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# The Role of Amache Family Objects in the Japanese American Internment Experience: Examined Through Object Biography and Object Agency

## Abstract

This project investigates the meaning of Japanese American families' personal possessions associated with internment through the concepts of object biography and object agency. It uses material culture analysis to help anthropologists understand the Japanese American internment experience, specifically through a case study at Amache, the Japanese American internment camp in southeastern Colorado. Five semi-structured phone interviews, and one structured email interview, are the primary data used to explore the importance of material culture associated with the site and to help preserve the cultural heritage of Amache. Object agency and object biography are key components of the new material culture theory. In this project, object biography concerns how examining different meanings, values, uses, and contexts over time can help anthropologists better understand the Japanese American internment experience. Object agency involves analyzing the relationship between former internees' families and their personal possessions. One of the crucial ways to investigate this concept is understanding why museum donors decided to donate their family items to a museum. It also involves why objects were donated specifically to the Amache museum, instead of to other museums that have Japanese American collections. This thesis suggests there are multiple patterns and themes in the relationships between museum donors and their objects that relate to the Japanese American internment experience.

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Examined Through Object Biography and Object Agency

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

Rebecca M. Cruz

August 2016

Advisor: Dr. Bonnie Clark

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## **ABSTRACT**

This project investigates the meaning of Japanese American families' personal possessions associated with internment through the concepts of object biography and object agency. It uses material culture analysis to help anthropologists understand the Japanese American internment experience, specifically through a case study at Amache, the Japanese American internment camp in southeastern Colorado. Five semi-structured phone interviews, and one structured email interview, are the primary data used to explore the importance of material culture associated with the site and to help preserve the cultural heritage of Amache. Object agency and object biography are key components of the new material culture theory. In this project, object biography concerns how examining different meanings, values, uses, and contexts over time can help anthropologists better understand the Japanese American internment experience. Object agency involves analyzing the relationship between former internees' families and their personal possessions. One of the crucial ways to investigate this concept is understanding why museum donors decided to donate their family items to a museum. It also involves why objects were donated specifically to the Amache museum, instead of to other museums that have Japanese American collections. This thesis suggests there are multiple patterns and themes in the relationships between museum donors and their objects that relate to the Japanese American internment experience.

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Multiple scholars involved in this thesis must also be acknowledged for their guidance and hard work in making this a successful endeavor. Dr. Esteban Gomez, immediately after arriving to the university, helped guide me throughout the writing process during my second year. I must, of course, thank Dr. Bonnie Clark for her leadership throughout the entire research and writing process. She helped me gain rapport with Amache community members by inviting me to a number of community events.

This thesis has certainly been the most difficult project I have ever undertaken, and so, I feel that it is appropriate to thank my family and my graduate student cohort for their constant support and encouragement throughout all stages of this project.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Background

The Amache Incarceration Facility may have been stripped of most of its infrastructure soon after the end of World War II, but all material evidence was not lost. In fact, many former internees kept possessions from the Colorado Japanese American internment camp with them. For many Japanese American families, these personal possessions were perhaps all that they had left as they ventured into an uncertain future.

During World War II, all men, women, and children of Japanese ancestry living in designated “exclusion areas” on the West Coast of the United States were ordered by the Western Defense Command to leave their homes and live in one of ten prison camps in the central U.S. This was justified by government officials as a “military necessity.” Overwhelming fear of Japanese espionage and terrorism, which has never to this day been corroborated, was fueled by political rhetoric and the media. This was a major factor for excluding Japanese Americans from the West Coast (CWRIC 1982, 2).

Before they were incarcerated, Japanese Americans were told by the WRA (War Relocation Authority) that they could only take to the internment camps what they could carry (CWRIC 1982, 11). The majority were only able to bring what they could fit inside a suitcase or two. There was little room for anything but the essentials. When they arrived

at Amache, each barrack was completely barren, except for a cot for each person and a light bulb hanging from the ceiling. The lack of family possessions as well as the inadequate housing accommodations forced internees to make do with what they had. This included finding wood from the camp construction and packing materials to make furniture or purchasing items from mail order catalogues. Almost everything was reused (Simmons and Simmons 2004, 7).

Seventy years later, former internees and their families actively donate their possessions from Amache to the Amache museum. This is a community-based museum, managed by the Amache Preservation Society, located near the Amache Incarceration facility, in Granada, Colorado. The Amache museum preserves these objects for public interpretation and education, with the purpose of teaching the general public about a rather overlooked part of American history. Granada High School students, supervised by their principal, John Hopper, primarily curate the collections and operate the museum.

### **Research Questions and Hypothesis**

This project is structured through three general research questions. They are as follows:

- How do object biographies help us, as anthropologists, understand the Japanese American internment experience?
- How can examining objects through object agency help us understand the Japanese American internment experience?

- Why are museum donors donating their items to the Amache museum, and how does this relate to object biography and agency?

Each of these research questions highlight the importance of understanding objects so that Amache's cultural heritage can be further preserved.

In preparing for this project, I had several hypotheses in mind when considering what objects meant to Amache families. First, I suggested objects kept after camp did have significant meaning to their owners. I did not think museum donors were giving away their family items because they were meaningless. In addition, I suspected there was likely multiple individual factors that play a role in whether objects were purposely forgotten due to the painful experience, or distinctively interactive in their lives. Furthermore, I suspected objects kept after camp still had a significant impact on Amache families' lives today. These all relate to the Japanese American internment experience.

