel detailing the life and contributions of founder Bill Lee.

The design of the space encourages not only a linear historical narrative reading, but also a linear experience of this history by visitors. The first introductory panel sits directly to the left of the doorway, marking it as the first text to be read with the other panels laid out in order after it. The text of the introductory panel presents the story of the corps in terms of its humble origins into the triumph of national competitive relevancy:

When Bill Lee founded the Chung Wah Drum and Bugle Corps in 1954, he had no idea that he was starting a proud march into a history of nearly 25 years. As Chung Wah transformed into the

Los Angeles Chinese Drum and Bugle Corps, eventually known as the Imperial Dragons, the corps grew to compete nationally. Much more than a source of organized musical and marching activities, the Corps became a “family” for teens of Chinese and other Asian ancestry.

While a few of the members entered the organization with some formal musical education, most joined with little or no training. Upon joining between the ages of 10 and 21, new members had to be taught the basics of music and marching. By comparison, other drum corps had members who were already experienced in these areas.

The Corps went on to proudly represent the Asian community in parades, standstills, and field competitions. Moreover, participation helped to instill the characteristics of honesty, integrity, and discipline—core values that Corps members adhered to throughout their lives.

This exhibit will highlight how a group of young people who needed instruments, training, uniforms, and traveling funds went from humble beginnings to the national stage.

The first panel thus primes readers to view the ensuing display panels through the lens of a progress narrative, one that traces the Imperial Dragons’ development out of local music-making practices into a national drum corps competitor.



Figure 17: Imperial Dragons exhibit, as viewed from entryway. Photograph by author.

The linear temporal narrative continues on the adjacent panel, entitled “Through the Years: Los Angeles Chinese Drum and Bugle Corps, 1954-1977” (see Figure 18). Designed as a snapshot timeline of the organization, the gridded panel provides year-by-year descriptions of “National Events,” “Local Events,” and “Memorable Events” in the corps’ history, along with placements at the California American Legion State Championships for each season. Photos contributed by corps alumni are interspersed within the grid, placed either within the column representing the year the photo was taken, or integrated into the negative space at the bottom of the “Memorable Events” section. Notably, the corps’ history is divided by decade along the lines of the separate subcommittees, with each decade given a label by the Legacy Committee that outlines the linear narrative: “1950s: The Beginning,” “1960s: Formative Years,” and “1970s: Competitive Years.” The march of historical progress is mirrored by the photos at the bottom margin of the panel: whereas early photographs display the corps marching in white shirts and navy-blue slacks in a local parade, subsequent photographs display members of the corps marching in full uniform on the starting line of a competition. In this photograph, members march in the traditional left-to-right direction, aligning with the left-to-right historical timeline that points their bodies towards a photograph at the end displaying the corps performing at the US Capitol building in Washington, D.C. Accordingly, the design and implementation of the timeline panel situate the corps within an unmistakably forward-marching, progress-oriented temporality. Indeed, the corps’ demise is noted in a small, passing reference placed in the far bottom right corner,

relegated to an inconvenient detail: “*Due to declining membership, the Corps makes difficult decision to disband*” (original emphasis).



Figure 18: "Through the Years" display timeline graphic. Note the marchers at the bottom facing forward into the future years. Photograph by author.

The next three display panels in the room (see Figure 19) reflect the Legacy Committee’s decision to organize the corps’ history by decade sub-committees and reflect the broader progress temporality outlined by the timeline panel. These panels hang on the adjacent wall and are lit from above, drawing the visitors’ eyes within the otherwise unlit room. Each of the roughly 3’x 2’ panels are organized in the same way, with a few paragraphs of text at the top detailing broad strokes of the corps’ development during that decade while the bottom two-thirds contain digitized photographs gathered by each

leader of the decades sub-committees. The 1950s poster emphasizes a humble origins narrative, highlighting the corps' place within L.A.'s postwar Chinatown community:

Los Angeles Chinatown was central to local Chinese families—a place to find familiar goods and foods, and even educate the younger generation. It was here that Bill Lee began fulfilling his dream of starting a drum and bugle corps. Wanting to bring Chinese youth together, Bill acted on the suggestion from John Hom, a fellow youth band member, to start at the Chung Wah Chinese School where John was a student.

...

Within weeks, the Chung Wah Association provided monies to purchase horns and drums. Bill then scheduled regular Saturday afternoon practice sessions to teach members how to play these instruments. The Chung Wah Chinese School Drum and Bugle Corps made its debut in Chinatown only two months later!

The 1960s, or “Formative Years,” presents the subsequent growth of the ensemble outside of the confines of L.A.'s historic Chinatown, and reflects much of the language of integration and progress that Caswell critiques. Noting that the decade “was characterized by both grown and growing pains” as recruitment “reflected the movement away from the Chinatown area and into surrounding suburbs as families assimilated into the American mainstream,” the panel acknowledges ruptures within the organization that resulted from such recruitment efforts:

As the Corps began competing more, intense discussion ensued as to its focus. For many of the parents, education was paramount to ensuring a better future for their children; they viewed the Corps solely as an extra-curricular activity. For the members, competing was a heady experience and many wanted to see how far the Corps could go. This became an ongoing dilemma with no easy answer. Sadly, it resulted in Bill Lee's departure in 1962, as well as the many instructors and members who followed him.

This is the first text thus far in the exhibit that seriously engages with discordant histories within the ensemble, rupturing the thus far clean progress narrative by highlighting how competing community interests resulted in internal schisms. While framed as a narrative of progress, this paragraph turns readers towards a broader engagement with the challenges of community building and collective action, demonstrating the multi-vocalic nature of Asian American timekeeping.

1950s: The Beginning



Los Angeles Chinatown was central to local Chinese American families—a place to find familiar goods and foods, and even educate the younger generation. It was here that Bill Lee began fulfilling his dream of starting a drum and bugle corps. Wanting to bring Chinese youth together, Bill acted on the suggestion from John Hoon, a fellow youth band member, to start at the Chung Wah Chinese School where John was a student.

In March 1954, Bill spoke with Chinese school administrators, outlined his plan, and convinced them that he had the skill, background and experience to create and develop a drum corps. Gaining their approval, Bill had only 20 minutes between classes to teach the rudiments of marching to more than 25 interested boys and girls.

Within weeks, the Chung Wah Association provided monies to purchase horns and drums. Bill then scheduled regular

Saturday afternoon practice sessions to teach members how to play these instruments. The Chung Wah Chinese School Drum and Bugle Corps made its debut in Chinatown only two months later!

Although Chung Wah was the official sponsor, non-students were allowed to participate. Early membership consisted of young people living within 10 miles of Chinatown. It continued to grow after charter members pored over local telephone books to identify and send letters to potential candidates. As a result, new recruits came primarily from areas beyond the initial radius.

Within a year, the Corps caught the attention of the American Legion and gained a co-sponsor in Hollywood American Legion Post 43, with Glendale American Legion Post 127 taking over a few years later. Under American Legion sponsorship, the Corps became eligible to compete in a major yearly event—the American Legion State Competition.

Besides Chinatown and American Legion events, the Corps participated in parades and field shows both within

Los Angeles and other cities throughout California. Notable events included marching in the annual Hollywood Christmas Parade, the Huntington Beach 4th of July Parade, and at Disneyland, as well as performing at the Hollywood Bowl's Meredith Willson Night.

In the late-1950s, the Corps ended its association with the Chung Wah Chinese School and changed its name to the Los Angeles Chinese Drum and Bugle Corps.



Left by drum major from Chung, the Corps debuted in Chinatown in May 1954. At first uniforms were navy-blue slacks and white shirts.

Chung Wah Chinese School (July 1954)



Parade celebrating the 100th anniversary (April 1975)



Drum Major (1955)



Drum major Elaine Fong (June 1954 (senior 1955))

Bill Lee would "run along side of us, yelling 'left, right, left' for those of us who had two left feet....I don't believe any of us had any musical or marching experience before this. It's amazing in retrospect how Bill was able to teach all of us by himself!"

—Barbara Wong Kerr, member (mid-1950s)



Hollywood Park Christmas Parade (1955)

Post-Chinese New Year Parade (February 1956)



Bill Lee would drive "...100 miles back and forth from Camp Pendleton to make sure practices continued."

—Lilyane Telle, parent



San Bernardino (March 1952)

Glendale International Day Parade (L-R) John Hoon, Victor Hoon, Jack C. Hoon, and Andy Chan (1956)



Hollywood Park Parade (June 1956)

The Corps included several non-Chinese members. Linda Wolff (middle row, third from left) is a non-Chinese member. "They were the good students in school...the nice kids involved with music and Bill Lee. We were welcomed and treated kindly. Bill Lee was a mentor to all of us kids." (1958)



1960s: Formative Years



The next decade was characterized by both growth and growing pains. Revitalizing efforts reflected the movement away from the Chinatown area and into surrounding suburbs as families assimilated into the American mainstream, but wanted to maintain some tie to their cultural identity.

The Corps continued to participate in parades, field competitions, and was often invited to special events. In July 1960, the Corps performed at three especially memorable occasions: the Fourth of July Celebration at the L.A. Coliseum, opening ceremonies for the Democratic National Convention, and a second appearance at the Hollywood Bowl with Meredith Willson ("The Music Man").

In 1961, the American Legion State Competition was held in Long Beach. Sporting new, professionally-made uniforms, the Corps placed third in the drum corps segment, but the

all-male color guard unit placed first in the state color guard competition!

As the Corps began competing more, intense discussion ensued as to its focus. For many of the parents, education was paramount to ensuring a better future for their children; they viewed the Corps solely as an extra-curricular activity. For the members, competing was a heady experience and many wanted to see how far the Corps could go. This became an ongoing dilemma with no easy answer. Sadly, it resulted in Bill Lee's departure in 1962, as well as the many instructors and members who followed him.

Corps parent Phil Kwan then stepped up to perform Bill's directorial responsibilities: music arrangement, drill design, and overall instruction. Phil's efforts helped the Corps move forward during a time of uncertainty about its future.

In June 1964, the Corps suffered a horrific tragedy—a bus accident—killed three people and injured many others. But the Corps proved resilient and continued on.

The Corps entered yet another phase in the mid-1960s as older members left for college or "aged out." New members—often siblings, relatives and friends who became of age to join—took their places in what were essentially membership rebuilding years.

In 1968, Bill Lee returned. With the help of instructors from both inside and outside the Corps family, the Corps began another chapter in the newly nicknamed Imperial Dragons.



The Corps was invited to play for Gov. Edward "Pat" Brown at the San Francisco Civic Auditorium (1960).

As Governor Brown's speech ended, "... the Corps went up and down the aisles playing 'Battle Hymn,' ... We were thrilled having seen him in person!"

—Corps newsletter (July 1960)



Next Week Parade (1963)



The Los Angeles South High School Armory in 1962

"Since I was 8 and watched my older brother and sister march in the Corps, I knew I would be in the Corps, too."

—Fred Tom, member (1961-63)



Charmant parade in Alhambra Park, Rosemead, 1961 (Y. Chan, Chen, and Lida, 1961)



Overseas Week parade (1965)



1962 State Competition in the Shrine (L-R) Victor Young, Candy Chang, other Junior Corps, Fred Tom, Fred Tom, Victor Young, and Candy Chang



June 26, 1964

Encroute to the 1964 American Legion State Competition in Sacramento, a bus carrying the L.A. Chinese Drum & Bugle Corps and their families was involved in a head-on collision with a semi-truck. Three people were killed and 30 others injured. The Corps members were hospitalized and the bus was destroyed. The Corps members were hospitalized and the bus was destroyed. The Corps members were hospitalized and the bus was destroyed.

"We were four teenagers growing up in Orange County and our parents decided we needed to become more familiar with our heritage...so they tricked us into attending a full dress rehearsal. Shortly after that, we joined!"

—Keith Bagun, member (1966-72)



Members with their parents at the 1964 State Competition



Members with their parents at the 1964 State Competition



Members with their parents at the 1964 State Competition



Members with their parents at the 1964 State Competition

1970s: Competitive Years



The Corps had its best years of competition in the early-1970s with membership growing, in part because the Corps offered a place to meet others of similar ethnic backgrounds and culture.

Meanwhile, the drum corps world was evolving—it was moving away from its military roots and patriotic themes—and embracing more theatrical presentations and contemporary music.

In 1970, the Corps competed in the American Legion National Championship and surprised many by finishing seventh in the nation.

The Corps traveled to the East Coast in 1971 for a two-week tour that combined both competition and educational sight-seeing. It participated in several

regional shows, but the highlight was the World Open in Lynn, MA—a national competition. The Corps also played concerts for the Chinatowns and businesses that generously supported them.

In 1974, the Corps participated in the first Drum Corps West (DCW) competition—the West Coast's answer to the newly-established Drum Corps International (DCI) whose mission was to showcase the most predominant corps in the world. DCW allowed the best West Coast corps to compete against one another.

After the mid-1970s, interest in the Corps waned. The Asian community continued to assimilate into the mainstream where sports and other activities provided alternative outlets. Many college-age indi-

viduals ventured farther from home and no longer participated until they "aged out." Membership and funding were deeply impacted. Also, DCI had matured and competing required time commitments and financial demands that contributed to the downfall of smaller drum corps, including the Imperial Dragons.

Although the Corps disbanded after 1977, many relationships that developed over the years continue to this day: friendships, business partnerships, and even marriages. Members from across the decades consider one another family.



L.A. mayor Sam Yary presents a proclamation to drum majors Colson Tang, Michael Tsui, and Stacie Hyslop, naming the Corps a cultural ambassador during its 1971 East Coast tour.



The Hon. Senator Frank Pong (HI) and the Hon. Congressman Edward Roybal (CA) requested that the Corps perform at a flag-raising ceremony while in Washington, D.C. (1971)



Arriving in Portland, the Corps was the first in drum corps history to travel to a national championship by air. (1970)



Preparing for the 1970 American Legion National Championships in Portland, Ore.



Hollywood Park (1971)

"All for one and one for all..." —Imperial Dragons corps motto

Pacific Palisades (1970)



"Los Angeles in the '70s was a melting pot. Corps was a place where we kids could get together and mix with others sharing the same ethnic backgrounds and culture that wasn't always available in school environments."

—Cliff Uyeda, member (1969-73)



Young Dragons meet to sleep with veteran members in the early-1970s.



Hollywood Park (1970)



East L.A. College (1972)



1971 World Open Prelims in Lynn, Mass. Although the Corps did not qualify for the Finals, it was honored to play the national anthem at the ribbon cutters.



The Corps joined the world of gymnastics when the City of Los Angeles and its Asian community joined together during the American Legion National Championships in Honolulu, Hawaii (1972)



1970 Chinese New Year Parade in Boston, Mass.



Los Angeles Chinese New Year Parade in the mid-1970s

Figure 19 (a, b, c): Decades panels from *Imperial Dragons*. Photographs by the author.

Such discordant marking of time is perhaps most evident in the final panel, which—despite covering the “Competitive Years” of the organization—does much to explain the corps’ ultimate demise. After celebrating the corps’ participation in national drum corps competitions of the early 1970s—including participation in competitions adjacent to the nascent DCI circuit that ultimately put many corps out of business (see Introduction)—the last three paragraphs of text grapple with the place of the corps’ unwinding within the broader narrative of the organization and broader flows of Asian American history. This marking of Asian American time does much to both localize histories of Asian American community dispersion in the 1970s and foreground specific circumstances that led to declining membership in the Imperial Dragons:

After the mid-1970s, interest in the Corps waned. The Asian community continued to assimilate into the mainstream where sports and other activities provided alternative outlets. Many college-age individuals ventured farther from home and no longer participated until they “aged out.” Membership and funding were deeply impacted. Also, DCI had matured and competing required time commitments and financial demands that contributed to the downfall of smaller drum corps, including the Imperial Dragons.

Although the Corps disbanded after 1977, many relationships that developed over the years continue to this day: friendships, business partnerships, and even marriages. Members from across the decades consider one another family.

Taken in sum, the decades panels highlight the challenges and politics of temporality in the exhibit. While structurally they support the broader linear historical narrative outlined by the first panels, the decades sections also do much to acknowledge the limits of such historical narrativization. The last panel in particular takes time to emphasize that the corps’ folding is not the end of the story of the community but instead points towards futures outside of the corps’ existence that helped maintain community and interpersonal ties across the ensuing decades.

Accordingly, the CHSSC display texts reproduce the structure of chronoviolence while also making an effort to open challenges to the linear progress narrative that undergirds such a framework. By focusing not just on the year-by-year historical events of the organization but also a broader legacy of the drum corps “family,” the Legacy Committee transformed the framing narrative of the ensemble’s rise and fall into a broader commentary on Asian American organizing, community, and futurity. Much like the communities who shifted the US American drum corps performance tradition towards uniquely Asian American politics, so too did the Committee transform normative narrative devices into transformative public history-making and memory work.

While much of the focus thus far has been on the museum texts, a broader look at the material culture components of the exhibit helps underscore the productive tensions between linear and alternative temporalities within the space. Much like the more formalized archives that contain instruments from L.A.’s Japanese American Boy Scout ensembles (see Chapter 2), the instruments within the CHSSC exhibit invite an imaginative sonic approach to the space. Left within touching distance of the visiting observer, the bugles and drums almost invite a tactile engagement despite the presumptive archival impulse to display and preserve behind glass. Indeed, the corner of the room that joins the aforementioned timeline and decades walls features a comment box placed directly atop signed corps drums from the 1970s. Visitors are thus invited to engage tactile modalities of experience as part of the experience of the museum space, collapsing past and present in a small but meaningfully present way. While explicitly *not* a “hands-on” exhibit (warning messages elsewhere discourage touching of the equipment

in the open air), the comment box does bring the visitor into closer proximity with the personal instruments that were foundational to the performance practice of the organization. Such proximity encourages, moreover, modes of archival sonification (see Chapter 2), as visitors may creatively imagine the sounds of these instruments in pasts that are no longer audible. Such imagination is supplemented by a video display area on the opposite wall, which when set up plays an ongoing reel of music and archival footage of the corps.