### **Contribution to Anthropology**

This project investigates object biographies and object agency as it has contributed to the Japanese American internment experience. In the process, it analyzes the complex meanings, values, and roles of objects associated with the forced relocation of Japanese Americans and their impact on Japanese American internment experience. This project recognizes the importance of understanding the different kinds of values that are placed on objects associated with this experience, and how this changes after incarceration, whether through 'purposeful forgetfulness' or as a 'locus of memory.'

It also reveals important insights in oral history which helps preserve the cultural heritage at Amache.

In making a contribution to the field, this project was shaped by a number of assumptions. I identify object agency through the relationship between the donor and his or her personal possessions as they unfold in interviews. Furthermore, this project regards objects as active agents in the personal remembrance of Japanese American internment. It accounts for the complexity of this relationship and its changing nature over time. It also recognizes that these personal possessions play a significant role in former internees' and their families' lives.

Before continuing with this project, it is important to state what is not addressed in this project. It does not, for the most part, concern the role of those objects which are still owned by internees. Some interviews discuss objects that were donated to other internment camp museums, or those that are still in the family's keeping. Since these objects were key in the storytelling process, they are included in this thesis. However, the majority of objects on which I focus were donated to the Amache Museum. This thesis does not go into detail about the role of objects in the home, since interviews were mainly conducted over the phone. It also does not directly address Amache archaeological collections.

This project is focused on interviews with five museum donors, each who have donated at least one object to the Amache Museum. These museum donors include, Mr. Minoru Tonai, Mr. Bob Akaki, Mr. Dean Ogawa, Mr. Edwin Yamada, and Mr. Peter Furuta. Ms. Francis Palmer was also interviewed, to speak about the wooden relief

sculpture she temporarily donated to History Colorado. Each museum donor had a unique story to tell about their objects and their families' lives during and after incarceration. However, because of this small sample, the research conducted should not be assumed representative of the meanings and social lives of all Amache objects. It is also only specific to how the interviewers felt about Amache family objects.

## **Key Terms and Concepts**

### ***Incarceration Terminology***

There are a number of terms that must be described before going forward in this thesis. Throughout this project, I refer to Amache as an incarceration facility instead of a relocation center. The latter terminology is seen as a euphemism that underplays the pain and suffering Japanese Americans faced during and after World War II. In some instances of this thesis, Amache is referred to as "camp," which is a term casually used by the Japanese American community to state the place they were incarcerated. Japanese Americans who were historically forced from their homes and incarcerated are called internees or incarcerated, instead of evacuees. This follows the Japanese American community's terminology. Evacuees insinuates that they had someplace else to go besides an internment camp. They did not, however, and were treated as prisoners. After incarceration, Japanese Americans are referred to as former internees in this project.

### ***Generation Terminology***

In Japanese American culture, there are unique names for each generation in the United States. *Issei*, for example, refers to first generation Japanese Americans. *Nisei*, means second generation, those born in the United States. *Sansei* are third generation Japanese Americans. All of the people interviewed were *Nisei* or *Sansei*. These terms are important to consider because they are critical cultural constructs within these groups that relate to how people feel about their personal possessions. They will also be further discussed in the background chapter of this project.

### ***Object Biography***

Amache family objects, in their multiple meanings and biographies, have become enmeshed in the internees' and their families' behaviors and overall relationship to the internment experience. These objects theoretically "lived" through this experience, and therefore, can speak to this history and to the identity of Japanese Americans. This may be revealed through an analysis of object biographies, which involves examining the different life stages of an object. This may incorporate an analysis of multiple owners, uses, contexts over time (Kopytoff 1986, 68).

Although previous studies address the values, meanings, and roles of objects associated with forced human displacement, this particular study examines how these aspects of Amache Museum objects provide key insights into understanding the Japanese American internment experience. This includes information about how museum donors want their history to be preserved through their objects. This study also helps us, as



anthropologists, understand why people who have gone through forced displacement want to donate their cherished possessions to a museum.

Insights gathered through studying Amache family object biographies can tell us more about the meaning of the Japanese American experience. Each object has a different story to tell to add to the literature on this topic, and so, each object should be examined closely and studied to interpret both the meaning and the social life of the object. Personal stories from museum donors about these objects can highlight the meanings of these objects in great detail. These are stories that should be preserved in order to ensure the Japanese American internment history can be told to its full potential. This leads me to my second research question.

These object biographies can also help the general public understand the Japanese American internment experience. The public should understand why these objects were donated, and the associated multiple meanings through time, will help the public understand this history. In addition, one of the project's intentions is to preserve interviews conducted with museum donors. In theory, the Amache Museum could use these to help preserve the history and interpret it to the public.

### ***Object Agency***

An examination of Amache objects through object agency is an equally important analysis in this project. Studying the meaning of objects through object agency is essential because it investigates the role of peoples' possessions in their lives. The object agency concept accepts that things have value and have some role, whatever that may be.

This concept plays a crucial role in the material culture studies because it infers that objects are not just reflections of humanity (Miller 2005, 11). Object agency complements object biography, in that it further investigates object meaning, and can fill in the gap in understanding which role objects played throughout time.

It is equally important to consider why people donate their things. This was the primary question asked during interviews because it can reveal an abundant information about the meaning of objects. This question is not often asked in typical museum donor interviews, but for this project, it is important to consider. In some way, this project is expanding the museum donor interview process. This question also relates to object agency. The reasoning behind why people donate their things can reveal if an object has agency or it does not. If it does, it can reveal what agency that object possess.

### **Thesis Outline**

I initially became attracted to this project because I was interested in objects associated with difficult heritage. In particular, I wanted to understand the meaning of objects before and after tragedy, specifically the meaning to their owners. I was drawn to Amache because of its active and spirited community members. The community leaders involved, some of which I have interviewed, are forthright in preserving Amache so that the public can better understand Japanese American internment. I share with them a belief that it is important to preserve Amache's cultural heritage so that these series of events do not happen again. It is my hope that through this research, I can help educate

the public about the importance of material culture in the preservation and education of difficult heritage.

Before my fieldwork is described and analyzed, a brief history of Japanese American internment and museums that collect objects associated with difficult heritage will be discussed to provide context. This background chapter is then followed by an explanation of material culture theory, including the reasoning for why this theory was chosen. Next, a discussion of the methods used in this project are outlined as well as the rationale behind them. Lastly, an analysis of object agency and object biography are discussed, as well as an overall conclusion.

## CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND

### **Japanese American Internment in the United States**

#### *Life leading up to Incarceration*

In preparing for a life in internment, Japanese Americans were forced to pack up their belongings for an unknown destination. Military officials authorized internees to pack “only what they could carry” (CWRIC 1982, 11). This meant that only a small amount of portable personal belongings were brought to camp in suitcases, trunks, or other similar items families could find on short notice. Oral history records illustrate how hard it was to leave valuables behind, and the importance of family at that time (Denshō 2015). The process of leaving for camp left many families in great despair as they watched their valuables sold for nearly nothing while being uprooted from their normal lives (Nagata 1993, 7). However, these hardships were not the first ones Japanese Americans encountered.

Japanese immigrants were not exactly welcomed when they came to the West Coast of the United States. During the mid to late nineteenth century, most of the first Japanese Americans were young and middle-aged businessmen and students who came in search of entrepreneurship and higher education (Wilson and Hosokawa 1980, 44). In the

twentieth century, more women and families immigrated together (Yoo 2000, 3). The increased emigration from Japan was largely influenced by was a diplomatic compromise in 1907 called the Gentleman's Agreement. The arrangement was designed so both nations could economically benefit from U.S. Japanese Immigration- Japan from economic remittances and the United States from the increased cheap workforce (Kurashige 2002, 22). This policy also came from residual racist principles towards Chinese immigrants, who came to America's West Coast earlier than the Japanese (Kurashige 2002, 16). American merchants and farmers quickly felt threatened by the presence of Japanese Americans, who mainly were self-employed in the agriculture or fishing industry (Robinson 2012, 46). Xenophobia was highly prevalent among the general public. Economic competitors as well as "opportunistic politicians" encouraged anti-Japanese sentiment (Robinson 2012, 43). There was a fear that all Asian Americans were coming to take jobs from Americans already living in the United States, even though Japanese immigration never reached high volumes (CWRIC 1982, 4) (Kurashige 2002, 16, 17).

The overwhelming fear and growing racial discrimination on the West Coast, specifically in California, Washington, and Oregon forced Japanese Americans to work even harder to create a decent living in the United States. Multiple factors hindered life as a Japanese American. For example, first generation Japanese Americans (Issei) were not legally able to own their own land in many states, including California, due to Alien Land Laws (Fugita *et al.* 2012, 8). This meant the Issei had to rent the land for unfairly high prices or the land was in their children's' name, who were part of the second generation

(Nisei). The Issei were also not allowed to apply for citizenship in the United States (Fugita *et al* 2012, 8). Although the Nisei were U.S. citizens by birthright, they still faced discrimination in public schools and in other interactions with their peers (Wilson and Hosokawa: 1980, 164). Japanese Americans were actively discriminated while doing ordinary errands around town, such as grocery shopping (Kurashige 2002, 313). These racial tensions led to the creation of Japanese American trade networks and business groups, so that they could help each other survive through mutual assistance (Robinson 2012, 5). These reciprocal relationships resulted in ethnic enclaves, such as Little Tokyo in Los Angeles. Here, Japanese American businessmen and consumers alike were able to feel comfortable in carrying out their daily routines (Kurashige 2002, 45). However, this further isolated the immigrant population and hindered acculturation into the broader United States.

With this history of discrimination in mind, one can imagine that when the Japanese Empire bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the American public, media, and military quickly pointed at Japanese Americans to blame for aiding the tragedy. Japanese Americans were greatly saddened upon hearing about what happened in Pearl Harbor. As the second generation Nisei were lined up to fight for their country, the media fueled public hysteria by blaming all Japanese Americans for committing espionage and aiding the Japanese Empire, although it was never proven (CWRIC 1982, 2, 5). More and more businesses were closed to Japanese Americans and xenophobia intensified. Curfews and driving restrictions were created in Japanese American neighborhoods (Hirasuna 2005, 14). Seemingly ordinary items such as cameras,

projectors, and radios were confiscated during unwarranted searches in Japanese American homes (Nagata 1993, 17). Almost immediately after Pearl Harbor, Japanese American community leaders were arrested and incarcerated without any proof they were involved in the bombing of Pearl Harbor (Robinson 2012, 2).

Individuals and organizations who were influential on the West Coast, including the military, made it their objective to convince the federal government the Japanese American population should be removed from the West Coast, for safety concerns. General John L. DeWitt, the Commanding General of the Western Defense Command, would play a role in developing Executive Order 9066. He is famously known for claiming the military should be fearful that something may happen shortly, citing the lack of fifth column activity by Japanese Americans as evidence it would happen soon. He also did not care that the majority of Japanese living in the country were U.S. citizens. Instead, he is quoted as saying, “A Japs’ a Jap” (Robinson 2012, 43).