A linear progress narrative is further problematized by the sole glass display cabinet in the far corner of the room (see Figure 20). Inside, a palimpsest of unlabeled materials is played out: program books stacked underneath parade sabers, dragon-adorned supporter pins piled alongside small hand flags, veterans' caps placed gingerly next to pins from other drum corps ensembles, certificates and local governmental resolutions leaned up against smaller soprano bugles. On the bottom shelf, program books from the late 1970s are stacked against a bilingual 1959 Chinese Telephone Directory for Los Angeles, a photograph of the corps in their earliest dark uniforms resplendent across the front. Rather than view this case as a "dump display" to fit all of the smaller items of the exhibit, I believe that the case marks a critical—if possibly unintentional—critique of the broader linear temporality (and assimilation to whiteness) narrative undergirding the text portions of the exhibit. Here, the various periods of the corps' history are literally jumbled together, with items marking the group's broader assimilation in the 1970s placed alongside those that speak to the community grassroots origins of the organization. Rather than being presented in a linear fashion, the layered

material cultures stick to each other, literally and figuratively, as markers of multiple histories that contribute to the organization's legacy. If the text was the space for *Imperial Dragons* to reproduce the traditional violences of archival spaces, these objects are the materials that disrupt the notion that this ostensible chronoviolence is secured.



Figure 20: Detail from glass display case in *Imperial Dragons*. Photograph by the author.

Given these observations, what does *Imperial Dragons* reveal about the process and potential of marking Asian American time? Much of the critique of the so-called “model minority myth” seeks to unmoor Asian American identity from a presumptive proximity to whiteness and white supremacist notions of racial progress through hard work and determination. Indeed, the language engaged within *Imperial Dragons* often

echoes the very logics that underpin the model minority: the drum corps' development indexes the broader "assimilation into the mainstream," movement away from ethnic enclaves, and focus on education that presumptively shifted the tides of the corps' historical past. And yet—I would suggest—the exhibit does much to challenge the presumptive racialized progress narrative of "white time": periods of corps history that were once siloed in the timeline panel are rendered contemporaneous and intermingled by the items strewn about the room; narratives of the corps' rise to national prominence are directly challenged by text that acknowledges the diversity of goals and objectives within the same musical and ethnic community; and the corps' ultimate dismantling goes from being an inconvenient blip in an overarching historical narrative to a key marker of broader sociocultural challenges that Asian American drum corps ensembles faced at a crucial juncture in the scene. The final impression that *Imperial Dragons* leaves is thus one of productive ambivalence towards the normative structures of Western archival spaces. While indeed the exhibit might well fall short of the liberatory political and temporal practices outlined by Caswell, members of the Legacy Committee productively constructed and drew upon community archives to mark their unique contributions to the drum and bugle corps space. Rather than merely marking Asian American time "in-spot" (i.e., in one static place), they engaged in history-making practices that—much like their performances—worked within yet directly challenged dominant structures of US American drum corps history.

As one of the only examples of a permanent, public-facing display outlining Asian American drum and bugle corps contributions, what does *Imperial Dragons* offer

as a model to similar future projects? To inaugurate an answer to this question requires a turn to the Nisei Ambassadors, a corps active between 1959 and 1978 on Chicago's North Side. Reflecting on the Ambassadors' emerging efforts to develop their own history exhibit with the Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS), I suggest ways that such efforts might expand and build upon the critical work inaugurated by alumni of the L.A. Imperial Dragons.

Vignette: Sunday, July 21, 2019

I am parked at the 600 block of West Randolph Street. Here at the headquarters of the Chicago Federation of Musicians, local musician and union organizer Dean Rolando has invited me to the sixtieth anniversary of the Nisei Ambassadors Drum and Bugle Corps. As I walk through the parking lot overlooking the overpass bridge, I can't help but recall how only three summers ago my Sansei (third-generation Japanese American) mother had mentioned "the Japanese drum corps" she heard in Chicago parades growing up. Now after a few years of getting to know the members of the Ambassadors' alumni organization, I'm humbled to be invited to their milestone anniversary. This is one of the corps' biggest reunions since 1990, and with many of the former members entering their sixties and seventies, I can sense in Dean's emails an urgency to get he and his fellow corps alumni together before more time passes.

The second-floor office is relatively narrow, and yet over sixty former members and their families have packed into the space, seated at long brown tables that face towards a dais and podium at the head of the room. They've come from as far away as

Hawai'i and as close as a quick L train ride to be here today. Upon entering the offices, I can't help but look to my left and see the food spreads. These are the staple foods that former members always used to talk about in their interviews: platters and full spreads of *inari-zushi*—lovingly called “footballs” by the *hakujin* and *nihonjin* alike—grace a long table alongside chow mein, teriyaki chicken, and mounds of rice that make my heart full. I sit down and get lost in conversation with Dean, who begins to introduce me to other former members of the Ambassadors as he explains that I'm “the Yonsei kid from the suburbs” doing “his research project about us.” He is quickly drawn to other tasks, catching up with old friends and seating them around the increasingly claustrophobic conference area. He then steps to the smaller office podium, thanking his friends for coming to the banquet before toasting again to the corps' battle cry—the same one used by the second-generation Nisei of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team—“Go for Broke!” The iconic call reverberates around the room, as the alumni knowingly share in this collective moment of both memorialization and ritual communal identification. They take their seats again, reminded now not only of their own organizational history but of the community leaders, elders, and family members who made their organization possible in the first place. I know, sitting there, that the cry is always more than just the corps motto: it is the corps' past, present, and future wrapped up in three words.

As I pass by the food table for a piece of celebratory cake, my eye catches the nearby history display put together by the alumni. Spread across the table are various photographs from the 1960s depicting the teenage members wearing the corps' striking royal purple and cream-colored uniforms, along with uniform parts brought in from

members' personal collections. I'm perusing the issues of *SOUNDing OFF!*, the corps' official parent and booster broadsheet newsletter, when Rolando pulls up alongside me. Seeing my interest, he remarks:

“Hey, I can make you some copies of them if you want.”

“Sure, that would be great.”

The Nisei Ambassadors alumni have engaged in memory and history-making work for well over three decades. Through occasional reunions and now a significant push for a permanent museum display akin to *Imperial Dragons*, the Ambassadors represent a parallel effort in marking Asian American time for the Japanese American community of Chicago. But whereas the L.A. Chinese's efforts at community-based museum collaboration have come to fruition in curated physical and digital spaces, the history-making efforts of the Ambassadors remain in progress. Accordingly, the Nisei Ambassadors project offers a unique glimpse into this process *in media res*. In this section, I will explore previous projects by key alumni invested in history-making for the Ambassadors. After outlining the broad strokes of the organization's history, I then turn to oral history interviews and historical documentaries made by the Ambassadors to examine how these projects shape historical memory within the organization's alumni. What these materials reveal is the Ambassadors' investment in espousing not merely an Asian American community history, but one of interracial and panethnic coalition that mirrors the political efforts of the Asian American Movement. In other words, the

memory work in the present operates to frame the corps' history as one of progressive inclusion at a time of relatively minimal racial integration.

The Nisei Ambassadors: Historical Background

The Chicago Nisei Ambassadors mirrored the development of the L.A. Chinese in multiple respects. First, the corps emerged at a key period of Asian American community reformation following World War II. After the incarceration, many of the West Coast, second-generation Nisei resettled in Chicago as part of War Relocation Authority partnerships with local companies seeking laborers to support a growing postwar economy. After returning from the war, many of the veterans of the decorated all-Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team, 100th Infantry Battalion, and Military Intelligence Service joined family in Chicago, congregating mostly along the North Side in racially segregated neighborhoods between white and Black communities (Brooks 2000). It was here that these veterans organized the American Legion (AL) "Nisei" Post #1183 and started families; their third-generation Sansei children grew up in Chicago. By the late 1950s, post veterans recognized a need—much like the Chinese American parents of Los Angeles—to provide a productive extra-curricular activity for the growing population of Japanese American youths. In 1959, the Nisei Post officially founded the Chicago Nisei Ambassadors Drum and Bugle Corps, starting with around a dozen members from the families of post members in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood. Unlike the efforts of Bill Lee, however, Nisei Post veterans were motivated to promote drum corps as a way of demonstrating their patriotism after their citizenship and loyalty

remained suspect within mainstream US American society. As corps historian Terry

Nakagawa later explained:

...they knew about drum corps from American Legion, cause they saw the shows and they saw all these posts basically had---drum corps [that] were really key posts. So it was a way to showcase your talent, your heritage, and other things too. And it was...to them it was a, you know, really, you know, American, you know, patriotic thing too at that time. Um, so that's how they got it started, and it really was, you know, a hundred percent Japanese American, a hundred percent Sansei for the first three years.

(Interview with author, February 3, 2017)

While the motivation to run a drum corps may have been different than their Chinese American counterparts out west, the corps similarly functioned as representatives of the local ethnic community. Until 1963, the corps paraded in military-style khaki slacks and red button-down shirts, performing US military marches and bugle calls for parades, festivals, and post functions in Chicago's Japanese American community. Music and marching rehearsals took place once a week under the direction of Gordon Kaihatsu, a volunteer from the post veterans whose moderate military music training placed him in the role of the corps' first instructor. Soon, interest in turning the corps towards field competition grew within the ranks of the post members, and by 1963 the corps competed in its first local and state American Legion drum corps competitions. Over the next few years, the post added more trained musical staff to their instructional roster, building the corps up to above fifty members by drawing from local youths from surrounding Italian and Jewish communities. Ruptures within the organization soon formed in the winter of 1965/66 when buglers from the majority-Black La Tek El Dorados parade corps approached leaders at the Buddhist Temple of Chicago, seeking membership while the Ambassadors rehearsed. Under the pretense of wanting to keep the corps focused on serving Japanese American youth and not Black communities, a cohort of parents

protested the corps' racial integration. After multiple meetings at the Nisei Post, pro-integration factions won out.¹³

In retrospect, many alumni of the organization attribute the subsequent competitive success of the organization to this racial integration, as the corps numbers and talent pool expanded beyond the confines of Uptown's Japanese American community. Starting in 1966, the corps went on a string of annual national tours, heralded as patriotic representatives of "Americanism in Action" by the pro-assimilation Japanese American Citizens League (Marutani 1966). Much of the narrative of the corps' decline echoes the Imperial Dragons' story of the late 1970s. Following a peak of national competitiveness in 1969 and 1970—including finalist placements at national drum corps competitions—the corps experienced a wave of departures amongst the membership after 1971. While attributable to numerous factors, a shrinking youth population in the community and overall waning interest forced the corps to return exclusively to parade performances for 1972. Over the 1970s, the corps continued in a smaller capacity as a local competition unit, performing at local public events alongside occasional field shows. Members from the previous generation of the corps in the 1960s came back as instructors for the group, working to keep the corps alive despite the growing popularity of the national tour model for drum corps competitions. Faced with mounting debts and a waning local interest in the ensemble, however, the corps folded by the end of the decade.

¹³ Afro-Asian music collaboration remains a key concern in tracing Asian American political histories and coalition building (Kastin 2010; Roberts 2016). However, much of this necessary work explores the hybridity of musical influences from Afro- and Asian-diasporic communities rather than collaboration within an historically white, US American tradition such as drum and bugle corps.

Vignette: February 3, 2017

Sitting in the awkward sliding desks in a classroom on the first floor of the newly-opened “S.S. Bienen”—the student-adopted name of the cruise-ship-esque architecture that defines the Ryan Center for the Musical Arts at Northwestern University—I’m fumbling with an SD card trying to work a handheld audio recorder for the first time ever. Until a few weeks ago, the Nisei Ambassadors existed, for all intents and purposes, in the memories of my Sansei mother, who—knowing my love of drum corps as a performer—told me one summer day that she remembered a “Japanese corps” that performed in local Chicagoland parades while she grew up on the city’s North Side. This memory, fuzzy as it is, lives now with me in the present, a new temporality opened up to me through the sparse remembrances of my only familial connection to my Japanese American roots. Only a few weeks ago, I had decided to follow through on this thread of memory, and through an acquaintance from an oral history upper-division course, got in contact with members of the Chicago Japanese American community who marched the Ambassadors and pointed me to Terry Nakagawa because “he would have more answers for your questions.” Terry is now seated in front of me, the awkwardness of the sliding desks more pronounced for a man approaching his mid-sixties. A Chicagoan through and through despite his Iowa Hawkeyes baseball cap, Terry wears his wire glasses well, his calm and matter-of-fact demeanor matching his thinning side-brushes of hair. As I press record for the first time, I exclaim: “Works! Okay, I think we’re rolling.”

Over the next two and a half hours, I interview Terry about his time in the corps and his life growing up in postwar Chicago as a Sansei with formerly incarcerated family

members. Terry joined the corps in 1965 as a soprano bugler before transitioning in the late 1960s to mellophone, the marching bugle equivalent of the French horn. Staying with the corps through its competitive rise he, like many of the corps members, left after 1971 to pursue his college education. Midway through our interview, I ask Terry how he feels about his experience marching in the Ambassadors considering what he learned later in life about the incarceration. Suddenly, he takes an unexpected turn:

And, uh, you know, we've had a couple of reunions since then too, and it's always been, you know great, it's, it's always been, uh, uh, uh nice to see. Now, the other thing that I, I didn't tell you about is that we...at our first reunion, which is 1989 [sic], the post handed us a check for eighteen thousand dollars and said "This is what was left from, uh, the liquidation of the corps," that they had done like in 1980. And they just stuck it in a checking account, uh, passbook savings account. And they said, "Here, you guys take it down. It's up to you to decide what to do with it."

(Interview with author, February 3, 2017)

"Interesting," I think to myself. I knew the reunions were important, but he's talking about this instead of anything to do with the incarceration. I wonder why.

History-Making in the Nisei Ambassadors

History-making and the archival impulse has remained, much like in the Imperial Dragons' case, a core part of the alumni experience of the Nisei Ambassadors. Beginning with the initial reunion in 1990, corps members have consistently engaged in forms of memory work and self-archiving that mirror the initial efforts by the L.A. Chinese Legacy Committee to preserve a version of the corps' history for posterity. Former members such as Nakagawa and Rolando have become de facto corps historians, helping organize both the reunions where a lot of this memory work takes place and taking the lead on organizing the initial efforts in 2025 and 2026 to produce a museum display

detailing the corps' history. The remainder of this chapter thus focuses on previous and ongoing history-making initiatives by the Ambassadors, tracing how their approach to narrating their corps history parallels and departs from the problematized linear progress narrative constructed by the L.A. Chinese alumni. In comparing their ongoing efforts to those of their West Coast counterparts, I suggest that alumni marking Asian American time navigate similar pitfalls of chronoviolence but offer varying strategies to construct critical—even if not liberatory—narratives of Asian American community formation and identity, and of drum corps musical history specifically.

In many regards, the 1990 reunion marked the first concerted effort on the part of Ambassador alumni to mark their experience of Asian American time. Using the windfall of funds left over from the Nisei Memorial Legion Post, former members gathered in Chicago to not only reconnect with old compatriots, but to document oral histories of the corps for posterity. Under the direction of filmmaker and former member Richard “Dick” Izui and editor Tina Izui Hill, members of the Nisei Ambassadors came together at the reunion to produce a private documentary (see [Media Example 1](#)) of the reunion and the corps' history, befittingly titled *Go For Broke: The Nisei Ambassadors Reunion* (1990). Rather than merely recount the history of the corps however, the documentary interwove oral history accounts of both former members and parent volunteers, many of whom served in the all-Japanese American military units of World War II. Rolando acted as interviewer, and as one of the leaders of the corps both as a member in the 1960s and as a staff member in the 1970s, he was able to elicit dozens of life histories and oral history narratives that made it into the final version of the documentary. In many respects, the

forty-minute reunion documentary thus set the trajectory for how members of the Ambassadors would collectively narrate their ensemble's legacy, rendering this media a key step in the corps' process of marking Asian American time.

A close viewing of the documentary reveals that the Ambassadors' alumni have engaged in a linear progress narrative of the corps' history in ways that parallel the historical narratives presented in *Imperial Dragons*. The video opens with Rolando standing at a simple wooden podium inside a hotel banquet hall, offering a toast to the alumni crowd. After introducing himself, he offers initial remarks about the corps and its legacy in Chicago:

The Nisei Ambassadors were founded thirty-one years ago in 1959 by a few concerned parents of Japanese descent. Anyways, they started this little corps with little Japanese kids. Well, this ragtag bunch started marching parades, then started field competition and more kids joined: Black kids, white kids. Suddenly, this, this entity took on a life of its own, and now it takes three buses, an equipment truck, twenty-five managers, directors, chaperones...to move this huge 125-member hormone factory around the country. [audience laughs] ...

We grew, we got better, and the corps rose to become one of the top fifteen or twenty competition corps in the country. Not bad, when you consider that at the time we were marching there was 800 corps in the country. We were all part of this monster, part of this group, and part of this family. We worked hard together, we traveled together, we lived together all through our teenage years. We never won the big show, but we had a lot of big shows. You remember what they were like? From the first note, everything clicked. We played perfect, we marched perfect, the crowd was into it, they were behind ya. It felt so right, it was magic under the lights, and we all shared that magic. So, tonight is a night to relive some of that magic and celebrate our years as Nisei Ambassadors. I'm glad to see everyone—it's been a long time, too long. So now, I'd like everyone to join me in raising a toast with whatever you have—cause we're too cheap to buy wine [audience laughs]—To all of you who are here, and to all those who couldn't join us tonight, "Go For Broke!

During this toast, Izui Hill intersperses b-roll taken from the reunion showing the racially diverse alumni base catching up with one another and eating together, many of them wearing either suit jackets or dresses. This brief montage bolsters Rolando's historical narrative, suggesting forms of interracial camaraderie and coalition that developed from the so-called "ragtag" beginnings of a strictly Japanese American practice. Thus, while

this cold opening to the documentary does much to sustain the common linear progression narrative from small, community-based Asian American activity to cosmopolitan national contender, it also underscores a broader thesis of the documentary: the Nisei Ambassadors represented a key site of coalitional community-building between Japanese American and other racially minoritized communities during the 1960s and 1970s.

Much like the L.A. Chinese Drum and Bugle Corps' museum graphics, the audiovisual design and editing of the documentary does much to bolster the progress narrative. Following Rolando's speech, the screen fades to black while the opening drum feature from the corps' 1970 field competition fades in to accompany the documentary's title cards. This music selection—an arrangement of Quincy Jones' opening theme from J. Lee Thompson's 1969 Western film *Mackenna's Gold*—plays over home movies of the corps marching in field competitions during the 1960s. Given that 1970 marked what many alumni considered the peak of the corps' national competitive relevance, its juxtaposition with the left-to-right, forward marching video of the ensemble highlights an overarching progress narrative. Indeed, at a corporeal and sonic level, the documentary implies that that corps' history is a forward march of progress (see Figure 21).

And yet, even within this subtextual narrative, the documentary opens critical opportunities for marking Asian American time in moments where this linear progress narrative ruptures. This is apparent when looking at the *literal* mark-time steps that occur in these videos: on multiple occasions during these video clips, the corps can be seen not

marching forward into the field of competition, but instead performing the high mark-time steps characteristic of 1960s and 1970s drum and bugle corps performance practice.