DeWitt, with the aid of his colleagues, sent a recommendation to Francis Biddle, the Attorney General of Defense. Biddle objected, but the recommendation was later sent to Henry L. Stimson, the Secretary of War regardless of the objection (CWRIC 1982, 6). The recommendation was then given to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and would be eventually signed into executive order on February 19, 1942, ten weeks after Pearl Harbor (CWRIC 1982, 2). The recommendation stated that it was a “military necessity” to create “strategic military areas,” and exclude all those deemed a threat who were living in these areas (CWRIC 1982, 2). These areas included parts of California, Oregon, and Washington (Simmons and Simmons 2004, 16). This was obviously intended for the

removal of Japanese Americans from these areas, even though, of the 110,000 Japanese Americans living in these areas, two-thirds of the population were U.S. citizens (Robinson 2012, 43). The executive order made the exclusion of any ethnic group legal.

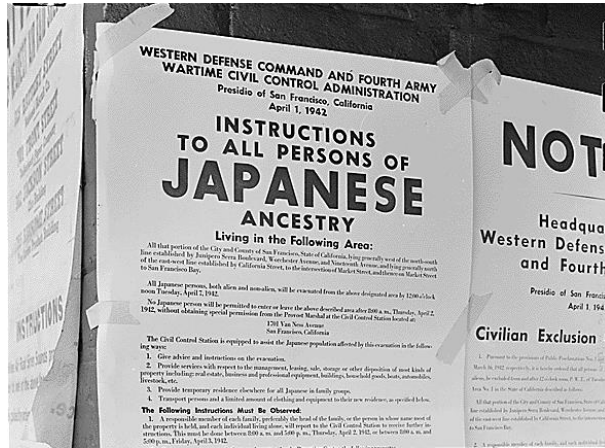


Figure 2.1: Image showing Evacuation Notice, Image Courtesy of the Japanese American Relocation Digital Archives

At first, the “relocation” process was voluntary (CWRIC 1982, 2). However, the military became frustrated with the slow progress, and soon all Japanese Americans were forcibly removed from their homes (CWRIC 1982, 9). The WRA (War Relocation Authority) was created for the purpose of overseeing the removal process, and transporting internees to the interior United States. It was also the government organization’s responsibility to determine where Japanese Americans should live in the interior (CWRIC 1982, 10).

Governors in most states selected, such as Arizona and Wyoming, did not welcome the Japanese American population with open arms. They were infuriated the United States government, in their eyes, were using their states as a “dumping ground” (CWRIC 1982, 10). They also made it extremely clear that Japanese Americans would not be able to own land in their states. Governor Ralph Carr, of Colorado, seemed to be



the only one with a different opinion. He stated before internment camps were required, that it was the American people's "civic duty" to welcome the Japanese Americans into these states (Harvey 2004, 57). Nevertheless, pressures from the majority of the governors, as well as from the American public in the interior states, made the WRA create ten internment camps, in which Japanese Americans would be incarcerated during World War II (CWRIC 1982, 10). These camps were located in California (Manzanar and Tule Lake), Arizona (Poston and Gila River), Colorado (Granada/Amache), Utah (Topaz), Idaho (Minidoka), Wyoming (Heart Mountain), and Arkansas (Rohwer and Jerome). The Granada Relocation Center is better known as Amache, which is the name for the camp's postal designation. Living in difficult areas with strict supervision, Japanese Americans were forced to live in appalling conditions, alike typical prison facilities (Harvey 2004, 80-81).

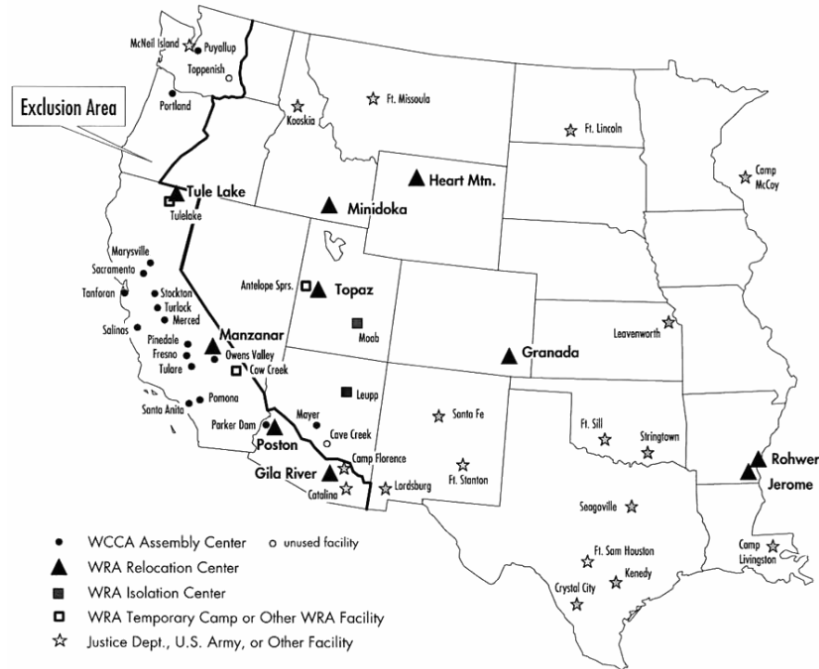


Figure 2.2: Map of Japanese American Internment Camps and Assembly Centers, Image Courtesy of the Japanese American Relocation Digital Archives

The WRA was not well equipped to follow through with the internment transportation process in a reasonable fashion. Most of the process was thrown together haphazardly, with little concern for the well-being of Japanese Americans. After the difficult task of selling belongings they could not carry with them, Japanese American families were put on buses to the assembly centers, where they awaited the long and uncomfortable journey to their assigned internment camp (CWRIC 1982, 2). The assembly centers, created first by the WCCA (Wartime Civilian Control Administration) were typically racetrack facilities, and often families were forced to sleep in horse stalls that overwhelmingly smelled like horse urine and manure (Robinson 2012, 44; Simmons and Simmons 2004, 16). Internees had no other choice but to stuff mattresses with straw to use to sleep. There was almost never any privacy, whether it was using the bathroom facilities or sleeping areas (CWRIC 1982, 151). There was much confusion, anger, and

fear among the internees, however most Japanese American families attempted to make the best of it. *Shikataganai*, which translated to “it can’t be helped,” and *gaman*, which means, “to accept with patience and dignity” were often used Japanese phrases (Hirasuna 2005, 7).

Internees were eventually put on out-of-service trains to the internment camps. A portion of those living in the Santa Anita assembly center and all who were in the Merced assembly center, were transported to Amache (Simmons and Simmons 2004, 4, 22). California residents came from both urban areas, such as Little Tokyo, and more rural agricultural areas inland. These trains were considered low priority, and so most of the time, they had to wait hours while higher priority trains passed them by on the tracks (Harvey 2004, 71). They were strictly told not to look out the windows, so there was no way internees could know where they were going. Seats were upright, which made it very uncomfortable to sleep or simply to sit on for days, as many had to endure if the trains’ military escorts did not let them get off (Harvey 2004, 72). Even though there was a train car reserved for the sick and families with infants, where they could somewhat lay down, the trip was evidently brutal for all. The conditions were extremely hard for the elderly and young children, and many had to be hospitalized after the trip (Harvey 2004, 72).

### ***Life at Amache***

After the long journey, the first internees soon discovered that the camp was not ready for them. Construction on many of the buildings, including the barracks, was still in progress. After being registered, medically examined, and escorted to their assigned

barracks, the first train passengers who reached Amache had to help finish the job of building camp (Harvey 2004, 74; Simmons and Simmons 2004, 21). At its peak, this would be the home for 7,318 internees from 1942-1945, and most remained unless they were able to obtain indefinite leave to pursue education, work, or enlist in the army (Harvey 2004, 200). Internees were also able to work in the camp, but were not able to make more than the lowest waged U.S. soldier, which was between eleven and nineteen dollars a month at the time. This was so the public would not complain that the internees had better lives than their own (Robinson 2012, 44).

Amache is located in southeastern Colorado, fifteen miles outside of the Kansas state line, with a high plains arid climate (Simmons and Simmons 2004, 4). The prairie plants are mostly composed of sagebrush, sunflowers, and cacti (Simmons and Simmons 2004, 3). The internment camp site environment includes high winds, unpredictable weather, and a desert landscape (Harvey 2004, 81). Most internees were not ready for the very cold weather, since they came from California. The WRA chose this area of Colorado because it was outside of major towns or cities, could be self-sufficient, and the land would be able to be used for farming, with proper irrigation (Harvey 2004, 59). Amache was the only camp bought or condemned completely from private landholders. Other camps were all at least partially on federal land. It was also among the few camps near other settlements. The small town of Granada was only one mile away (Harvey 2004, 60-61).

Amache was made up of a block system, which corresponded to a letter and number designation, with internee barracks made of crudely constructed frame structures

covered in asphalt roll roofing (Simmons and Simmons 2004, 7). In the barracks, some rooms were partitioned inside with walls that did not even reach the ceiling, which hindered any sense of privacy (CWRIC 1982, 158). The poorly constructed barely insulated walls also meant that leaks during storms were frequent, and it became extremely cold during the winter months. Each barrack contained a single light bulb hanging from the ceiling, cots, and a potbelly stove. The single room had a dirt floor, with the largest “apartment” reaching only 24 x 20 feet (Simmons and Simmons 2004, 7). Furniture, such as a dresser or vanity, was not provided (Harvey 2004, 82-85). Instead, internees had to be creative in constructing their own furniture by hand, using unfinished wood and leftover nails. These materials had to be gathered in the camp by themselves, the WRA did not provide wood for furniture, and some camp administrators attempted to punish internees for using the scavenged scrap material (Dusselier 2008, 21-22). The internment camp also included structures such as a mess hall, laundry facilities, a school, a Co-op, and a hospital (Shew and Kamp-Whittaker 2013, 304). There was also an isolated section reserved for administrative offices (Simmons and Simmons 2004, 6). The entire site was surrounded by barbed wire and guard towers for surveillance (Harvey 2004, 82).

Although internees were very far from their home, they were able to work together to make the camp comfortable in the best way they could. For example, some internees were able to obtain seedlings to plant trees for shade outside the barracks (Clark *et al.* 2014, 6; Simmons and Simmons 2004, 5). Others constructed traditional Japanese gardens to make their living environment more welcoming (Clark 2014, 7). Internees also

contributed to a highly productive farm at Amache (Simmons and Simmons 2004, 27). With the little money they had, internees also ordered items, such as clothing and toys, from catalogues like Sears and Roebuck and Company (Shew and Kamp-Whittaker 2013, 310). Internees were also able to walk to the nearby town of Granada or get transportation to Lamar, where they could do some shopping and get away from camp for a while. Internees had to, of course, have permission from the WRA officials before they were allowed to leave the camp at any time. Internees also created social organizations which ran dances for the younger generations, as well as sporting competitions, and workshops in traditional Japanese art (Simmons and Simmons 2004, 26).