Figure 21: Detail of frame from *Go For Broke*, depicting the Nisei Ambassadors stepping off the starting line and marking time. Note the forward march of all members. Courtesy of Dean Rolando.

Coordinated in their choreographic and musical responsibilities, these moments of seeming respite emphasize the tensions at the center of marking Asian American time. Given that many of the videos are filmed from the spectator stands (presumably by parents of the teenage performers), it is difficult to recognize the racial diversity of the ensemble. Instead, what is apparent from the home videos is a high degree of coordinated marching maneuvers that bring the ensemble together as a unit. Thus, the seeming stasis of marking time critically examines—whether unintentionally or not—the broader embodied politics of interracial coalition and collaboration at the heart of the corps’ historical narrative. Even though the racialized identities of the performers are partially obfuscated, there is a clear, distinctly communal cohesion that is made possible through

the mark-time step. Thus, even in an overall narrative that reproduces the logics of linear temporality and chronoviolence, there are moments of pause that index the Ambassadors' contributions to the distinctly Asian American political practice of building and sustaining interracial coalition.

While the opening minutes of the documentary frames a narrative of linear progression while also marking Asian American time, these tensions are more fully played out in the oral histories that comprise the remaining thirty-five minutes of the film. Indeed, *Go For Broke* places much of the power of history-making in the hands of the members, instructors, and parents by stitching together historical memories from over thirty individual and group interviews conducted between 1989 and 1990. Upon first impression, the interviews tend to reinforce the overarching narrative of the corps' linear development, with Izui and Izui Hill stitching together much of the historical narrative by taking short clips from over thirty separate oral history interviews and arranging them in a relatively chronological order. Crucially, the corps origin story receives relatively little attention in the documentary: outside the very first interview, where Post veteran and corps quartermaster Joe Akiyama emphasizes that he "was in from [the beginning]," only a few additional clips discuss how the corps' first few years of operations as a local parade corps with red jackets and white pants. The first extended interview excerpt, indeed, features corps music arranger Dick Snyder, who taught the corps beginning in 1962 and raised the ensemble from a parade unit into a regional field competition corps. In it, Snyder emphasizes that the corps was set up for quick progression in the competitive landscape:

We had a bunch of little kids. And they didn't know their left from their right and didn't know one note from the other. And we started working on them, and it was one of the best experiences I ever had in drum corps. It was just amazing what these kids learned and ended up doing. In the time I started, I knew this outfit was going to meld together, because it was such good rapport from everybody: adults, the kids, the discipline was great. You couldn't ask for better.

Thus, early in the elaboration of the historical narrative, the documentary positions the corps in a teleological light. Competitive success, even early on, appears to be the inevitable outcome of a community and culture that fostered the right circumstances to cultivate success. *Go For Broke* thus plays into the rhetoric of historical progression and exceptionalism that undergird not only “white time,” but the dreaded model minority myth of Asian American success.

Yet despite these ostensibly detrimental undertones, the oral histories continue the Ambassadors' efforts to mark Asian American time by highlighting the corps' uniquely Asian American political coalitional efforts even before the advent of the Asian American Movement proper. At the same time, they highlight the political contradictions of this history-making process, revealing that such projects are rarely fully liberatory. This is particularly apparent roughly six minutes into the documentary, in which members and parents recount the group's racial integration of the corps in 1965. In one interview with Rolando, Legion Post sponsor Fred “Sats” Tanakatsubo, Rolando and the Post elder discuss why the Japanese Americans decided to permit Black members into the corps. For them, integration carried a political message of acceptance along with competitiveness:

Tanakatsubo: The first three kids that approached me were Stan[ley] Patrick and Cornell and...who was the third one?

Rolando: Zach Ramey.

T: Zach Ramey. They had approached me one day at the [Midwest] Buddhist Temple one day during a practice and [unintelligible] says they'd like to join...It was one of those mutual benefits

thing. You know, I think it was really a good, opening for us really to have outside kids coming in.

R: Well certainly, the corps would not have been competitive without it being fully integrated.

T: Right, definitely.

R: Couldn't be done.

T: Well, the example was the Chinatown corps [Wah Mei]. They kept to themselves and never moved [competitively].

Accordingly, racial diversification is framed as both a political move to accept other racially minoritized performers and as a strategic decision to bolster the corps' dues-paying membership and talent pool, as the Black members were particularly strong performers. While this narrative works to expound the benefits of coalition, it does so while also distinguishing the corps from Chinese American units that operated in the city at the same time but took different approaches to their membership policy which prohibited coalitional engagement. The documentary thus asserts a uniquely Asian American political ethos on the one hand while also noting shortcomings in other Asian American political efforts and correlating them to competitive shortcomings on the other. The process of marking Asian American time and community history-making in this case thus foregrounds a liberal political message of racial diversity and inclusion while simultaneously revealing how such projects are not guarantees for liberation.

When juxtaposed with *Imperial Dragons*, *Go For Broke: The Nisei Ambassadors Reunion* presents a more complexly contradictory insight into the process of marking Asian American time. While both the museum display and the oral history documentary are rooted in the linear temporalities and teleological narratives that feed model minority discourse, they diverge from one another with respect to how they address the contradictory and incomplete project that is marking Asian American time. For the L.A.

Chinese, the contradictions lie in the handling of temporality itself, artefacts and documents piling up upon each other in ways that subtly critique the notion that the corps' history and legacy can be easily periodized and separated into clean decades-based developments. The Ambassadors, meanwhile, offer a seemingly more explicit message of Asian American coalition with other minoritized communities during the 1960s, only in certain respects to overlook potential sites of panethnic identification with their Chinese American counterparts. And yet, *Go For Broke* still attends to the social power of building interracial sites of collaboration, the literal mark-time steps documented in family's personal archives highlighting the critical potential of this performance practice. Taken together, these two manifestations of marking Asian American time produce a spectrum of possibilities for understanding the importance of community-based history-making practices within Asian American drum corps alumni communities. While imperfect in producing a narrative of liberation on the political and temporal domains, they nevertheless offer multiple strategies for transforming a linear progress narrative into something distinctively—if imperfectly—Asian American in political outlook.

Vignette: "Hi and Did you ever find that DVD?"

A cold, early spring evening greets my nostrils as I step outside my undergraduate dormitory in 2019. I am greeted by Dean Rolando's now-familiar silver shoulder length hair and prominent mustache. To most musicians in Chicago, he is a middle-aged piano player who gets around in the musician labor union circles of the city. One look wouldn't bely the fact that this *hakujin* had been part of the city's pre-eminent Japanese American

community drum corps of the 1960s, or that he was one of a handful of former members working tooth and nail to preserve the history of the defunct organization. As he drives us to his favorite Chinese restaurant, conversation turns toward the upcoming reunion. As I ask about the 1990 reunion, he stops me mid-thought: “Hey, I actually still have the video from the reunion. I could get it to you if you want.” Two weeks later, I have a DVD copy of the commemorative documentary.

Six years later, I’m finishing another year of graduate work and preparing for the summer when I check my email account from my undergraduate program on a whim. Buried under a few lines of alumni news emails is an unexpected email from Dean. I open it already dreading what it entails.

Hi Nathan - Hope all is great with you !!! I'm sure you are probably going crazy with Drum Corp Stuff.
I while ago I asked if you had the DVD that I gave you of our 1990 reunion - were you able to find that? If so i would greatly appreciate you sending it to me.

(Email correspondence with author, June 2, 2025)

Only a few months ago, Dean had reached back out to me, letting me know that the Ambassadors were preparing a museum exhibit detailing the corps’ history and legacy within Chicago’s Japanese American community. Immediately I turn my room over, searching beyond hope for that elusive DVD handed to me all those years ago. In the interim, Rolando and the other history-minded alumni of the Ambassadors have worked to put together an historical exhibit of their own in conjunction with the CJAHS, and the 1990 reunion video holds many archival videos, photographs, and oral histories recorded at the reunion. I know that the video is invaluable to them and their project. Following a day of feverish searching with no luck, I realize that my poor undergraduate organization now has real relationship consequences. Immediately messaging Dean with a profuse

apology, the shame I feel over the next few days is palpable. Finally, after awaiting his wrath, I sheepishly open my inbox:

“No worries, I often misplace my car!”

Graciousness aside, the disc continues to elude me. While another digital copy is available, I cannot help but feel the shame of knowing a piece of the Ambassadors was entrusted to me, and I mishandled it.

Don’t forget the DVD!

Conclusion: Creating the Nisei Ambassadors Future Museum Exhibit

With both the 1990 and 2019 Nisei Ambassadors gatherings, members were not just asked to attend to reminisce and reflect on their experiences, but to actively participate in constructing the historical legacy of the organization in the present. As such, the Ambassadors’ reunions have served as a key site of marking Asian American time, offering moments for corps historians like Rolando and Nakagawa to gather archival documents, oral histories, and material artefacts for the rest of the alumni. But while these efforts have historically focused on local, grassroots projects of varying degrees of organization and formality, recent efforts within the Ambassadors’ alumni base have pushed these community-based archival practices into more public-facing realms. As outlined in the above vignette, the corps is pursuing a collaboration with the CJAHS to create a fully public museum exhibit dedicated to the corps’ legacy as a multi-racial organization in Chicago’s turbulent 1960s. As of May 2026, this project will be on display from June 2027 until June 2028 at Chicago’s Field Museum of Natural History.

Supported through grants and donations, the corps alumni have raised nearly \$200,000 to fund the proposed exhibit. Given the emergent nature of this project and its placement within a broader history of community-based history-making, what does the proposed Nisei Ambassadors museum exhibition reveal about the varying processes and approaches to marking Asian American time, particularly when juxtaposed against the extant work of the L.A. Chinese? And how does this model of history-making compare with the ones elaborated by their West Coast counterparts? I conclude this chapter with brief insights into the current Ambassadors project, drawing from correspondences with alumni and an interview with Mary Louise Doi, the main community archivist and historian behind the museum exhibit's production. I then reflect on the broader implications this exhibit may have on the process of marking Asian American time.

One of the core aspects of the model being used to create the proposed exhibit is direct collaboration between members of Chicago's Japanese American community, Ambassadors alumni, and stakeholders in the museum circles of Chicago. Doi, a longtime archivist who hails from the South Side of Chicago, serves as the project's primary advocate in her role as a board member of the CJAHS. Although not a former member of the group herself, she grew up in Chicago's post-World War II Japanese American community and knew many of the Sansei members who ultimately joined the corps in the mid-to-late 1960s. Following her involvement in a number of public museum exhibits about Chicago's Japanese American community—including a well-received exhibit on the Chicago Nisei Athletic Association made in 2004—Doi reached out to corps alumni in 2024 to, in the words of Terry Nakagawa, “[bring] our story to a broader

audience through an exhibition” because “She believes that the Nisei Ambassador story is unique and fascinating, especially within the social and cultural context of the 60s and 70s” (email correspondence with author, September 12, 2025). Since the initial engagement, Doi has brought on multiple other key stakeholders in the museum exhibition circles of Chicago, including CJAHS board president Jean Mishima, former Chicago History Museum Director of Exhibits Tamara Biggs, and professional exhibit designer Kevin Sayama. Beginning in September of 2024, Doi and others brought together a focus group of roughly twenty Ambassadors alumni to develop the exhibit’s storyboard and overarching themes. From those and ongoing subsequent conversations, Doi and her compatriots have developed a proposal that focuses on five core themes outlined by the corps’ alumni: the ensemble’s history, its placement in the broader sociopolitical context of 1960s racially-segregated Chicago, the organization’s focus on racial diversity, the importance of discipline to the members, and the interracial friendships developed as a result of their experiences (Mary L. Doi, interview with author, March 2, 2026).

Crucially, the model of collaboration between CJAHS, museum stakeholders, and the Ambassadors builds upon previous efforts by the corps’ historians to gather items for community-based museum displays. As discussed previously, Ambassadors alumni have an established history of contributing objects from their personal belongings to the corps for the purposes of creating temporary historical displays at the corps reunions. When attending the 2019 reunion, for example, two entire long folding tables were explicitly dedicated to laying out documents, records, pins, badges, uniform parts, and photographs

gathered from the attending members and their families. The current proposed project expands upon this archival impulse in terms of scope and public visibility: thus far, Doi and her collaborators have gathered and considered displaying over four hundred items across a range of media, including uniforms, instruments, audiovisual materials, and internally published newsletters distributed by the corps throughout the 1960s. And while these types of media originally would have been displayed for a single day as part of the temporary reunion history displays, the proposed exhibit would place these items in high-traffic, climate-controlled museum displays for a greater amount of public visibility. Additionally, many of these items are not being donated, but are being lent to the project on a temporary basis, meaning that members of the Ambassadors alumni may retain their ownership rights to their possessions if they choose.

As such, the ongoing model of community engagement within the proposed Nisei Ambassadors exhibit project attempts to circumvent the curatorial control of large museum stakeholders by placing representational agency and curatorial decisions in the hands of key alumni and former practitioners rather than the museum administrators. These efforts align with broader efforts in public history and critical archives studies to place the power of representation and narrativization in the hands of culture-bearers and scholar-practitioners, providing avenues to combat the symbolic annihilation of minoritized stories (cf. Cifor et al. 2018). This approach remains a vital component of Doi's philosophy of museum-community collaboration broadly, and a key aspect of the Ambassadors project specifically. For her, the intention is for the Ambassadors to use their "voice to tell their own story" instead of letting the Field Museum "dictate how

those stories will be told” (interview with author, March 2, 2026). The use of the singular “voice” here warrants some consideration: rather than treat the variously racialized members of the ensemble as separate voices in a larger whole, the exhibit will emphasize the relative cohesion and coalitional collaboration of the ensemble and its membership across its history. To view this decision as a missed opportunity for multivocality, however, would overlook the significant efforts by the Ambassadors themselves to create a unifying historical legacy. Indeed, as both the 1990 video and the 2019 reunion displays evince, Ambassadors alumni are invested in sharing a historical narrative of their organization that portrays the organization as one rooted in Japanese American cultural heritage but as a site of interracial collaboration. Accordingly, a community-based collaboration model offers an opportunity to highlight the corps’ contradictorily liberal racial politics while operating as a unit inside of the socially conservative space of drum and bugle corps performance, i.e., to mark Asian American time.

Admittedly, the Ambassadors project does represent a critical juncture in the historical development of marking Asian American time. Until this point, previous efforts at documenting the histories of Asian American drum and bugle corps have been either ephemeral and sporadic (Chapter 1), buried in the bureaucracy and racial violence of national archives (Chapter 2), or remained relatively localized in scope and presentation (see this chapter’s discussion on *Imperial Dragons*). What the Nisei Ambassadors’ proposed exhibit offers, by contrast, is the first time that such a community-based project of drum corps history-making will be translated to a major museum space, to be viewed by general publics outside of the communities in which these ensembles developed. As

such, how might this massive undertaking shape the future of marking Asian American time? An initial response to such a question, I believe, can be found in comparing the proposed Ambassadors exhibit to *Imperial Dragons*. Despite its relatively small footprint and limited public visibility (the CHSSC is open only one afternoon a week), the L.A. Chinese exhibit remains one of the few permanent public museum displays exclusively dedicated to narrating the history of an Asian American drum and bugle corps. Perhaps most importantly, it also represents one of the *only* such projects to be completed and placed in a permanent home. *Imperial Dragons* thus offers a contrasting model to marking Asian American time that nevertheless may provide valuable insight into a project that is not yet public.

Imperial Dragons hits on two key practices of marking Asian American time that could benefit the Ambassadors' planned exhibit: elements that disrupt linear temporalities and physical proximity to the artefacts. While the final storyboarding of the Ambassadors' project is not yet finished, initial interviews and observations suggest that the themes decided upon by the alumni will be explored using a relatively linear chronological approach. *Imperial Dragons*, as discussed previously, also relies on this approach. And yet, within moments such as the display case in the corner of the room, the exhibit does well to challenge a progress narrative by physically overlapping and juxtaposing physical artefacts to create new associations and understandings of the Imperial Dragons' community legacy that transcend straightforward temporalities. That is, a palimpsestic marking of Asian American time could do much to plumb the complex and contradictory nature of coalition building and racial politics at the heart of the Nisei

Ambassadors' historical narrative, perhaps offering space for discordant or multivocal undertones to enter an otherwise unified narrative. Making some artefacts more physically proximate to the museum goer could also offer an opportunity for forms of interaction akin to archival sonification (see Chapters 1 and 2), allowing museum goers to speculatively construct critical empathy with the histories and people the objects represent. While I hesitate to suggest an "interactive" display for the purposes of preventing long-term damage, creating a certain proximity to the objects may allow a broader engagement of sonic modalities that expand beyond merely adding background music recordings to the space. Regardless of the methods and models by which the Ambassadors' project comes to fruition, it will represent arguably the most expensive and public manifestation of marking Asian American time across the century-long history of Asian American drum corps participation. Considered in tandem with the work of the L.A. Chinese Drum and Bugle Corps alumni, the future of Asian American community-based music archives remains open for further development, led by two contrasting yet exemplary models to guide future endeavors.

Vignette: Postscript – February 3, 2017

Terry continues.

Terry: So we took it [the money left by the Nisei Post] and we dumped it into a mutual fund, and uh, we cr...we ran that fund up to like a hundred thousand dollars. And since then, we've used that, um, to sponsor and number of people in drum corps, uh, people who are marching their age-out year that are involved, um, uh, whatchamacallit...music education and whatnot, and we finance their, um, uh, um, age-out years. And we, we formalized relations about ten, eleven years ago with the Mandarins [Drum and Bugle Corps]. Um, and we give the Mandarins also a \$3000 stipend every year to fund who they choose to be their best age-out person from that.

And then, uh, um, uh, and then we formalized the thing with the Mandarins, because, quite frankly, we can relate to the Mandarins...

Nathan: Mm-hmm.

T: ...in a lot of ways. Um, you know, they're, uh, they can't break through certain things...

N: Mm-hmm.

T: ...but they've now become, um, uh, a great, uh, a great homogeneous corps with an Asian background.

N: Mm-hmm.

T: You should talk to Jim Tabuchi, the corps director, executive director, he just got elected to the DCI Board of Directors too.

N:: Mm.

T: He marched with the Seattle Imperials...

N: Ah. Okay.

T: ...and with uh, um, the Mandarins.

(Interview with author, February 3, 2017)

Given its situatedness in archiving past Asian American musical experiences, how do the practices of marking Asian American time resonate in the contemporary drum corps scene? As the interview that inaugurated this work suggests, a direct connection exists between the self-archiving practices of Asian American drum corps from the 1950s and 1960s and those of modern Asian American-identified ensembles. In the final chapter, I follow Nakagawa's advice to explore the fraught politics of Asian American identity in the Sacramento Mandarins, the last remaining drum corps that originated as a community-based Asian American ensemble *and* made the transition into the modern, multi-million dollar nonprofit era of the contemporary drum corps landscape. In doing so, I aim to mark the process of marking Asian American time as an ongoing negotiation, a self-archiving impulse that shapes not just the legacies of long-defunct Asian American military music ensembles, but the Asian Americanness of ensembles in the present.

Chapter 4 - Forward March: The Sacramento Mandarins and Re-racializing Asian American Drum Corps Performance

Vignette: Locke Redux

I am on a coach bus riding along the outskirts of suburban Sacramento. After four years as a drum corps percussionist, I know the miasma of carpeted seats, body odor, and diesel fumes all too well at this point. It smells like home. But now I find myself in the completely novel role of administrative assistant, chaperoning the members of the 2021 Sacramento Mandarins Drum & Bugle Corps as they prepare for the July 4th festivities (see Introduction). On most days, I act as a runner: airport drop-off and pick-up for the two-hundred-plus members and staff, food pick-up from any number of grocery stores and wholesale outlets, and building stage props for the corps' field show, *Beyond the Canvas*. After a long twelve-hour rehearsal yesterday, the corps is on its way to the Rancho Cordova Independence Day festival, invited—like many marching ensembles throughout the country—to supplement the patriotic festivities with parade tunes and drum cadences in the sweltering July heat.

Sitting behind me is a member with long dark hair holding her trumpet as she gets ready to perform the music materials introduced the night. Having not met her yet, I strike up some conversation. Her name is Emily, and she just joined the corps after spending her early drum corps years at Blue Devils B, a feeder corps to the twenty-time world champion Concord Blue Devils. Though she started as a clarinetist in the fifth grade, her introduction to drum corps during her high school marching band years inspired her to convert to trumpet. This is now her first summer as part of a top-tier World

Class drum corps.¹⁴ When we slip into the topic of her family, she mentions that she's half-Chinese American and that her mother emigrated to the United States in the 1980s as part of the broader boom in East and South Asian professionals and college students.

Jokingly, I reply:

“Well, I guess this means that you're kind of carrying on the Mandarins tradition, in a way.”

She responds somewhat nonchalantly: “Yeah, I guess so...It's cool that they were originally for Asian Americans.”

Later in the day, well after the members have slogged through the oppressive Northern California heat for over two miles, I find myself in the red-leathered black Lexus two-door coupe of the Sacramento Mandarins CEO (see Introduction). He has worked in perhaps every major role of the Mandarins organization, starting as a trumpeter (technically, a soprano bugler) in the 1970s before working as an instructor, music arranger, director, and now board member of the organization. As we ride along the Sacramento River delta towards the former Chinese worker town of Locke (see Chapter 1), I'm reminded of a conversation we had last week, when we unsuccessfully attempted to visit the historic site. We had stopped to get some pizza at a nearby mall, and after ordering, I had asked about the upcoming History Night, where he and other alumni would share the history of the organization with its current members. What did he want the members of this new version of the Mandarins to know about the organization? This,

¹⁴ Under the DCI classification system, World Class ensembles tend to have extended touring schedules, larger membership, and more complexly designed competitive productions, whereas Open Class corps tend to be more developmental for younger musicians and performers, with lower costs and travel fees.

I knew, was of immense importance to him, because this was the first year of live performances following the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. He answered abruptly: the founding year (1963), “significant dates” such as their championships in the 1990s and early 2000s, the four “founding fathers” (see below), and the four values (Honor, Family, Heritage/Tradition, and Respect). I remember how he turned to me, looking me directly in the eyes: “I don’t want them to take all this stuff they have for granted.”

We drive down to Locke together, blasting drum corps recordings of yesteryear as the agricultural fields pass by. Knowing, as I do, that the Mandarin are no longer an exclusively Asian American organization, and that more members each year come from white, middle-class, financially stable families, I understand why Fong is so insistent on sharing the Chinese American roots of the organization with the members. Unlike Locke, he does not want the corps to be lost to time.

This vignette of a single day—extended over multiple chapters and delivered in out-of-order segments to emphasize the non-linear temporalities of marking Asian American time—encapsulates the key tensions and considerations that motivate my overarching project: How do Asian American stakeholders within these organizations engage in practices of history-making? How might drum and bugle corps performance provide a lens through which broader flows of Asian American history might be understood? And, most pressingly in an age of anti-Asian violence and intolerance, how will Asian American presences in this US American musical tradition be taught to future generations of performers? These questions have been at the crux of my ethnographic

work with the Mandarins: as an Asian American drum corps performer, I was keenly aware of the Mandarins long before I became involved with the organization, knowing at least that they were exclusively Chinese American when first founded. Moreover, I was quite aware—if only anecdotally—that the Mandarins were one of the last Asian American-*identified* ensembles in the country, even though hundreds of Asian American and transnational Asian performers participated in corps across the United States each DCI season. Yet as I worked more intensely with members of the organization, I was often surprised how the corps felt, on some days, like any other corps. I soon noticed how performers in the ensemble often didn't emphasize the Asian Americanness of the ensemble and its history in their daily experiences, despite its key position within broader ethnic drum corps histories. Emily's response was like those given by other Asian American members of the ensemble: while it was indeed something that they thought about, often the reasons they joined the group had nothing to do with the ensemble's Asian American heritage. At the same time, I saw people like Fong working feverishly to position the Mandarins' uniquely Asian American legacy within broader Chinese American drum corps performance traditions. How, then, do stakeholders and performers in this organization negotiate the somewhat conflicting conceptualizations of what it means to be in the Mandarins? This chapter addresses these questions by exploring the tensions of musical performance and Asian American identity in the contemporary US American drum and bugle corps scene.

Though founded originally as a small Chinese American community youth organization in 1963, the Mandarins—like most other contemporary drum corps

ensembles and in master narrative fashion—have long since moved beyond their local and regional confines, drawing members from throughout the United States, Canada, and Japan to their organization. Competitive programs performed by the Mandarinins have similarly shifted: whereas early shows followed the relatively strict military-bearing aesthetics described earlier in this dissertation, by the 1990s and 2000s the corps frequently incorporated elements of Asian American cultural heritage into their programs, including group *kumi-daiko* drumming and lion dances. Following recent changes in corps leadership, however, musical and visual designers at the Mandarinins have increasingly de-emphasized Asian American traditions and aesthetics, often in the name of developing a newer “brand image” and raising the corps’ competitive level. This *deracialization* of the corps competitive programs—and, I would suggest, the increasingly unmarked whiteness of both the organization and its performances—has inspired stakeholders in the Mandarinins to reinforce the corps’ Asian American organizational identity in alternative ways. By focusing on community-based history-making within the Sacramento Mandarinins, I thus examine the stakes of Asian American drum corps performance not only in the present, but also across generations of practitioners. I argue that Fong and other Chinese American alumni of the organization engage in *musical re-racialization* to assert the uniquely Asian American identity and heritage of the Mandarinins in the face of increasing deracialization. This process occurs, I suggest, in modes of performance that go beyond the competitive field show in order to balance the desire for community-based history-making with the rising competitive successes of the drum corps. Accordingly, these processes of re-racialization should not

be conceptualized as oppositional to the current performance practices of the Mandarins. Instead, they are part of an ongoing series of negotiations within the organization to both trace Asian American histories while maintaining economic viability and sustainability in an increasingly corporate contemporary drum corps landscape.

This chapter unfolds through sections interwoven with ethnographic observations and immersive interviews conducted between 2021 and 2024 with members and staff of the Mandarins organization. First, I explore the critical ramifications of musical re-racialization, placing it within broader dialogues of Asian American racialization and music. Then, after providing an overview of the Mandarins' origins as an exclusively Chinese American youth organization, I trace how the ensemble expressed its Asian American cultural identity through field show performances spanning the 1990s through the 2010s. I then contrast these close views with contemporary productions, arguing that these have become mostly deracialized in the name of competitiveness and innovation. I then turn to key practices that alumni of the Mandarins use to maintain and transmit their racialized histories of the ensemble, particularly through the lens of the corps' "History Night" where past performers return to teach the current corps about their own experiences and the history of the organization. I conclude by examining the alumni-led tradition of performing "Year of the Dragon," a brass chorale originally written in 1984 by British brass band composer Philip Sparke and arranged for the Mandarins by Dan Fong in the late 2000s. By examining how "Year of the Dragon" is used to forge community ties between past and present members, I suggest that these and other traditions supported by the alumni allow for a re-racialization of the corps' identity,

teaching current members the importance of remembering the Asian American roots of the organization.

Vignette: July 16th, 2021

Seated across from me in the cool confines of the T.R. Smedberg Middle School computer lab in Elk Grove, California is Yolanda Yang, a first-year percussion member of the Mandarins. We've both tried to fit an interview in during the very short time slots we get during meal breaks, which usually only last an hour or an hour-and-a-half at most. As we're both munching away on our food in our individual student desks, I ask her to share how she got interested in the Mandarins and how she ended up here on a hot July day working on a field show with over a hundred and thirty other performers. Yang is a short Chinese American woman with shoulder-length black hair and an iconic pink hat that she wears pretty much all day long during the outdoor rehearsals. For her, what attracted her to the ensemble was seeing previous shows, particularly from the 2017 and 2018 seasons when the Mandarins experienced an artistic renaissance and renewed national relevance in the Drum Corps International competition circuit.

Well, honestly, the first thing that intrigued me about Mandarins was the show itself. I didn't know about the history at first, I just saw the show, the front ensemble music, and was like "I want to do that. That sounds cool as heck."

What solidified her resolve to join the Mandarins, however, was her sense of wanting to reconnect to aspects of her Chinese cultural heritage:

And then once I learned I could be a part of this group, I started to dive deeper into what this organization values, its roots and everything. And when I found out they were originally Asian—a Chinese American corps—in the first place, that was incredibly awe-inspiring to hear. Because, you know, with the rise of the recent spike in Asian American hate crimes and everything, I've

been really trying to reconnect with my Chinese roots, ‘cause I feel like I’ve lost that. I was originally really fluent in Mandarin. Like growing up, all I spoke was Mandarin. And then as soon as I entered the public school system, that just started to slowly wither away. I started retaking Chinese classes in university, I started getting back into Chinese music more just to, like, improve my Mandarin more and everything and just reconnect to the culture I grew up with. And just hearing that Mandarins was rooted in something that I connect myself so strongly to, I just felt like I had to go for this.

As we wrap up our interview, I have a moment of weakness and ask a leading question, guiding her to reflect on what it means to be in the Mandarins as an Asian American performer and how she felt about the four core values of the organization (cited by Fong in the above vignette). She answers matter-of-factly:

I don’t know if *heritage* is talked about much though. Like that was the first time I found out about that heritage was like a thing [at History Night]. Which is a little weird in my opinion to bring it up now because, if I’m being honest, *some people here aren’t Asian American!* So I understand, like, where [director] J.W. [Koester] might be coming from when he says “Heritage,” it’s like “Oh yeah, you know, we stem from this feeling of wanting to unite people who are super into music and, like, respect one another” and everything. But also you have—you can’t forget the Asian American part! So I don’t know: parts of me think the heritage part is cool, parts of me think that maybe that could have been phrased a little bit better.

(Interview with author, July 16, 2021. Vocal emphasis italicized.)

When I put away the equipment so she can return to rehearsal, I can feel her disappointment that the Mandarins have relatively little Asian American representation in her perspective. She shares that she had gotten back into practicing Mandarin in the hopes that she would be able to practice speaking with corps alumni, only to be surprised to learn most of them exclusively spoke English. She then pivots to speaking about the corps’ emphasis on Asian heritage, and how she felt their engagement with Stop Asian Hate and other AAPI issues was hollow and somewhat performative. How ironic, I think, that the corps that is most known in this space for being Asian American might be so far from *feeling* Asian American to her.

Yang's observations point to what has been a broader tension in the Mandarins between racialized historical performance practices and the present realities of day-to-day experience in the Mandarins, which many interviewed members explicitly or implicitly framed as detached from the corps' distinct cultural background. Accordingly, any investigation of the Mandarins within the contemporary drum corps landscape must grapple with the interwoven forces of racialization and deracialization that have shaped the organization and its performance practices.

A few critical concepts will contextualize the Mandarins organization and its relationship to racialized narratives and histories discussed later. In their formative explication of racial formation theory, Michael Omi and Howard Winant define "racialization" as "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group" ([1988] 2015, 13) Notably, racialization contributes to the maintenance of racial categories and identities, as these "are often pre-existing conceptual or discursive elements that have crystallized through the genealogies of competing religious, scientific, and political ideologies and projects" (ibid., 111). Music thus constitutes but one of many extant domains in which racialization occurs, providing a sonic and semiotic field from which racial meanings may be constructed or destroyed. *Deracialization*, meanwhile, tends to conceptualize the intentional de-emphasizing of "explicit reference to race-specific issues" while simultaneously "emphasizing those issues that are perceived as racially transcendent" (McCormick II and Jones 1993, 76), often those imbued with an unmarked whiteness. First heavily theorized

in political science circles during the 1990s, the concept now encompasses how extant racialized projects are intentionally reframed as beyond racial meaning.

These interconnected concepts have long informed Asian American music studies: scholars have consistently drawn attention to the processes by which racial meanings and significations become dis/associated with sonic and embodied practices. Mari Yoshihara's (2007) study of Asian transnational classical musicians revealed how performers structured the very identity of being a "musician" by negotiating racialized and deracialized conceptualizations. While many of these classical musicians, she argued, typically subscribed to a humanist, deracialized discourse of music as universally transcendent of borders, identities, and racialized categories, many also found themselves portrayed in Western media as racialized Others whose musicianship reflected an orientalized racial essence. In her ethnographic work with Asian diasporic classical musician communities, Grace Wang also showed how racialization directly mapped onto white listener expectations of what Asian American musicians "should" sound like (i.e., mechanical, technical, and proficient, yet lacking emotional depth and expressivity). This, she argued, leaves Asian and Asian American musicians in a "quandary": "For if sounding 'Asian' is perceived negatively, then Asian and Asian American musicians need to produce performances that somehow transcend their racialized bodies; their Asianness should not leave a sonic trace on their musical performance" (2015, 80–81). The solutions that musicians find to this dilemma, she suggests, reflect their efforts to simultaneously recognize their Asian cultural identities and heritage without fulfilling extant racialized conceptualizations of musicality. Whether by deracializing their

performances in lieu of promoting a certain populist cosmopolitanism, or by intentionally racializing their concerts through the framework of “exploring their heritage,” Asian American classical musicians, she argues, “have pursued different and often conflicting strategies” (ibid., 94) to succeed within complexly racialized professional and discursive fields. While but two of many examples within Asian American music scholarship, these works demonstrate how de/racializing projects shape Asian American musical practices, oftentimes as a neoliberal strategy of self-promotion and survival.

The project of *musical re-racialization* builds from these ongoing conceptualizations to question what happens precisely when ongoing deracialization projects are resisted, to explore the critical potential generated when musicians reassert the racial meanings and significations of their performance practices. Drawing inspiration from Omi and Winant’s formulation of racialization, *musical re-racialization* may be defined as the reattachment of racial meaning and significance to the social practice of music-making or the process of using music to reassert racial meanings to a social group. My historical overview of the Mandarins organization will illuminate how processes of racialization and deracialization have informed the corps’ development from a community-based Chinese American organization into its current form, and will begin to explicate how and why alumni remain invested in projects of re-racialization to protect against what many stakeholders like Yang see as a persistent deracialization of the organization in recent years.

Early Mandarins History: From Chinese American to Asian American

Vignette: Fairfield, California. June 22, 2024.

I'm sitting with Cory Chew, an alumnus of the Mandarins from the 1970s who I accompanied on a long walk to the band room of Vanden High School just fifteen minutes ago. The broken air conditioning in the building has forced us to move to the back storage closet, where we nestle ourselves between crates of disposable cups and water jugs on one side of the room and the school's vibraphones, marimbas, and xylophones on the other. Cory's open collar and the khaki shorts tell that the summer heat is getting to him as well. He is wearing what is now the classic Mandarins purple polo shirt, with the iconic three diagonal strokes and apostrophic diacritic representing the "core values" of Honor, Family, Heritage/Tradition,¹⁵ and Respect. To my eyes, it's always looked like a dragon claw that doubles as a slanted M written with vaguely "Asian" calligraphic strokes (see Figure 22). Cory is here a few days early from the annual Friends and Family show, a Mandarins tradition where the corps shares their upcoming competitive program with the public for the first time. For many alumni of the organization who still live in the Sacramento metropolitan area, Friends and Family Day is their equivalent of a homecoming, where they get to build social bonds with current members and share their own experiences and memories as former performers. Many older alumni told me in the days leading up to the Friends and Family performance that Cory was "the guy" to talk to about the early history of the corps. His lean face and silver

¹⁵ While the Mandarins' official terminology is "Honor, Family, Tradition, and Respect," many members and staff used "Heritage" interchangeably with "Tradition," even in History Night presentations.

hair speak to many years spent around this activity; it's clear that, as many of the alumni put it, he's ready to share *his* version of the Mandarins' history. I have trouble believing it took me this long—nearly three years—to finally speak with him, given that his investment in the corps and recording its history has spanned fifty years. We begin, the sweat forming on both of our brows as the meager fan in this narrow corridor works overtime on this late June rehearsal day.



Figure 22: The Mandarins logo. Each stroke represents one of the four core values of the organization: Honor, Family, Heritage/Tradition, and Respect. Courtesy of Mandarins of Sacramento, Inc.

The early history of the Mandarins is a well-rehearsed narrative within the ensemble and its alumni, one that emphasizes its emergence within Sacramento's Chinese American community as a vessel for civic engagement and cultural pride. The broad strokes of this historical narrative start with the corps' foundation. In February of 1963, local Chinese American businessmen Roy Wong, Frank Lim, Thomas Fong, and Yuk Fong (no relation to Daniel Fong) gathered to discuss the formation of a marching music

youth organization to represent the Chinese American community in local parades and festivals. In March, they sent out notifications to the broader Chinese American community to build support, meeting for the first time at the Sacramento Confucius Temple community center on 6th and I Streets in the heart of Sacramento's historic Chinatown. The founders originally named the corps the Ye Wah Drum & Lyras Corps, a portmanteau of the local Chinese names for Sacramento (Ye Fow) and Chinese (Chung Wah). By July, the original eleven members and their families had expanded to 47 members, and the corps performed for the first time in public at the suburban Oak Park July 4th parade.