Unfortunately, there were many ways life at camp hindered Japanese traditional cultural values. For example, meals were strictly scheduled, and the mess hall design disrupted the importance of family at the dinner table (Shew and Kamp-Whittaker 2013, 7). Children often sat with their friends instead of with their parents. Parents did not have the same authority as they once did back home, and many children became more independent from their families (Shew and Kamp-Whittaker 2013, 307). Crowded and dirty bathroom facilities insulted internees because of their value of privacy (Harvey 2004, 89). The barracks were also so small that families did not spend much time in them. Because most time was spent doing activities outside the barracks, the camp experience contributed to the deconstruction of the home (Shew and Kamp-Whittaker 2013, 313). Lastly, the Issei generation could no longer earn a living for the family, and most ended up having an abundance of leisure time. Therefore, the Issei patriarchal

leadership value was weakened through life at camp as well (Shew and Kamp-Whittaker 2013, 316).

There were multiple ways internees could leave the internment camps during the war. If they passed the loyalty test, they were eligible for resettlement outside the strategic military areas on the West Coast (CWRIC 1982, 12-13). Young men were also able to enlist in the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, which was made up of enlisted Japanese American servicemen (CWRIC 1982, 14). Numerous Nisei internees, through Supreme Court decisions, were able to obtain indefinite leave to achieve a college education or find employment (CWRIC 1982, 204). However, the Nisei were only able to go to the few colleges that would accept Japanese Americans, with the help of the newly organized National Japanese Student Relocation Council (Fugita et al 2012, 107; Robinson 2012, 45). Those permitted resettlement could not return to the military strategic areas. Some Nisei were uncertain if leaving the rest of their family would be the best option. In the case of resettlement, many were fearful of discrimination, and were also uncertain if they would be able to get a job at all (Fugita et al 2012, 106). They would lack the comfort of having their friends or family around. Others were happy to leave an oppressive family environment or troubled relationships (Fugita et al 2012, 106). It is important to note that the WRA decided to resettle eligible Nisei into places that did not have prominent Japanese American communities. This was intentional, in order to isolate them away from their community, which in their eyes, as well as President Roosevelt's, would promote integration into American society (Fugita et al 2012, 109; Robinson 2012, 3, 30).

### *Life after Incarceration*

In May of 1944, it was determined by the federal government that it was no longer a military necessity to keep Japanese Americans out of strategic military areas. However, President Roosevelt decided not to recognize this and instead delayed resettlement in hopes that he could use it as a political advantage in the next election (CWRIC 1982, 15-16). Some camps closed early in the fall of 1944, but all camps began to close in 1945 (Harvey 2004, 186). In terms of leaving camp, the WRA only provided a one-way train ticket to internees' destination (Nagata 1993, 14). Prior to the closing of camp, internees must have had a plan approved by the WRA for resettlement before leaving (Harvey 2004, 187). The WRA minimally helped ease the resettling process, and the federal agency officially disbanded in 1946 (Robinson 2012, 45).

Leaving camp was a very slow process for multiple reasons. Many internees were reluctant to leave since it was likely they would not find much of their property or belongings left back at home. Their future was uncertain and many internees feared going back to their hometowns or building a new life elsewhere. Those that traveled back home first wrote back about dangerous acts of violence, such as arson and shootings, against those returning back to the West Coast (Harvey 2004, 187; Robinson 2012, 47). The negative psychological impact of years of living behind barbed wire also made it hard to imagine starting life over again as a free American (Nagata 1993, 27). Others did not want to leave behind new friendships created during camp. Nevertheless, all internees left the internment camps by June 1946, with the exception of Tule Lake, which had to



undergo hearings for the detainees at the camp before it was officially closed (Nagata 1993, 14). Amache officially closed on October 15, 1945 (Harvey 2004, 199).

Picking up the pieces after camp and starting life over was certainly not easy. Many of those who went back to their homes, farms, and business found them in disrepair. They found that other minority groups on the West Coast took over traditionally Japanese ethnic enclaves during the war (Nagata 1993, 15). Californians who were not interned were not happy to see them return, and racial discrimination against Japanese Americans was still very prevalent. Internees who entrusted neighbors with belongings or property during the war often found their possessions stolen or in ruin (Nagata 1993, 17). Some tried to start over where they lived before, but others decided to move away and start a new life elsewhere. Former internees spread out across the country, both in the Midwest, the intermountain states, as well as the East Coast (Fugita *et al* 2012, 106). The uncertainty of where to go led to the creation of hostels were in Colorado for former internees (Harvey 2004, 192). Many former internees from Amache moved to Denver or other places in Colorado, but many others eventually moved back to the West Coast (Harvey 2004, 197).

This created a diaspora among the Japanese American community after the war. People moved away from their original homes to places that were more welcoming to Japanese Americans and to places where they could get a job. Former internees went to places where they had access to social welfare services and could face less economic discrimination than where they lived before the war (Robinson 2012, 5). Many were not able to get their pre-war leases back, and could not afford to buy land. Because of

housing discrimination, Japanese Americans were often forced to live in substandard housing situations. This created relationships with other minority groups forced to live in these areas, such as African Americans and Latino groups (Robinson 2012, 4, 46). Key urban areas to which Japanese Americans moved, included Detroit, Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago (Robinson 2012, 48). New communities formed across the United States. The YMCA and other organizations helped cater Japanese American social events in these new social networks (Robinson 2012, 46). For example, the Japanese American Citizens' League (JACL) chapters were formed where there were no previous Japanese Americans living prior to the war (Fugita *et al.* 2012, 132).

There were many differences in how both the Issei and Nisei responded after the war. The older generation had a more difficult time rebuilding their lives. Most were already middle aged or older, and found it very difficult to start a new business. Many Issei were forced to take menial jobs, which caused an abundance of shame and guilt (Robinson 2012, 46). During the 1950s and 60s, many of the Issei relied on their children's income, who were reaching adulthood during this era (Nagata 1993, 30). Many of the Nisei, on the other hand, decided to move away from their childhood homes and start a new life in an entirely different part of the country, or in the suburbs. Because the Nisei were American citizens, they often felt abandoned by their own country during the war, and more Nisei than Issei were outspoken on improving their quality of life (Nagata 1993, 31).