Notably, the corps emerged before the rise of the broader Asian American Movement and its focus on panethnic identifications. As such, parents and instructors focused the corps inward on the local Sacramento Chinese American community, restricting membership to only youth who were at least a quarter Chinese. Early on, this membership policy was of no major consequence to the corps and its growth, as most members hailed from pre-existing family circles within the tight-knit Chinese American community anyways. By the late 1960s, anywhere from one fourth to one third of all members were related to each other as cousins or siblings in some capacity. Often, these family members opened the “pathways” (Finnegan [1989] 2007) by which members joined the organization, creating an expanding network of members through word-of-mouth. Kim Wong, an early color guard member who later served as an instructor before transitioning to the Health & Wellness team and Board of Directors, recalled how her family became involved long before her own entry into the organization: “I started in

Mandarins—it [was] kinda like a family affair. My older brother and sister marched in the hornline, my parents all volunteered. So, I joined when I was twelve, and was in the guard, of course” (Khalifa 2024). Cory Chew similarly came to the Mandarins through familial connections:

We used to—as school friends, I would always go over to visit, and one day he’s watching drum and bugle corps on television. And [I] said “What’s that?” He explained to me what it was and explained to me that he was marching with Ye Wah (at the time). And he thought “Well, maybe I should join. Maybe I should become part of an organization; it’s a lot of fun.” Then, I thought about it for a little while and I didn’t join up until high school. One day, my parents were driving my brother and me just out and about, and we saw these kids out on the junior high school grounds with flags and instruments. And my parents said, “Oh, look! Chinese kids! Look like Asia, and let’s check it out!” And it turned out that one of my dad—my father’s friends from elementary school was in charge of the drum corps. Childhood friend. And we said since we knew then and we referred to his friend as “uncle”—okay, we’re family now. So, that’s when we first picked up joining the drum corps.

(Interview with author, June 22, 2024)

The Mandarins were thus a community-based, exclusively Chinese American music organization for much of their early years. Even as the broader politics of the Asian American Movement pushed for liberation from interethnic division and coalitional identification across historically East Asian American communities, the drum corps followed the politically conservative rubric of the drum corps tradition by remaining ethnically exclusive.

During these formative years, the corps drew upon competing racializing and deracializing practices in their performances, riding an often-ambiguous line between auto-exoticization and conformity to the US American military music aesthetics of the drum corps activity. On the one hand, the corps—which renamed to “the Mandarins” by the end of the decade—often played into visually essentialized imagery of Asianness: their uniform was a pink *tangzhuang* (唐裝) coat, their logos replete with chopstick font schemes, and their drums often carried Chinese characters alongside the English titles

(see Figure 23). The corps' self-orientalizing performance practices were not unprecedented. Indeed, heightening the "Oriental" characteristics of a community-based Asian American corps was common practice at the time among Asian American corps on the West Coast during the 1960s. The Chinese Cathay corps in nearby San Francisco, for example, were well known for their blue silk orientalized costumes replete with conical rice hats, and even appeared in the Chinese New Year's sequence of the famed film *Flower Drum Song* in 1961.¹⁶



Figure 23: Detail of the 1965 Ye Wah Drum & Lyras Corps, wearing their first consistent uniform inspired by Chinese *tangzhuang* coats. Note the use of chopstick font script for the corps banner in the foreground. Photo courtesy of the Mandarins of Sacramento, Inc.

¹⁶ While an analysis of the Chinese Cathay corps' appearance in *Flower Drum Song* is beyond the scope of this work, their appearance alongside the musical's groundbreaking majority-Asian American cast highlights the need for further inquiry into how drum and bugle corps ensembles implicated themselves in constructions of empire and Asian American identities in post-World War II popular media (cf. C.-H. Kim 2013; Tacorda 2004).

Despite these orientalized garments and banners, members in the Mandarin still wore traditional drum corps shako hats and white feather plumes, marching in a synchronized militaristic style like other drum corps of the period. Thus, starting with the earliest years of the organization, the Mandarin were consistently negotiating and positioning themselves as both a Chinese American organization and as a broader member of the competitive drum corps landscape.

These negotiations between community-based focus, self-racialization, and competitive deracialization boiled over into internal tensions over the direction of the corps during the 1970s. As referenced in both the introduction and the previous chapter, the formation of the Drum Corps International circuit and the rise of national touring models touched off the decline of local, community-based corps that struggled to maintain operations with rising transportation costs and performance fees. The Mandarin had been somewhat insulated from these economic forces up until the 1970s, remaining a mostly small operation of around sixty members annually and competing mostly at in-state competitions to reduce overhead expenses. Yet the need for sustained membership was as pressing as ever. As larger and older corps folded, the need for young, dues-paying members remained vital to the sustenance of a smaller drum corps like the Mandarin. At the same time, the growing influence of the Asian American Movement and Yellow Power disrupted the logics of community cultural separation and isolation that were foundational to the Mandarin's origins. Accordingly, the tradition of Chinese American exclusivity in the organization soon came into direct conflict with the growing Asian American political consciousness of the period.

Many collaborators—especially those that marched during the formative years of the organization up through the early 1980s—framed the inclusion of Asian American members from outside the Chinese American community as a key inflection point in the corps’ history, one that simultaneously set a new competitive trajectory for the ensemble while also disrupting the social and familial bonds that had supported the corps up until that point. Between the 1978 and 1979 seasons, four new members—including future director and CEO Jim Tabuchi—joined the Mandarins, traveling north from Stockton, California to inquire about joining the ensemble. Given the foundational nature of this story to interlocutors’ narrations of the history of the Mandarins, I quote a few versions of this story at length, drawing from interviews with both Tabuchi and Chew:

So they [friends in the Mandarins] invited me to come out to rehearsal, which I did. And I think there were, gosh, maybe sixteen of us. We were in a little small class. So I started off on third soprano, so I was next to the youngest rookie, and I did that for about a week, and then the next week after that, they made me second soprano. ‘Bout a month after that, they’re like “Hey this guy’s pretty decent.” So, they made me lead soprano at that point. So here I was, a month into the Mandarins, and I’d already made lead soprano as a fifteen-year-old. At that point, I was called out of one of the rehearsals. And it was Cory Chew who was my corps director at the time, he pulled me out and he said, he goes “Tabuchi?” He goes, “That’s not a Chinese name.” And I’m like “No sir, it’s Japanese.” He’s like, “So your mother is Chinese.” Almost more directing me that my mother is Chinese. I’m like, “No, she’s Japanese American.” He says, “So, you’re not Chinese?” I’m like, “No, I’m Japanese American.” And he just went [finger to lips] “Shh, don’t tell anybody.” Because at that point, Mandarins was strictly Chinese membership only. Your—I believe at least one of your grandparents had to be Chinese-descent at that time. And that was written in the by-laws, it was upheld by the board of directors, it was strictly enforced. And so, I was snuck in. I was snuck into Mandarins as the first non-Chinese member.

(Jim Tabuchi, interview with author, July 7, 2024)

One day, four gentlemen from Stockton showed up. And we were just getting started and running the drum corps...and we said, first thing we thought was “Oh boy, more people! *Four more* [vocal emphasis].” And if you only have 40, that’s a big number. We were saying that because the Mandarins at the time had, I call, I would say, membership “requirements” [Chinese American ancestry], one of the people did not meet the membership requirements. And I looked at Gary and said “Oh, what are we going to do?” We...[hesitates] and he told me that, well, as the director, I needed to make a decision, but he would back me up no matter what decision I would make. And I looked at it and said “Four people is four people. You can’t look at them as ‘do they meet the

membership requirements’?” The requirements were written years ago, and things were changing. Socially, things were changing, things were more open...[pause] and we need to move with the times. And since we’re the young kids on the block, we will make a decision and we will move in that direction. So, that person was given the opportunity to march and I think I look back and I believe it’s probably one of the best decisions I’ve ever made, and I’m seventy years old. Best decision I ever made, and I...it eventually, I think, led to changes within the organization in the future. That person was Jim Tabuchi. And there are signs that helped in making the decision. We were new [as directors] and a lot of the parents did not like to travel, didn’t like to...they liked to stay home and do these easy parts here in town and not have to do a lot of leg work. So, it was up to me to “verify” that he met the membership requirements. And, forty years later, after he showed up, I met his mother and at that point, my research was over. And, I could verify that he didn’t meet the membership requirements, but it’s too late! [chuckles] For almost two years, I...we’d go to staff meetings and [pause] people would ask “So, how’s it going with your research? And for two years I had to face these adults, there people older than I was, and tell them that “I’m still researching.”

(Cory Chew, interview with author, June 22, 2024)

During these interviews, the clandestine nature of allowing Tabuchi into the corps was clear even after nearly fifty years. The euphemistic references to “requirements” and the concocted story of Chinese ancestry point to the real concerns of the organization to maintain an exclusively Chinese American membership and outreach.

Yet it was this move that arguably transitioned the Mandarins from a Chinese American ensemble (a construction I’ve been careful to uphold until this point) into an *Asian* American-identifying organization. Asian American Studies scholar Yen Le Espiritu argues that the political label of “Asian American” is a panethnic label that transcends identifications based on national origins and presumably shared culture, and functions beyond the mere instrumentalization of using the term towards political gain. Instead, a panethnic “Asian American” identity acknowledges that ethnicity is often an imposed categorization, and that shared identities and cultures are not required to forge political meaningful alliances (1993, 13). Jim Tabuchi’s eventual acceptance into the Mandarins, though heavily scrutinized by the old guard of Chinese American parents in

the organization, may thus be viewed as a movement towards a panethnic organizational identity. While Chinese American heritage shaped the Mandarins' formative years, the transition to a more broadly Asian American membership ultimately enacted a politics of panethnic identification that touched off the organization's broader approach to integration throughout the 1980s. By the 1990s, the corps had expanded beyond the Chinese American community of Sacramento, and while it remained small, the consistent local recruits and frugal financial management allowed the corps to sustain itself while many competing ensembles folded during the overall decline in community drum corps during the 1980s (Smith 2002).

Strategic Musical Orientalism: Racializing Performance in the Mandarins

Vignette: July 2021

On a cloudy summer afternoon, I travel with Dan Fong down to a nondescript garage in Sacramento's warehouse district. As he pulls up to the garage and flicks on the lights, I am instantly overwhelmed by the aisles of musical instruments, moving equipment, costuming, and merchandise stacked high within the warehouse's inner hold. It quickly dawns on me that there are decades of the Mandarins material history spread out before me, gathering dust in a non-descript industrial park that could care less about this major nonprofit founded within the Chinese American community in its concrete jungle. Glancing to the right, I notice two large *chu-daiko* drums with their *bachi* (drumsticks) packed neatly in the corner. Fong, noticing my interest, speaks up: "Yeah,

we were known for using taiko in all our shows back in the nineties. And we won a lot back then. So we thought ‘Well, we have them, we might as well keep using them.’”

The 1990s marked a significant period of musical racialization within the Sacramento Mandarins, motivated by leaders in the organization such as director Ray Mar and instructors like Fong who sought to highlight the corps’ Asian American identity within a changing drum corps landscape. This turn toward cultural markers of Asian Americanness—from the use of taiko drums to the selection of more “Asian” program concepts and even the incorporation of lion dances—came as a response to larger forces within the adjudication criteria for the overall drum and bugle corps scene in the United States. Through the 1970s, judges from veterans’ organizations scored ensembles based on military bearing, musical and visual precision, and technical execution using a demerit system known as the “tick system.” Judges used strict guidelines on tempos, length of show, step sizes, military bearing, and other performance elements to deduct points from the scoring sheet, marking each deficiency with a checkmark or “tick” (Atkinson and Close 2003). These represented a tenth of a point deduction for each infraction, which were then tabulated and assessed at the end of the performance. In addition to supporting the strict militaristic marching practices and aesthetics, this scoring system incentivized ensembles to focus more on the execution of the musical arrangements and drill formations rather than a cohesive creative program. But following the gradual decline of veteran influence in the drum corps space during the war in Vietnam, judges more frequently came from music education rather than military music backgrounds. Consequentially, the scene experienced a significant aesthetic shift, with greater emphasis

placed on “total production” value or “general effect” rather than on mechanical execution. These changes in competitive values and expectations coincided with the Mandarins’ growth and development over the same period. At the same time the drum corps became increasingly *non*-Asian American during the 1980s and 1990s following Tabuchi’s entrance into the organization, judges increasingly rewarded complete design packages rather than loosely organized, technically executed medleys.

Accordingly, over a period of two decades from 1996 until 2016, the Mandarins’ field show productions heavily often foregrounded, whether explicitly or implicitly, the corps’ emergent Asian American identity. Shows such as *Dragon Dance – Tan Dun* (1998), *Katachi – The Essence of Design* (2000), *Year of the Dragon* (2002), and *Samurai* (2004) all focused heavily on performing a broadly East Asian sonic and visual identity through the lens of drum corps performance, solidifying the corps’ reputation in the scene as one of the last remaining Asian American organizations.

An examination of performance practices during this period of shows reveals how different designers highlighted Asian Americanness in often essentializing ways.¹⁷ A representative example of these Asian-identified shows is 1996’s *To the Edge* (see [Media Example 2](#)), which garnered the corps a first-place finish in the DCI Division III Championships. Towards the end of the ten-minute show (8:05), the corps departs from the standard instrumentation of marching bugles and percussion to perform a full-ensemble *kumi daiko* drum break. In a rather unconventional move within drum corps

¹⁷ Access to archival recordings of these productions was graciously provided by alumni of the Mandarins, especially Director of Media Joseph Khalifa.

performance practice of the time, the movement begins with the battery percussion members counting off in Japanese rather than having the drum major conduct or count them in. Laying down an energetic and up-tempo *ji*, or repeating metric pattern, the percussionists add coordinated *kakegoe*, or synchronized shouts, along with hocketed “split” parts more idiomatic to marching bass drum performance practice. Incorporating the grounded percussion with driving bell beats and cymbals, the brass performers then step forward to play the drums themselves. A large gong crash signals the end of this non-traditional drum feature.

The use of taiko in *To the Edge* encapsulates the contradictions of this strategic racialization of the Mandarin’s productions. As the Asian American Movement’s proverbial soundtrack, group *kumi-daiko* drumming was rooted in a coalitional, activist ethos centered in Asian American politics. Yet at the same time, taiko’s radical political message isn’t always understood by non-Asian American ears, which might hear it instead as an articulation of an exotic Asian essence. The taiko break in *To the Edge* works both sides, offering a visually and musically effective diversion for a predominantly white US American audience while also asserting a collectivity bonded by Asian American heritage and group identity. According to Angela Ahlgren, such efforts to “perform Asian America” work within a variety of pedagogical contexts by “commemorating Asian American histories, challenging gender and racial formations, inviting queer spectatorship, and engaging in a range of encounters with presenters, audiences, and each other” (2018, 3). By performing taiko, the Mandarins were thus able to achieve three things: to obliquely acknowledge the political and cultural roots of the

organization, to create a generalized “Asian” soundscape for the purposes of producing a cohesive and competitive show concept, and to provide a complicated Asian American pedagogy to predominantly white US American audiences.

What these examples of intentional racialization by the Mandarins reveal is an inherent messiness produced by Asian Americans who intentionally perform “Asianness” for non-Asian American audiences, and this messiness remains a generative point of investigation and critique. Shuhei Hosokawa (1999) demonstrated nearly two decades ago that self-orientalizing embodiments offer Asian diasporic musicians a critical tool to counter, parody, and disarm orientalist discourses. This is because self-orientalism, in the formulation of Runchao Liu, does not “suggest a submissive Asia internalizing the orientalist gaze,” but instead contains “the potential to unsettle a (neo)colonialist temporality that perceives the non-Western as newfound treasures” (2021, 31). The challenge with self-orientalizing practices, however, is that they also introduce a slippage between self-determination and the re-entrenchment of essentialized corporeal difference. This then raises the question of whether “the emphatically politicized Asian American body”—and I would add the emphatically self-politicizing, self-exoticizing Asian American body—“...can be reconciled with the performance venues available to us” (Wong 2019, 108). How then might musical competition refigure the role of orientalist embodiment in structuring Asian American political sensibilities?

One way to address this provocation, I would argue, is to consider how embodied musical performance facilitates what Wendy Cheng terms “strategic orientalism.” Cheng pairs Cedric Robinson’s concept of “racial capital”—the co-determinative, intertwining

development of racial ideology alongside capitalism—with Edward Said’s assessment of discourse and power. Reading through both foundational thinkers to assess how Asianness might be theorized beyond national origin or shared oppression models, she proposes one such solution occurs when those “who cannot avoid being racialized as ‘oriental’” employ the “dynamics of racial capitalism and orientalism toward specific political interests” (Cheng 2013, 153). This process of strategic orientalism is crucially an embodied practice: “rather than reject their stereotyping as model minorities, middlemen, inscrutable exotics,” Cheng states, Asian Americans under strategic orientalism “use their inevitable embodiment of these tropes in service of specific political goals” (ibid.).

Building from Cheng’s framework, I use the term “strategic musical orientalism” to discuss the deliberate use of othering and exoticizing forms of musicking that embody, sound, or otherwise reconstitute Asian American political sensibilities. I propose that performers, instructors, and show designers in the *Mandarins* engaged in strategic musical orientalism, retooling sonic markers of otherness to navigate shifting competitive norms and forward a distinctly Asian American political ethos during this two-decade period. Indeed, subsequent iterations of the *Mandarins* enacted similar forms of strategic musical orientalism using original compositions. Following a period during the 2010s where corps membership rose above a hundred and twenty members and became majority non-Asian American, the *Mandarins*’ 2015 production *Resurrection* saw the corps amplify its use of self-orientalizing musical techniques. Notably composed by three non-Asian American men (Key Poulan, Sean Womack, and Mark Hunter), the show depicts the terra cotta warriors of Emperor Qin Shi Huang magically coming to life. The

opening moments offer a veritable cornucopia of orientalist exotica: electronic sampler instruments mimic a bamboo flute; tom-tom drum impacts, clanging metal wind chimes, and gong hits all set an Orientalized acoustic texture, and eight color guard members dressed in stylized warrior costumes mime hitting drums emblazoned with the adjective *huo* (upward intonation), or ‘lively/life’. Both sonically and visually then, the corps members become what management studies scholar Helena Liu terms “mythtappers,” self-orientalizing actors who “[frame] themselves as custodians of an ancient and mysterious tradition that imbued them with attributes and wisdoms” (2017, 789).

Intriguingly, former members and stakeholders within the Mandarinins have consistently argued that these shows aligned with the corps’ “brand image” at the time. Strategic musical orientalism granted the Mandarinins a way to distinguish themselves from other competitive drum corps while referencing the corps’ Chinese cultural roots. As Ivan Raykoff notes in his analysis of difference in the Eurovision song contest, competition raises a “crucial decision” for historically orientalized performers: “enter yet *another* conventional and formulaic song that could appeal to voting listeners across the continent, or [use] the opportunity to present the differences of *an Other* identity” (Raykoff 2020, 115, original emphasis). Though concerned with starkly different geopolitical and musical contexts, Raykoff suggests that difference structures musicians’ decisions to differentiate themselves within the context of competition. The decision to self-exoticize stems from the organization’s refusal to mimic other competitively successful ensembles. The neoliberal premise of this discourse cannot be ignored, but the strategic musical orientalism of *Resurrection*, *Destination America*, and *To the Edge*

provided a way for corps stakeholders to identify with an Asian American past and claim a unique group identity within the normative competitive landscape of the musical subculture.

This significant investment in the corps' Asian American identity during the previous two decades raises questions about how the same organization by 2021 became devoid of Asian American identity, to the point that Yang, as discussed above, felt that there was only a superficial engagement with Asian American culture and history. Many in the organization point to a particular moment in the corps' development, the hiring of a new design team in the off-season between 2016 and 2017, as the key inflection point for the corps' deracialization. During the off-season, newly-minted corps director J.W. Koester hired longtime percussionist and show designer Ike Jackson to lead a new era of show design at the corps. Members immediately felt the change: at the first audition camp of the 2017 season, Jackson gathered the members and proclaimed that the Mandarins "were not going to do an Asian show" (former member Joseph Khalifa, interview with author, June 13, 2023). The first show of this new era, *Inside the Ink*, incorporated Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel's "Sound of Silence" with large ink pen stage props and a field tarp displaying a Rorschach blot. After achieving a record-high thirteenth-place finish, the Mandarins rode their competitive momentum to the corps' first-ever World Class finals placement the following year. Since then, the corps has remained a consistent finalist in DCI World Class competition. Even after the departure of Jackson prior to the 2020 season, the Mandarins have continued to move away from the Asian American identifying shows of the past.

I share these recent developments to emphasize that strategic musical orientalism's competitive and political efficacy is not given. Considering the current landscape of the drum corps scene, where annual budgets run into seven figures and members pay up to \$6000 to participate, the need to be competitive to maintain sponsorships and donation funding puts real economic pressure on decisions made about the competitive program. It is thus no surprise that the Mandarins have shifted away from racialized self-representation in the name of financial feasibility. Returning to Wendy Cheng's work reminds us that the intertwining of strategic orientalism and neoliberal capital is not coincidental, but an expected norm under racial capitalism. The political potential of strategic musical orientalism is thus beholden not only to the normative practices of competition, but to the material realities of performance as well. Musical performance, therefore, offers a modality through which the contradictory embodiments of strategic orientalism might be played out, modified, riffed upon, or even eliminated, in the service of Asian American political sensibilities.

In light of this ongoing deracialization of corps members' daily experiences, how do alumni stakeholders in the organization use their symbolic capital and status as previous members to transmit racialized histories of the organization to future generations? In the next section, I explore the importance of the Mandarins' "History Night," an annual event run by former members of the drum corps held during the pre-season training camps (otherwise known as "all-days," "spring training," or "pre-tour"). By combining material culture, shared listening to oral histories and previous productions, and the performance of the corps' anthem "Year of the Dragon," the History

Night operates as a key ritual that instills the importance of Asian American histories and cultural identities on the drum corps in the midst of a deracializing change in “brand image.”

Musical Re-racialization: History Night and “Year of the Dragon” in the Mandarin

The Mandarin History Night in its current form developed after the COVID-19-shortened 2020 season, when most drum corps were forced to shutter operations or to move to mostly asynchronous forms of teaching. With the renewal of the field show circuit in a modified 2021 non-competitive season, alumni such as Fong and Tabuchi saw the pre-season as an opportunity to share with members the history of the organization and instill the core beliefs and values in future generations of the drum corps. Since 2021, Fong has helped arrange a version of History Night each pre-season, often coordinating with corps staff and student leadership to ensure that it happens at a good time of the summer for all involved. In addition to the material items described above, the history night also typically includes a significant video presentation that explains the corps’ history, provides clips from key shows, and often includes the full run through of the previous season’s show for members to enjoy at the end. In doing so, the History Night presentation is palimpsestic, changing and accruing the materials from previous years on top of it to more explicitly make connections between past, present, and future. At the same time, it serves a pedagogical function for the members, enculturating them into the histories and legacies of the historically Chinese American organization. Its critical potential, therefore, is in how it binds current members to the organization’s past,

racializing the corps' identity in ways that build continuity between an Asian American identified heritage and a predominantly *non*-Asian American membership. In other terms, an in-depth examination of the History Night as a ritualistic endeavor provides valuable insight into how History Night functions both as a tool of history-making within the Mandarins organization and how it enacts a musical re-racialization of the ensemble from within.

Vignette: July 22, 2021, Rio Linda, CA.

It is a Thursday night. I run away from the field after full ensemble and get into the car with some of the administrative staff to hitch a block-long ride back to the high school. When we arrive, I bail from their path towards the food line and made my way to the doors of the gymnasium, where two minivans have pulled up with brass instruments and sound equipment. Mandarins historian Scott Jow, Daniel Fong, and an older Chinese American man carrying an iPad (Dan later introduces him as his brother Matt, a former corps member from the 1970s) walk up. I help schlep six cases of G bugles into the gym and onto a table that Dan asks me to set up for him. Scott and Keith connect a MacBook to the SmartBoard that has been wheeled in while Matt methodically sets up his cables for the speakers, a wireless microphone, and a mixer so that Dan can speak to the members later that evening. Along the gym seats, Dan hangs up three jackets from the Mandarins' history: a striking black and orange one with a golden dragon between the words "Sacramento" and "Mandarins," a white one with blue outlined script, and a third black one which Dan notes as his personal jacket from when he marched in the corps.

Members trickle into the gym as I wait around, setting aside their equipment in the astute, pristine fashion expected from them as drum corps members. Some meander up to the table and squint at the horns, in front of which Dan places six of the eight championship rings from the Mandarinins' history. As I set up my camera to film the upcoming "History Night," I notice that many members murmur amongst themselves as they pass through the gym, worried that they won't be able to eat, shower, and take care of their instruments in time for the 10:45 pm start time.

Dan steps up to the microphone and congratulates the corps on a hard day's work. He then asks the members to repeat back the core values of the Mandarinins. Members tentatively respond with the correct answers of "Family, Respect, Heritage/Tradition, and Honor." He then explains the meaning behind the Mandarinins logo, how each stroke represents one of the key values, reminding members to consider those things each time they wear a Mandarinins uniform. The members are well-behaved, keeping their side conversations to a minimum while listening to the words Dan has for them.

Following these opening remarks, Dan plays a video put together by Jow on the projector. A former member himself, Jow has taken it upon himself to edit archival videos and homemade media into these presentations for a few decades now.¹⁸ The video opens with a credit reel while the corps' brass arrangement of their signature tune, "Year of the Dragon," plays in the background. It then cuts to a video produced in the 1990s about the history of the Mandarinins, in a quasi-news reporter style. An unnamed alumna offers a

¹⁸ While members of the media team—many of whom are alumni who viewed earlier versions of the video—are now responsible for putting together each year's History Night video, the editorial work of Scott Jow is evident in the History Night video, which typically opens with significant private archival footage of the corps.

brief historical of the organization to the camera with a slideshow playing over her voice. Many of the images of the early years are of rehearsals, with Chinese American members carrying their G bugles and sling drums while high stepping. The few performance shots show the corps in its iconic pink and black as her voiceover extolls the corps virtues of providing for Chinese youth in Sacramento, before shifting to a more broadly multicultural discourse about the corps now being open to people from all backgrounds. Watching the audience, I'm increasingly surprised by how few of the members seem engaged during the presentation. Many are on their phones, or lightly chatting with neighbors, or simply staring silently but respectfully at the screen, watching the content.

Their behavior changes when the video shifts to its second portion of video clips, usually from previous championship shows from the 1990s through the 2010s. Excerpts from the corps first championship show in 1987 and eighth championship show in 2001 play as the members watch attentively. They begin to cheer for big color guard tosses, a common practice in contemporary color guard audiences; they clap at the end of movements, shouting out exciting musical arrivals or impacts.

Then, *Destination America* comes on.

More than any other portion of History Night, the historical video (see [Media Example 3](#)) played each year allows alumni of the Mandarins to position the current members' experiences within a broader historical narrative of the organization and its Asian American identity. As referenced in the above vignette, the terms of this identification are often couched in a broadly multiculturalist discourse that

simultaneously emphasizes the Mandarins' Chinese American roots while highlighting how the corps supports members from diverse racial identities in the present by drawing upon core values ostensibly forged within Sacramento's Chinese American community. The History Night video further operates as a space for alumni to enact Asian American pedagogies and teach histories of oppression. This is apparent in the extended commentary detailing the story behind *Destination America*. In an interview done exclusively for the documentary (13:11), former executive director Jim Tabuchi explains how the corps' golden anniversary presented an opportunity to produce a meaningful show that acknowledged the corps' Chinese American heritage while also providing a space for educating the broader public about the Paper Sons phenomena. Excerpts from the show play in the background and stock newsreel footage plays over his narrative, linking the Mandarins music-making and organization back to longer histories of Asian American immigration:

And, so, the Fiftieth anniversary, we knew was very exciting. And we wanted to do two things: We wanted to honor the past and also set the foundation for the future. What we had done for the show to commemorate it was actually a few different things. One was the show design was all about recognizing the heritage of the founders and the members who'd come before us in the Mandarins. And if you look back to immigration of Chinese when they came to the United States, there was a method that they used that they came by, which was called being a paper son, which was that they would come to the US and actually pretend that they had a relative here in the United States. And they would be interrogated...just to make sure they did have relatives here. And so, we based our show off of that story.

(Quoted in Khalifa 2024)

The History Night documentary then presents an extended portion of the show to members, allowing them to see this Asian American pedagogy in action. The show follows the immigration story of an unnamed Chinese narrator from Guangzhou province looking to enter the United States by pretending to be related to a US citizen of Chinese descent. Various movements take the listener through the struggles of the narrator in

China to make a living, and of the challenges faced on the long journey across the Pacific. In the penultimate movement, the narrator is taken into Angel Island for interrogation, before successfully passing the questions and being allowed to enter the country.

The interrogation scene from *Destination America* (see [Media Example 4](#), 7:30) provides a window on the strategic racializing practices driving the Mandarins production, and of the broader Asian American pedagogies at play. Men in the color guard are dressed as the titular paper son in a smart business suit and hat, while women in the guard are dressed in red with white flowing skirts, representing working women who traveled from southern China to the US along with the narrator. The movement begins serenely, with the keyboard percussionists in the front ensemble playing an extended melody over the narrator describing his first moments seeing the Golden Gate Bridge. The peaceful tranquility of the major harmonies ends on an unresolved dominant chord as the pillars showing Chinese script—a reference to the poetry written on the walls of the Angel Island barracks by detained Chinese laborers—are flipped to produce the famous image of a worker being interrogated by white immigration officers at Angel Island (see Figure 24). The timpani and low brass then enter with a heart-pounding ostinato as narrative vocal samples explain how the narrator “was escorted to a room with many others.”

Dissonant interjections from the baritones underscore the escalating fear experienced by the narrator, as do crunching chords played over the top of the ostinato by the trumpets and mid-range mellophones. As the narration explains how “Everyone was



Figure 24: Still from the Mandarins 2013 production, *Destination America: Journey of the Paper Sons*, depicting an interrogation at Angel Island. Courtesy of the Mandarins of Sacramento, Inc.

interrogated,” quarter-note triplets from the brass section highlight a featured rifle and saber toss by the color guard dressed in their working clothes. The impending danger implied by the music is palpable, and the militaristic choreography of the weaponry coincides neatly with the moment of US military and governmental intervention in the storyline. At the height of the dramatic tension, the entire horn line gathers into a square on the stage right side of the field and visualizes the narrators’ answers through the marching drill. When asked “How many steps to the front door?” members in the middle spell out a 7; when asked how many windows, they rearrange into a six-windowed formation; “How many rooftops?” is met with the narrator emphatically stating “Three!” while the corps gets into the shape of a 3; finally, when pressed for siblings, a rifle toss by two male color guard members at the front of the field visually communicates the final answer of “Two brothers!” Following this intense interrogation: as the narrator is allowed

to enter the United States, celebrating his entrance to the melody of a mostly pentatonic trumpet line singing over the entire ensemble. This marker of musical orientalism is thus not a marker of perpetual foreignness, but a sonic signifier of triumph in the face of anti-Chinese immigration laws.

Crucially, this recounting of Asian American immigration narratives operates not only as a history lesson for a broad public, but as a targeted lesson designed exclusively for members of the organization as well. While members nominally watch the History Night video as part of an overall program of history-telling, Jow's video thus enacts an Asian American pedagogy that explicitly links the organization's past to Chinese American histories and identities while simultaneously linking the future of the corps to these racialized narratives. The History Night documentary video thus operates on multiple levels of community building and marking Asian American time. By bringing the entire corps together to watch and interact with the video, alumni encourage members to share their personal reasons for joining the organization and to situate those experiences in a broader legacy of the organization *as* an Asian American ensemble. While members may not identify with the older shows that present the corps' Asian American heritage, they are nevertheless placed into a broader story about organizational history that situates their performance experiences as the next chapter in an ongoing narrative of Asian American history.

Current and former members of the Mandarins are incorporated into the ritual process of history-making at the conclusion of the History Night through their performance of the corps' anthem, "Year of the Dragon." As a marker of the Mandarins

organization, “Year of the Dragon” has significant personal and historical meaning for participants in the drum corps. The Mandarins first performed excerpts from the broader piece—originally written by British brass band composer Philip Sparke—for their 2002 show entitled *Year of the Dragon*. The anthem, taken from the piece’s brass chorale, didn’t appear in the Mandarins repertoire until the mid-2000s, when Fong arranged the slow middle section as a warmup routine for the hornline. The song became the corps’ official anthem in 2009, when after hearing the group play the piece as a warmup, Tabuchi noticed a trumpet player in tears. When he asked the member if he was okay, the brass performer explained that the song reminded them of all the memories of his time in the organization the previous season. Hearing this, Tabuchi asked during the corps pre-season training camp that “Year of the Dragon” become the official corps song of the Mandarins.

In the present, “Year of the Dragon” has become a ritual that consolidates group identity and marks key points in the competitive season. Since 2010, veteran members have first performed the piece during the earliest weeks of preseason training for the new members, who sit inside the hornline circle to mark their official welcome into the organization. Subsequent performances at History Night and the corps’ annual June debut at their Friends and Family event give the song a special temporal separation from the quotidian daily proceedings of spring training, marking a time outside the regular time to acknowledge the corps’ Asian American heritage and communal impact. The corps then performs the piece as part of their brass warmup routine at competitions across the country during the DCI Summer Tour, using it to prepare the members for a powerful and

emotionally poignant field competition run-through. Members perform the song for the final time on the last day of the season, when “age-out” members who will no longer be eligible to march in the corps are asked to take the ritualistic place that the rookies occupied at the first performance. Thus, “Year of the Dragon” marks a temporal and generational cycle, inaugurating the neophytes at the beginning of the season while sending off departing performers at the end.

Within the context of History Night, however, “Year of the Dragon” takes on a broader historical and intergenerational significance. Following the video presentation, Fong invites the current members and former members to play “Year of the Dragon” in a large circle of typically over a hundred brass performers. In this setting, the song functions as much more than a warmup or symbolic gesture towards the corps’ Chinese American identity. Instead, current and former members use it as a space to forge social bonds by collectively and ritualistically participating in intergenerational music-making. Prior to playing the tune for History Night, Fong typically recounts Tabuchi’s contributions to its installation in the organization, then explains to the members that the corps leaves the arrangement unchanged. This, Fong asserts, is done so that any former performer may return to each History Night or at the corps’ public performances to play it with the current members. After giving this speech, he conducts the piece, working with veteran members selected by the brass staff to perform the key solos of the piece.

While people within the Mandarins frame “Year of the Dragon” as a marker of the corps’ Chinese American identity, the piece itself (see [Media Example 5](#), 5:10) falls mostly within the unmarked whiteness of a tonal British brass band chorale. The

arrangement opens with a pedal drone in the lower brass, and then the trumpets state the major melody, wafting over this low foundation. As the middle voices of the mellophone and baritones enter, the corps grows to an impactful quarter note triplet half-cadence, at which point the corps drops out to feature the four selected soloists who step into the middle of the circle and perform a brief quartet that, despite being only eight notes long, feels as if a cry from the distant past echoes in the present. As the corps enters back in and builds to the final apotheosis, one key moment of musical re-racialization carries significance for corps members. At the height of the emotional tension of the piece, as the brass plays progressively dissonant suspension chords and crescendos to a *fortississimo*, the entire corps suddenly drops out. Facing away from the circle, the trumpet and mellophone soloists sustain long, distant drone calls followed by a solo baritone who performs the first distinctly pentatonic melody. At this moment of musical orientalism and self-exoticization, members are taught to sing in their heads the phrase “Mandarin Forever.” For the (mostly non-Asian American) members and even Chinese American staff, this phrase and sonic marker re-racializes the performance practice, performing the Mandarins’ Chinese American heritage through an orientalist musical topic while simultaneously transforming this moment into a communal experience of memorialization. “Year of the Dragon” thus continues a legacy of self-orientalizing practices that were once a cornerstone of Mandarins productions but which are now mostly absent from the corps’ musical repertoire. By performing it at History Night then, the corps sonically links itself to both Asian American pasts and a diverse, coalitional

future, drawing from musical strategies that defined the corps' performance traditions to create a new, intergenerational community in the present.

Accordingly, History Night does more than recount the history of the Mandarin. By combining material culture, shared listening to oral histories, video commentaries on previous programs, and the performance of the corps' trademark piece "Year of the Dragon," the History Night operates as a calendrical ritual that instills the importance of Asian American histories and cultural identities on the drum corps in the midst of its deracializing "brand image" change. That is, it encourages an intergenerational transmission of Asian American stories to contemporary performers that otherwise do not experience or enact Asian American cultural identity in the shows they perform. Re-racialization is therefore a core strategy of performance and history-making for the Asian American alumni of this increasingly diverse ensemble, suggesting—perhaps—an alternative strategy to assert Asian American belonging in the face of its potential elision.