In 1948, Congress passed the Japanese Evacuation Claims Act, which allowed former internee families to make claims on property values lost during the war. However,

Japanese Americans did not receive all funds stolen away from them. According to Donna Nagata (1993), “[a]pproximately \$148 million in claims were filed under the act, but the government distributed only \$37 million in compensation between the years of 1948 and 1956” (1993, 19). It was clear to Japanese Americans that they still had to fight against numerous economic and social inequalities solely based on their ethnicity, in order to survive and become successful in the United States.

Some people may wonder why the majority of former internees did not express anger against the government and fight for their rights and reparations after the war. Some Japanese Americans did, but others simply chose to move forward from what had happened (Fugita *et al.* 2012, 113). Before the war, prominent racism and economic inequality made Japanese Americans believe they were second-class citizens (Nagata 1993, 26). This was further embedded in their identity from being forced to leave their homes and interned in crudely constructed incarceration facilities, with Japanese ancestry as their only crime. Some thought that protesting the government for their rights would make it seem like they were, in fact, disloyal Americans, so it was thought to be safer just to be quiet (Nagata 1993, 21).

There was also great shame and guilt in the Japanese American community from being incarcerated (Nagata 1993, 32). This stigma caused many of those incarcerated to avoid talking about life in camp to their children, even when asked (Hirasuna 2005, 6). Even though Japanese Americans were not the criminals, the military and public thought they were, they still internalized what had happened to them. It was not until the CWRIC report, the reparations which allocated \$20,000 to former internees in 1988, and formal

apology given by President Reagan, that many Japanese Americans started to talk about their experiences and losses during incarceration (Harvey 2004, 208; Simmons and Simmons 2004, 18). With civil rights an increasingly hot topic at the time, the Issei were finally able to obtain United States citizenship through the 1952 McCarran-Walter Immigration Act. Although because of their age as well as other factors, the Nisei generation was able to find more economic opportunities than their parents (Nagata 1993, 27).

Today, former internees and their families' personal belongings are at risk. In the spring of 2015, media spread news of a private auction to be held which included Amache artifacts. These items, now known as part of the Eaton Collection, were for sale because the owner was in desperate need of income. The Japanese American community was generally outraged by the sale of personal items associated with their unjust incarceration during the war. Because of the protest, the Eaton Collection is no longer for sale (Lednicer 2015). However, this does not mean that items are not sold daily on the internet, such as on eBay. This issue will be discussed further in another section of this project.

### **The Amache site and museum**

After the closure of Amache, buildings at the facility were sold complete or for raw materials to governmental units or schools for profit, so today, only the foundations and original roadways remain (Simmons and Simmons 2004, 3, 31). The land was sold as well to the town of Granada (Harvey 2004, 201-204). Today the internment camp is a

National Historic Landmark in order to preserve the Japanese American internment camp history, and the site is maintained by the Amache Preservation Society. There is a cemetery adjacent to the camp, which includes a memorial, installed in 1983, for remembering those that died at the camp and former internees at Amache who died in military service (Simmons and Simmons 2004, 4, 11). An annual pilgrimage held in the spring allows former internees and their descendants to come together in solidarity and reflect on the memories of internment (Simmons and Simmons 2004, 32).

The Amache museum is managed by the Amache Preservation Society, which is directed by John Hopper, principal of the Granada High School. Together with his high school students, they maintain the museum. In this way, the Granada High School students are able to spread awareness about their local history and internment in general, which is often an underrepresented topic in American history classes. Students are also able to learn about public interpretation and preservation of historic sites (Simmons and Simmons 2004, 12). It is run by students, so the museum is mainly open only during limited hours in the summer months.



Figure 2.3: Front entrance of the Amache museum, Image Courtesy of the Amache Preservation Society

The museum is a modest one-room building, with a small storage facility. The front side of the museum includes a model of the internment camp, which was designed by the Granada High School students. It also includes small exhibit spaces that explain the archaeology done at Amache and a display of suitcases and trunks donated by former Amache internees and their family members. In the space's interior, there are exhibit spaces for the Boy Scout troops in Amache as well as a reference section that include photographs taken by internees during camp. There is also a small area in the center where museum visitors are able to write about and personally reflect on Japanese American internment.