Conclusion: Reset, Do It Again

Vignette: October 30, 2025

I mutter to myself: “I can’t believe it. No, that can’t be right.”

Sitting in my bedroom in Riverside, CA, mouth agape, I read emblazoned across my social media feed: “Mandarins Drum and Bugle Corps Announces Strategic Hiatus for 2026.”

I follow the link to the website. Sure enough, there’s the post, with Fong’s name at the bottom.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sacramento, California – October 30, 2025 – Mandarins Performing Arts has announced that the Mandarins Drum and Bugle Corps will take a hiatus from the 2026 Drum Corps International season as part of a comprehensive strategy to strengthen organizational infrastructure, enhance member experience, and ensure long-term sustainability amid evolving economic conditions affecting the performing arts nationwide.

“This decision reflects our commitment to thoughtful growth and the continued pursuit of excellence,” said Dr. Daniel Fong, President/CEO of Mandarins Performing Arts. “The Mandarins organization has a proud history of innovation and resilience. Taking a single season to retool our systems, evaluate touring logistics, and invest in creative and instructional development will position us for even greater success moving forward.”

During the 2026 hiatus, the Mandarins will continue their extensive year-round music education and community outreach programs – including Immortal Winds, Mandarins Music Academy, Mandarins Pathways, Mandarins Summer Camps, and school partnerships that support music education throughout the Sacramento region, as well as the DCI Capital Classic. The organization will also focus on program design, staff development, equipment upgrades, and strategic financial planning in preparation for a highly anticipated return to the DCI tour in 2027. “Every major organization benefits from moments of reflection and recalibration,” said Kathleen Davies, Chair of the Board of Directors. “This strategic pause ensures that the Mandarins remain an enduring force within Drum Corps International and a leader in providing transformative performance experiences for youth.”

The Mandarins extend deep appreciation to their members, alumni, fans, and the entire DCI community for their continued encouragement and look forward to rejoining the tour in 2027 with renewed creativity, energy, and vision.

To our Mandarins family – your dedication, pride, and spirit have built a legacy that continues to inspire. This pause in our competitive schedule is a deliberate step to ensure that our future is even stronger than our past. We are investing in the systems, people, and creativity that will shape the next era of Mandarins excellence.

We thank you for your unwavering support and belief in what the Mandarins stand for – excellence, family, and transformation through performance. Together, we look forward to 2027 and beyond with excitement and confidence.

With gratitude and respect,

Kathleen Davies, Chair, Board of Directors
Dr. Daniel Fong, President/CEO
Mandarins Performing Arts

For the past five years, I've lived with and helped alongside the Mandarins as they continued their historic rise into the vaulted position of consistent DCI World Class finalists. The last three years have seen them place sixth, seventh, and seventh at finals, their highest ordinal finishes in the long history of the organization. And now, they're not going to be on the field this summer.

I should have suspected as much. Money has always been the factor to kill any drum corps. I know all too well of the many corps that shuttered their doors first in the 1970s when they couldn't afford to tour the country. In recent years, many smaller corps, and even some of the most historic names in the activity, haven't been able to get the corps down the road. I think back to all the Asian American organizations that couldn't come back: the Seattle Imperials, the L.A. Chinese, the Ambassadors, the many boy and girl scout units throughout the West Coast.

Immediately I scroll over to the Nisei Ambassadors alumni page. Unsurprisingly, Terry Nakagawa has broken the news already:

I saw the announcement this morning that the Mandarins have suspended operations for the 2026 season...The [Nisei] corps alums have supported the Sacramento Mandarins since 2005 and watched as they have consistently become one of the Top 12 corps in DCI. Here's hoping that we see the Mandarins back on the field in 2027.

I sit, numb. I know how much this means to him and the Ambassador alumni. I know how much this means to the current and former members of the Mandarins, who won't

have a drum corps to support this summer. And, deep down, I know how much this means to me, someone who knows these people, someone invested, like them, in continuing to tell the histories of Asian American contributions to the music community I call home.

I catastrophize. Is this the end of Asian American-identified drum corps history? My brain knows it isn't. I remind myself: "Troop 12 is back up and running after the pandemic in San Francisco. I'm sure there's other local outfits somewhere." But my heart worries. The Mandarins were the most publicly visible of the historically Asian American drum corps. They were the only such ensemble left in the modern drum corps scene that first shaped who I became all those years ago. And now, the corps is taking *at least* a year off.

All I can do is cry. It is a vulnerable cry, one that tells me this is about much more than research, about more than me or any other individual. It is about what it means to be Asian American in this space. Without this Asian American group, what remains?

As a form of history-making and archival impetus, marking Asian American time is perhaps more endangered and yet more crucial now than at any previous point. Within the drum corps scene itself, rising costs make it increasingly inaccessible to youth outside of privileged financial backgrounds, excluding many socioeconomically minoritized communities from participating in what once was a widespread, localized youth musical tradition. Beyond the insular world of the US American drum corps community, archives of Asian American experiences remain poignant flashpoints in national political spheres.

Violence against protesters congregating in front of the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles to speak out against the abductions perpetrated by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents under the second Trump presidency make it clear: historically minoritized communities and their stories are desperately needed and are precariously in danger of erasure at the hands of “white time.” In light of these uncertain futures in Asian American time marking, what does the work of disparate Asian American agents across a century of performance and archival practice offer us in terms of assurances against symbolic violence? By way of conclusion, I don’t pretend to offer an encompassing solution to these concerns. Instead, I tease out the threads of what makes marking Asian American time compelling beyond the reaches of the niche of drum corps history. I suggest that the import of marking Asian American time is derived from its ongoing, ambivalent negotiation between the replication of mainstream, dominant narratives and the critical, liberatory power of community-based history-making.

Vignette: A Mandarin

It is a blazing summer afternoon somewhere on the outskirts of Sacramento. My first few weeks of living with the 2021 Mandarins have been hot but otherwise unremarkable. A few days ago, I got to stand up in front of the full membership and explain for the first time why I was traveling with them as an administrative assistant, my access to the group and permission to conduct fieldwork granted in exchange for volunteering. Now I’m standing outside in the scorching heat to take field recordings of the group as they rehearse. Next to me is Stephanie Sutton. She is a brass performer who

marched with the organization between 2014 and 2017, witnessing firsthand the transition away from Asian American-identifying shows and to the artistic abstraction of *Inside the Ink*. She has a straightforward way of speaking that is honest and refreshing, and as a fellow administrative assistant, I'm always able to pick her short, black hair out of a crowd if I need to ask questions about our responsibilities.

Today is the day that I get to hear "Year of the Dragon" for the first time. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, veteran members of the Mandarins mark the beginning of the new season by regaling the neophytes with a performance of the corps anthem. This, in their view, marks the new members' entrance into the fold of the organization. I spoke earlier in the day with Fong and know that today will conclude with this all-important cyclical ritual, and I want to be there without inserting myself into this key performance of Mandarins group formation and identity. I find myself now speaking with Stephanie in one of the fleeting moments of respite, and in a moment of ethnographic autopilot, I ask her what she thinks about the rookie performance of "Year of the Dragon." After explaining how it's important to her and to the other members past and present, she throws me a curveball: "You should go into the circle with the newbies."

I feel conflicted, immediately. As a former member of The Cavaliers Drum and Bugle Corps, I understand that corps traditions are exclusive and mark a member's belonging within a group. As someone from outside the organization who will never experience being a member of the Mandarins, being asked to join the new members in their own ritual feels ethically ambiguous. I attempt to reply:

"No, that's your thing, I don't want to impose."

A bit shocked, she fires right back: “Well, if you’ve been with us for awhile, you’re a Mandarin.”

I fall silent, unsure of how to proceed. A part of me is elated as an ethnographer that I’ve built enough of a rapport to be accepted and find belonging in an organization that continues to shape the past and future of Asian American drum corps. Another part of me recognizes that I can *never* understand what being a member of this organization means, as I am well past the DCI age limit. Can I ever *really* be a Mandarin? I’m not so sure. My protestations and reasons for why I shouldn’t join fall flat when I try to rebut her invitation.

That night, I find myself with my camera, sitting in the middle of the circle as the opening drone of the lower brass touches my ears for the first time. Complicated, conflicted tears form in my eyes. I want to cry, knowing that I am now “in the fold” in some small way; I don’t want to cry, because this isn’t about me, but about the new members and their connection to a long tradition of Asian American performance. In the end, I sit still, letting the air vibrate around me, the sound soaring beyond the confines of the circle and mobilizing into the cool Californian twilight.

In his reflections on ethnographic obligations in his own work on New Orleans brass bands, ethnomusicologist Matt Sakakeeny self-reflexively remarks that “One thing about mobility is that you do not always know exactly what direction you are going in or what kind of effect your motion will have. Another thing about voice is that you do not always know the most effective way to present yourself, let alone precisely what you are

trying to articulate and how others will receive you” (2013, 180). Since that cool evening in July of 2021, I have increasingly noticed how Sakakeeny’s remarks—influential as they have been for me as a budding band scholar—echo the messy ambivalences that pervade the marking of Asian American time.

His first sentence points to the ambivalence of mobility, a theme that resonates particularly strongly in the context of my research. As I outlined in the introduction, Asian American communities have consistently turned towards a musical tradition rooted in US militarism and imperialism—i.e., a tradition that racialized Asian American performers as foreign Others—to engage in uniquely Asian American collectivities and activities. But this is not to suggest that these performers “knew what direction they were going in”: indeed, as I traced out in Chapter 1, early Chinese and Japanese American drum corps were not tied to the nominal US American patriotism of the music tradition, but instead mobilized across the Pacific to engage political efforts specific to their transnational, multigenerational communities. And while the mobilities of incarcerated Japanese American performers discussed in Chapter 2 underscored a sonic critique that spread beyond the walls of their imprisonment, those occurred in a context of political ambivalence; some musicians supported the US military while critiquing incarceration, some resisted the imprisonment by converting US military bugles towards imperial Japanese bugle calls. Accordingly, while these early performers didn’t know what impact they would have in local, national, and transnational arenas, they employed physical and sonic mobilities to mark their political presences despite racialized marginalization.

Sakakeeny's second sentence also profoundly reflects the ambivalences of more recent efforts to remember the legacies of Asian American drum corps ensembles. Few of the Asian American drum corps performers of the 1950s and 1960s knew what effect they would have on the broader history of US American drum corps performance, yet their retrospective efforts to remember and record these histories have profoundly redressed the symbolic annihilation of their communities from dominant histories of the scene. Crucially, therefore, these ensembles demonstrate the ambivalence of not knowing "the most effective way to present yourself." As outlined in Chapter 3, alumni from the L.A. Chinese and the Nisei Ambassadors draw upon common temporalities of linear progress that replicate the logics of *chronoviolence* to explicate the historical impact of their ensembles. And yet within the messiness of these self-representations, both ensembles have found ways to highlight historical narratives of Asian American performance that challenge dominant historical narratives within the scene while also emphasizing a distinctly Asian American coalitional political outlook. "Not knowing how others will receive you" is also a core part of the Mandarin's efforts to re-racialize their performances as outlined in Chapter 4. Building from a growing concern in losing the current members to another, historical ambivalence, alumni of the Mandarin's have turned to community-based archival and history-making practices to forge a new yet uncertain path of self-representation.

Yet, as the above vignette with Sutton outlines, this uncertainty of "how others will receive you" is also a personal experience, one that has profoundly shaped the interpersonal interactions heart of this research. Walking into the Mandarin's, I could not

have imagined that I would be accepted so quickly despite my status as a member of a different organization. The same uncertainty was there when I interviewed Min Tonai, a decorated and respected Nisei elder, while I sat across the screen from him, a young Yonsei removed from strong communal ties to my Japanese American heritage. And it was there when I swung those bass drum mallets from the archives of the Japanese American National Museum for the first time, trying to embody and empathize with performers whose sounds were no longer accessible in the quiet of the archives. Could I even know how I would be “received” by an imagined archival subject with whom I was attempting to construct embodied and sonic empathies against the quiet of the archives? All these reflections suggest that the process of Asian American musical community formation and consolidation remain complicated and underdetermined. As all the portions of this dissertation have reflected in their own ways, there is no one “correct” way to navigate the inherent contradictions of Asian American performance in a space that was not originally made for Asian Americans. Instead, a focus on the multitudes of ways that Asian Americans continue to assert their belonging in this broader tradition allows for a broader commentary on the multivocal, incomplete nature of marking Asian American time. In other words, marking Asian American time does not connote one overarching strategy of historical memory, but instead encompasses a multiplicity of different and sometimes politically conflicting practices that nevertheless trace the past, present, and future of Asian American drum corps performance.

What, then, does such a future look like? With the Mandarins taking a temporary hiatus, it would be easy to bemoan the loss of a sustained tradition of Asian American

performance in the US American drum corps space. But as Sakakeeny remarks, the whole point of ethnographic encounters—and, I would add, marking Asian American time—is that the direction you are going is never certain. Just like the mark time step performs a stasis that can be broken at any point with a step in any direction, so too does an immediate future without the Mandarins (or dozens of former ensembles) create new opportunities for recognizing the historical contributions of Asian Americans to the US drum corps scene—and really, to US American culture writ large. Between efforts such as the Ambassadors’ forthcoming museum exhibit and the Mandarins’ ongoing work to trace the history of Chinese American drum corps back to rural Sacramento-San Joaquin Valley worker towns, the future directions of marking Asian American time may remain uncertain, but they will still be there. Even as they may reproduce some of the logics of militarism and imperialism that undergird the scene, community-based archives and public history initiatives will continue to forge new pasts and futures of an Asian American music tradition now entering its second century.

And so, I expect Asian Americans and alumni of these historically Asian American ensembles to reset: to go back to the beginning and to retread the pathways left by their predecessors, and to continue this tradition of history-making into the future. Or, put into a command that we as drum corps community members—that we as *Asian American* drum corps community members—might better understand:

MARK TIME, MARK! AND...1, 2, 3, 4.

Bibliography

- Adey, Peter. 2017. *Mobility*. 2nd ed. Routledge.
- Agamben, Giorgio. (1994) 2000. "What Is a Camp?" In *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, translated by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino. Theory Out of Bounds. University of Minnesota Press.
- Ahlgren, Angela K. 2018. *Drumming Asian America: Taiko, Performance, and Cultural Politics*. Oxford University Press.
- Althusser, Louis. (1971) 2014. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, translated by G. M. Goshgarian. Verso.
- Anderson, Benedict. (1983) 2016. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edition. Verso.
- Anderson, Jane, and Kimberly Christen. 2019. "Decolonizing Attribution: Traditions of Exclusion." *Journal of Radical Librarianship* 5: 113–52.
- Asai, Susan Miyo. 1995. "Transformations of Tradition: Three Generations of Japanese American Music Making." *The Musical Quarterly* 79 (3): 429–53.
- Asai, Susan Miyo. 2023. "Im/Mobility Paradox: Jazz Making in the Incarceration Camps of World War II." *American Music* 41 (1): 17–25.
- Asai, Susan Miyo. 2024. *Sounding Our Way Home: Japanese American Musicking and the Politics of Identity*. Univ. Press of Mississippi.
- Atkinson, Christopher, and Alison Close. 2003. "And Now the Scores...the Art and Science of Drum Corps Judging." In *A History of Drum and Bugle Corps*, edited by Steve Vickers, vol. 2. Sights & Sounds.
- Barbour, Alecia. 2014. "Musical Expression and National Identity in U.S. World War II Sites of Japanese American Forcible Civilian Containment." Society for Ethnomusicology 59th Annual Meeting, Pittsburgh, PA, November 13.

- Barbour, Alecia. 2017. "'For the Good of Our Country': Ruth Watanabe and the 'Good That Is in Music' at the Santa Anita Detention Center"." *Notes* 74 (2): 221–34.
- Barbour, Alecia. 2018. "American Strains: Listening for 'Loyalty' in U.S. Sites of Japanese American Involuntary Confinement during World War II." Society for Ethnomusicology 63rd Annual Meeting, Albuquerque, NM, October 26.
- Birdsall, Carolyn, and Viktoria Tkaczyk. 2019. "Listening to the Archive: Sound Data in the Humanities and Sciences." *Technology and Culture* 60 (2-Supplement): S1–13.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. (2003) 2018. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. 5th ed. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Burnett, Philip, Erin Johnson-Williams, and Yvonne Liao. 2023. "Music, Empire, Colonialism: Sounding the Archives." *Postcolonial Studies* 26 (3): 345–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2023.2243070>.
- Campt, Tina. 2017. *Listening to Images*. Duke University Press.
- Caswell, Michelle. 2014a. "Inventing New Archival Imaginaries: Theoretical Foundations for Identity-Based Community Archives." In *Identity Palimpsests: Archiving Ethnicity in the U.S. and Canada*. Litwin Books.
- Caswell, Michelle. 2014b. "Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives and the Fight against Symbolic Annihilation." *The Public Historian* 36 (4): 26–37.
- Caswell, Michelle. 2021. *Urgent Archives: Engaging Liberatory Memory Work*. Routledge Studies in Archives. Routledge.
- Chan, Sucheng. (1987) 2006. "Introduction: The Significance of Locke in Chinese History." In *Bitter Melon: Inside America's Last Rural Chinese Town*, by Jeff Gillenkirk and James Motlow. Nine Mile Press.
- Cheng, Wendy. 2013. "Strategic Orientalism: Racial Capitalism and the Problem of 'Asianness.'" *African Identities* 11 (2): 148–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2013.797284>.

- Chiang, C. Y. 2010. "Imprisoned Nature: Toward an Environmental History of the World War II Japanese American Incarceration." *Environmental History* 15 (2): 236–67. <https://doi.org/10.1093/envhis/emq033>.
- Chin, Vivian Fumiko. 2004. "Gestures of Noncompliance: Resisting, Inventing, and Enduring in *Citizen 13660*." *Amerasia Journal* 30 (2): 21–42. <https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.30.2.4712282231nm205k>.
- Chon-Smith, Chong. 2015. "Afro-Asian Rhythms and Rhymes: The Hip-Hop and Spoken Word Lyricists of I Was Born with Two Tongues and the Mountain Brothers." In *East Meets Black: Asian and Black Masculinities in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. University Press of Mississippi.
- Christen, Kimberly, and Jane Anderson. 2019. "Toward Slow Archives." *Archival Science* 19: 87–116.
- Cifor, Marika, Michelle Caswell, Alda Allina Migoni, and Noah Geraci. 2018. "'What We Do Crosses over to Activism': The Politics and Practice of Community Archives." *The Public Historian* 40 (2): 69–95.
- Cole, Dennis. 2011. *Competitive Drum Corps in the United States: An Ethnographic Field Study*. Sights & Sounds.
- Daughtry, J. Martin. 2015. *Listening to War: Sound, Music, Trauma, and Survival in Wartime Iraq*. Oxford University Press.
- Destination America: Journey of the Paper Sons*. 2013. Performed by The Sacramento Mandarins. Sacramento, CA. Digital, 11:42.
- Dora, Veronica della. 2021. "Listening to the Archive: Historical Geographies of Sound." *Geography Compass* 15 (11). <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12599>.
- Downey, Anthrony. 2013. "Exemplary Subjects: Camps and the Politics of Representation." In *Giorgio Agamben: Legal, Political and Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by Tom Frost. Routledge.
- Espiritu, Yen. 1993. *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities*. 1st edition. Temple University Press.

- Fellezs, Kevin. 2007. "Silenced but Not Silent: Asian Americans and Jazz." In *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America*. Duke University Press.
- Fellezs, Kevin. 2019. *Listen but Don't Ask Question: Hawaiian Slack Key Guitar across the Transpacific*. Duke University Press.
- Finnegan, Ruth. (1989) 2007. *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town*. Wesleyan University Press.
- Flinn, Andrew, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd. 2009. "Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy, and the Mainstream." *Archival Science* 9: 71–86.
- Foucault, Michel. (1975) 1979. *Discipline and Punish*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. Vintage Books.
- Fukui Mortuary. 2004. "HOW IT ALL STARTED | Our Story | Fukui Mortuary of Los Angeles." Fukui Mortuary. <https://www.fukuimortuary.com/111>.
- Gambirazzio, Gerardo Corral. 2009. "The Parallax View: Race, Land and the Politics of Place-Making in Locke, California." Ph.D. diss., University of California, Davis.
- Garofalo, Reebee, Erin T. Allen, and Andrew Snyder, eds. 2020. *HONK!: A Street Band Renaissance of Music and Activism*. Routledge.
- Gillenkirk, Jeff, and James Motlow. (1987) 2006. *Bitter Melon: Inside America's Last Rural Chinese Town*. Nine Mile Press.
- Gilliland, Anne J., and Michelle Caswell. 2016. "Records and Their Imaginaries: Imagining the Impossible, Making Possible the Imagined." *Archival Science* 16: 53–75.
- Giroux, Henry. 2003. "Spectacles of Race and Pedagogies of Denial: Anti-Black Racist Pedagogy Under the Reign of Neoliberalism." *Communication Education* 52 (3–4): 191–211.
- Hartman, Saidiya. 1997. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford University Press.

- Hartman, Saidiya. 2008. "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe* 12 (2): 1–14.
- Honeck, Mischa. 2018. *Our Frontier Is the World: The Boy Scouts in the Age of American Ascendancy*. Cornell University Press.
- Hong, Christine. 2014. "Introduction." In *Citizen 13660*, by Miné Okubo. University of Washington Press.
- Hoskins, Janet Alison, and Viet Thanh Nguyen, eds. 2014. *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field*. Intersections: Asian and Pacific American Transcultural Studies. University of Hawaii Press.
- Hosokawa, Shuhei. 1999. "Soy Sauce Music: Haruomi Hosono and Japanese Self-Orientalism." In *Widening the Horizon: Exoticism in Post-War Popular Music*, edited by Philip Hayward. Perfect Beat Publications.
- Izui, Richard, dir. 1990. *Go For Broke: The Nisei Ambassadors Reunion*. With Tina Izui Hill. VHS, 40:00.
- Johnston, George Toshio. 2020. "Korean War Vet Min Tonai's Memorable Memoir." *Pacific Citizen* (Los Angeles), November 6.
<https://www.pacificcitizen.org/korean-war-vet-min-tonais-memorable-memoir/>.
- Jorge, Jamil. 2017. "I Think We Sounded Black!': Space and Community in Black Drum and Bugle Corps." M.A. thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- Jorge, Jamil. 2022. "Youth and Intersectional Belonging in Drum & Bugle Corps Subculture." Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- Kagiwada, George. 1982. "Report on Locke: A Historical Overview and Call for Action." *Amerasia Journal* 9 (2): 57–78.
<https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.9.2.923452p764329503>.
- Kajikawa, Loren. 2012. "The Sound of Struggle: Black Revolutionary Nationalism and Asian American Jazz." In *Jazz/Not Jazz: The Music and Its Boundaries*. University of California Press.

- Kastin, David. 2010. "Fred Ho and the Evolution of Afro-Asian New American Multicultural Music." *Popular Music and Society* 33 (1): 1–8.
- Keebaugh, Aaron C. 2002. "Drum and Bugle Corps: Lacunae in American Musical History." The Association for Research in the Marching Arts and Sciences RAM Virtual Symposium, September 10.
- Khalifa, Joseph. 2024. *The Mandarins 2024 History Night Presentation*. Directed by Scott Jow. Digital, 32:56.
- Kheshti, Roshanak. 2015. *Modernity's Ear: Listening to Race and Gender in World Music*. New York University Press.
- Kim, Chang-Hee. 2013. "Asian Performance on the Stage of American Empire in Flower Drum Song." *Cultural Critique* 85: 1–37.
- Kim, Sojin. 2020. "George Yoshida | Densho Encyclopedia." George Yoshida | Densho Encyclopedia, October 4. <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/George%20Yoshida/>.
- Koyasan Beikoku Betsuin Buddhist Temple. 2006. "Koyasan Troop 379 Boy Scouts of America 75th Anniversary Commemorative Program." Japanese American National Museum.
- Kumei, Teruko Imai. 1996. "'Skeleton in the Closet': The Japanese American *Hokoku Seinen-Dan* and Their 'Disloyal' Activities at the Tule Lake Segregation Center during World War II." *The Japanese Journal of American Studies*, no. 7: 67–102.
- Liu, Helena. 2017. "Beneath the White Gaze: Strategic Self-Orientalism among Chinese Australians." *Human Relations* 70 (7): 781–804. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726716676323>.
- Liu, Runchao. 2021. "Sounding Orientalism: Radical Sounds and Affects of Asian American Women Who Rock." Ph.D., University of Minnesota. <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/ucr.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/sounding-orientalism-radical-sounds-affects-asian/docview/2572600664/se-2?accountid=14521>.
- Lodha, Suresh K., John Beahan, Travis Heppe, Abigail Joseph, and Brett Zane-Ulman. 1997. *MUSE: A Musical Data Sonification Toolkit*.

<https://repository.gatech.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/c88e8515-0f96-41bf-870b-6908a62c9fb2/content>.

Lonetree, Amy. 2012. *Decolonizing the Museum: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. First Peoples: New Directions in Indigenous Studies. The University of North Carolina Press.

Lonetree, Amy. 2019. "A Heritage of Resilience: Ho-Chunk Family Photographs in the Visual Archive." *The Public Historian* 41 (1): 34–50.

Lyon, Cherstin M. 2020. "Japanese American Citizens League." Japanese American Citizens League | Densho Encyclopedia.
https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Japanese_American_Citizens_League/.

Lyon, Cherstin M. 2024. "Segregation." Segregation | Densho Encyclopedia, Densho.org, September 9. <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Segregation/>.

Marutani, Bill. 1966. "East Wind: A Proud Salute." *Pacific Citizen* (Los Angeles), September 2.

May, Richard P. 2005. "Restoring 'The Big Parade.'" *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 5 (2): 140–46.

McCormick II, J. P., and Charles E. Jones. 1993. "The Conceptualization of Deracialization." In *Dilemmas of Black Politics*, edited by Georgia Persons. Harper Collins College Publishers.

McNeill, William Hardy. 1995. *Keeping Together in Time*. In *Keeping Together in Time*. Harvard University Press.
<https://www.degruyter.com/document/isbn/9780674040878/html>.

Mok, Christine, and Aimee Bahng. 2017. "Transpacific Overtures: An Introduction." *Journal of Asian American Studies* 20 (1): 1–9.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/jaas.2017.0001>.

National Park Service. 2015. "Robert Ross Photography." Robert Ross Photography - Tule Lake National Monument (U.S. National Park Service), National Park Service, March 1. <https://www.nps.gov/tule/learn/photosmultimedia/robert-ross-photography.htm>.

- Oda, Meredith. 2021. "Mobility and Japanese American Resettlement during and after World War II." Paper. Unsettling Transpacific Ecologies: The Association for Asian American Studies 2021 Annual Conference, Online, April 8.
- Odello, Denise. 2016. "Performing Tradition: History, Expression, and Meaning in Drum Corps Shows." *Popular Music and Society* 39 (2): 241–58.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2015.1065623>.
- Odello, Denise. 2020. "Ritualized Performance and Community Identity: A Historical Examination of Drum Corps Competition in the United States." *International Journal of Community Music* 13 (1): 65–79.
https://doi.org/10.1386/ijcm_00010_1.
- Okubo, Miné. (1946) 2014. *Citizen 13660*. University of Washington Press.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. (1988) 2015. *Racial Formation in the United States*. 3rd ed. Routledge.
- Osheroff, Raphael, and Robert Zinko. 2002. "The Big Parade: The Veterans Organizations and the Drum and Bugle Corps Movement." In *A History of Drum & Bugle Corps*, vol. 1. Sights & Sounds.
- Pacific Citizen* (Los Angeles). 1942. "Japanese Hail Independence Day at WRA Centers." July 9.
- Pirtle, Scooter. 2002. "The Evolution of the Bugle." In *A History of Drum & Bugle Corps*, vol. 1. Sights & Sounds.
- Rafu Shimpo* (Los Angeles). 1931. "Citizens' League to Hear City Office Candidates." April 20.
- Rafu Shimpo* (Los Angeles). 1932a. "Boy Scouts Installation Planned for Next Saturday | Ceremonies For Troop 79 of Eighteen Members Will Soon Be Held at Daishi Mission." January 31.
- Rafu Shimpo* (Los Angeles). 1932b. "New Boy Scout Body Installed." February 8.
- Rafu Shimpo* (Los Angeles). 1933a. "Boy Scout Band On Air Program." May 7.

- Rafu Shimpō* (Los Angeles). 1933b. "Eight Daishi Mission Scouts Attend Civic Service Camp Today | Troop 79 Take Part in Scout Movies; Drum-Bugle Corp to Play Friday." June 17.
- Rafu Shimpō* (Los Angeles). 1933c. "Second Generation Youths Add Color and Pep to Long Beach Cherry Fete | Crowd of 100 Enjoy Entertainment Offered by Local Japanese." May 1.
- Rafu Shimpō* (Los Angeles). 1934. "Nisei Scouts to Be Given High Honor | President Roosevelt Medal Won by Troop 79; Parade Through Lil' Tokio on Sunday." February 7.
- Rafu Shimpō* (Los Angeles). 1937. "Scouts to Sail For Vacation Nippon Visit | Leave on Monday | Pride of Lil' Tokio Plan First Scout Vacation Jaunt to Orient." June 27.
- Rafu Shimpō* (Los Angeles). 1939. "Nisei Appear on Roosevelt Camp Benefit | Roosevelt High Program to Provide Summer Camps For East L.A. Youths." September 17.
- Raykoff, Ivan. 2020. "Difference." In *Another Song for Europe: Music, Taste, and Values in the Eurovision Song Contest*. Routledge.
- Roberts, T. Carlis. 2016. *Resounding Afro Asia: Interracial Music and the Politics of Collaboration*. American Musicspheres. Oxford University Press.
- Robertson, Marta. 2017. "Ballad for Incarcerated Americans: Second Generation Japanese American Musicking in World War II Camps." *Journal of the Society for American Music* 11 (3): 284–312.
- Robinson, Dylan. 2020. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Sakakeeny, Matt. 2013. *Roll with It: Brass Bands in the Streets of New Orleans*. Refiguring American Music. Duke University Press.
- San Francisco Chronicle* (San Francisco). 1942. "Enemy Aliens: Japanese at Tanforan Raise U.S. Flag and Pledge Allegiance to Our Nation." May 25.

- Saporiti, Julian. 2016. "Dances in the Desert: Swing Bands in WWI Japanese Internment Camps." Paper. Society for Ethnomusicology 61st Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C., November 10.
- Scott, James C. 2006. "Cities, People, and Language." In *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, edited by Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta. Blackwell Publishing.
- Shelemay, Kay. 2011. "Musical Communities: Rethinking the Collective in Music." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64 (2): 349–90.
- Smith, Robert. 2002. "The Giant Killer - The 1980s." In *A History of Drum & Bugle Corps*, edited by Steve Vickers, vol. 1. Sights & Sounds.
- Snyder, Andrew. 2022. *Critical Brass: Street Carnival and Musical Activism in Olympic Rio de Janeiro*. Wesleyan University Press.
- Solis, Gabriel Daniel. 2018. "Documenting State Violence: (Symbolic) Annihilation & Archives of Survival." *KULA: Knowledge Creation, Dissemination, and Preservation Studies* 2 (1): 7.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. 2010. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400835478>.
- Stone, Jonathan W. 2015. "Listening to the Sonic Archive: Rhetoric, Representation, and Race in the Lomax Prison Recordings." *Enculturation*, no. 19.
<https://www.enculturation.net/listening-to-the-sonic-archive>.
- Sutherland, Tonia, and Alyssa Purcell. 2021. "A Weapon and a Tool: Decolonizing Description and Embracing Redescription as Liberatory Archival Praxis." *International Journal of Information, Diversity, and Inclusion* 5 (1).
- Suzuki, Erin, and Aimee Bahng. 2020. "The Transpacific Subject in Asian American Culture." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Asian American Literature and Culture*. Oxford University Press.
- Sward, Rosalie. 2002. "The Evolution of Musical and Visual Design." In *A History of Drum & Bugle Corps*, vol. 1. Sights & Sounds.

- Tacorda, Ryan. 2004. "Constructing Chinese American Identity through Film and Theatre: Flower Drum Song as Ingroup Narrative and as Counterstory Comment." *UCLA Asian Pacific American Law Journal* 9 (1): 118–42.
- Talusan, Mary. 2009. "Gendering the Philippine Brass Band: Women of the Ligaya Band and National University Band, 1920s–1930s." *Musika Jornal* (Quezon City) 5: 33–47.
- Talusan, Mary. 2021. *Instruments of Empire: Filipino Musicians, Black Soldiers, and Military Band Music during US Colonization of the Philippines*. University of Mississippi Press.
- To the Edge*. 1996. With The Sacramento Mandarins. Sacramento, CA. Digital, 11:37.
- Tonai, Min. 2010. "Min Tonai Interview I." Interview by Tom Ikeda. (Los Angeles), Densho, September 2. Digital. Densho.org. <https://ddr.densho.org/interviews/ddr-densho-1000-354-1/>.
- Troop 197 Chuo Gakkuen. 1938. "197 Hi-Lites: Tenth Anniversary." George Yoshida Collections 200.400.2. Japanese American National Museum.
- Tsai, Riona. 2024. "Los Angeles Chinese Drum & Bugle Corps (Imperial Dragons): 1954-1977." Los Angeles Chinese Drum & Bugle Corps (Imperial Dragons, Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, January 22. <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/445d4315ed564652a1ea599f755f4fa2>.
- Tsukahara, Yasuko. 2013. "State Ceremony and Music in Meiji-Era Japan." *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 10 (2): 223–38.
- Tuchman, Gaye. 1978. "Introduction: The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media." In *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*, edited by Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, and James Benet. Oxford University Press.
- Vickers, Steve, ed. 2002. *A History of Drum & Bugle Corps*. Vol. 1. Sights & Sounds.
- Vickers, Steve, ed. 2003. *A History of Drum & Bugle Corps*. Vol. 2. Sights & Sounds.

- Wang, Grace. 2015. *Soundtracks of Asian America: Navigating Race through Musical Performance*. Duke University Press.
- Waseda, Minako. 2005. "Extraordinary Circumstances, Exceptional Practices: Music in Japanese American Concentration Camps." *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8 (2): 171–209. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jaas.2005.0044>.
- Waseda, Minako. 2017. "Music in Japanese American Concentration Camps: The Film Hidden Legacy and Its Impact on the Collective Memory." *Témoigner. Entre Histoire et Mémoire*, no. 124 (April): 113–23. <https://doi.org/10.4000/temoigner.5765>.
- Waterton, Emma, and Laurajane Smith. 2010. "The Recognition and Misrecognition of Community Heritage." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16 (1–2): 4–15.
- Weglyn, Michi. 1976. *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps*. Morrow.
- Wells, Alyssa. 2022. "Falling Out of Step: Belonging, Grit, and Drum Corps International's Moment of Reckoning." Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan.
- Wilson, Catherine M., and Suresh K. Lodha. 1996. *Listen: A Data Sonification Toolkit*.
- Wong, Deborah. 2009. "Don't Fence Me In: Popular Music Studies and Neoliberalism." IASPM-US annual meeting, University of California, San Diego, May 29.
- Wong, Deborah. 2019. *Louder and Faster: Pain, Joy, and the Body Politic in Asian American Taiko*. American Crossroads. University of California Press.
- Wooden, Isaiah Matthew. 2025. *Reclaiming Time: Race, Temporality, and Black Expressive Culture*. Northwestern University Press.
- Yoshida, George. 1997. *Reminiscing in Swingtime: Japanese Americans in American Popular Music, 1925-1960*. National Japanese American Historical Society.
- Yoshihara, Mari. 2007. *Musicians from a Different Shore: Asians and Asian Americans in Classical Music*. Temple University Press.

Zeman, Andreas. 2023. "Wiriyamu and the Colonial Archive: Reading It Against the Grain? Along the Grain? Read It at All!" *History in Africa* 50 (May): 206–36. <https://doi.org/10.1017/hia.2023.2>.

Archival Collections

DeVincent, Sam Collection of Illustrated American Sheet Music. Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

Flaherty, John Collection. King Library Special Collections & Archives, San Jose State University, San Jose, CA.

Fujimoto, Mas Collection. Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, CA.

Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Records, 1930-1974. BANC MSS 67/14 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA.
<https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf5j49n8kh>

Kaji, Bruce and Frances Collection. Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, CA.

Kakimoto, Ikey Family Collection. Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, CA

Kei Kokubun Collection. Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, CA.

Lindley, James G. Collection. Densho Digital Repository, Densho.org, Seattle, WA.

Okubo, Miné Collection. Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, CA.

Uragami, Robert Collection. Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, CA.

War Relocation Authority. Record Group 210, 48, Tule 425 – Boxes 274-5, Pro-Japan Organizations and Unauthorized Publications. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

Yoshida, George Collection. Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, CA.