Figure 2.4: Front exhibits in the Amache museum

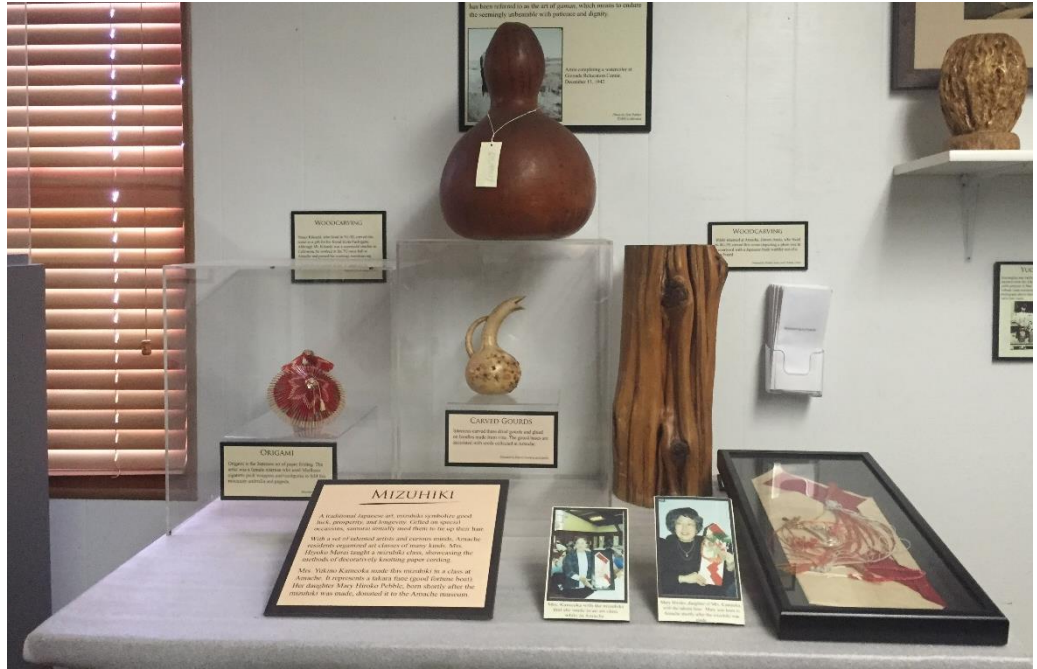


Figure 2.5 Exhibit on Amache internee artwork



Figure 2.6 Exhibit on Amache high school students

Amache museum donors go to John Hopper to donate their family possessions or other items associated with Amache. Collections are used for public interpretation such as exhibit display and presentations, as well as academic research. The collection includes: photographs, letters and diary entries written during camp, meal tickets and indefinite leave cards, yearbooks from the Amache high school; and issues of the camp, newspaper, *The Granada Pioneer*. The collection also includes various artworks made in



camp, clothing worn by former internees, and suitcases and other personal belongings which were owned by former internees.

### **Other Museums and Community Centers with Japanese American Internment Collections**

In addition to the Amache museum in Granada, those in charge of other Japanese American internment camps have created similar museums or community centers around the camps. For example, there are such places in Topaz, Utah, Rohwer, Arkansas, Manzanar, California, and Heart Mountain, Wyoming. The Japanese American National Museum (JANM) also collects items from the Japanese American internment camps, however it is not solely devoted to collecting, interpreting, and preserving these kinds of collections. JANM also focuses on other aspects of Japanese American identity and contemporary issues.

Community centers or museums surrounding a particular internment camp vary in size and design, but share similarities in purpose. A museum is a great opportunity to educate the public about the individual internment camps as well as to interpret how incarceration critically impacted Japanese American lives. Preservation of objects and the site itself is also key. The Topaz Museum has an exhibit gallery that features artwork made in camp, as well as a reconstructed barrack (Topaz Museum 2014). The museum in Rohwer is officially called the WWII Japanese American Internment Museum, and features Japanese American contemporary artists as well as oral history from former internees (Rohwer Heritage Site 2015). The Manzanar internment camp is part of the

National Park Service. Although they do not have a museum per se, they do have a visitor center with exhibit displays inside. Two reconstructed barracks and a mess hall can also be found at the site (National Park Service 2015). The Heart Mountain Interpretive Center includes interactive exhibits interpreting the Japanese American internment experience as well as an explanation of the prejudices before internment (Heart Mountain Interpretive Center 2013).

The Japanese American National Museum is located in the “Little Tokyo” of Los Angeles. The museum was officially opened in 1985 (JANM 2015). Because their mission considers all Japanese Americans, the museum is not entirely devoted to Japanese American internment collections. Instead, their goals mainly revolve around promoting ethnic diversity, as well as preserving and interpreting Japanese American culture and heritage (JANM 2015). This does not mean internment is at all forgotten in the museum. Many of the items associated with Japanese American internment at JANM are different types of artwork made in camp. Past exhibitions on internment include, “America’s Concentration Camps: Remembering the Japanese American Experience” and, “The View from Within: Japanese American Art from the Internment Camps, 1942-1945” (Ishizuka 2006, xviii; JANM 2015). The former exhibit became a traveling exhibit, and was displayed at Ellis Island (Ishizuka 2006, 160).

Through these exhibits, JANM has helped former internees and their children with the internment redress process, such as keeping the experience alive in memory. The museum has also stressed how imperative it is to move forward as well (Ishizuka 2006, xiii). It also has found ways, through public programming and education, to help the

Japanese American community specifically in Los Angeles. JANM uses the terms, “concentration camp” and “incarceration,” instead of simply using the word “camp” to address the real hardships instead of using euphemisms (Ishzuka 2006, 157). They collect all different types of objects and works on paper from internment as well (JANM 2015). As of 2016, JANM houses the Eaton Collection, although that may not be its final disposition.

## **Significance of Material Culture**

### ***Difficult Heritage Discourse***

There are multiple museums or heritage centers whose professionals are challenged with preserving and interpreting collections associated with difficult heritage. Difficult heritage may be defined as cultural property linked to sites, “dealing with genocide, political imprisonment, and conflict” (Roberts and Stone 2014, 15). It is also more generally described as “heritage that hurts” (Roberts and Stone 2014, 9). Many other scholars have focused their research on this issue as well. Objects associated with difficult heritage may come from a single tragic event or a time of hardship. They may serve as reminders of loss, but can also play a role in remembrance and acceptance and learning from the past in order to better the future. Many of these museums or places of heritage have similar histories as those associated with Japanese American internment.

Silke Arnold-de Simine suggests memorialization is becoming a popular field of study among museum professionals. In looking at mainly European museums, he states

that museums are “responsible for transforming living memory into institutionally constructed and sustained commemorative practices” (Arnold-de Simine 2013, 1-2). Museums visitors are directed in the way exhibits are designed to empathize with the specific tragedy and its victims, and sometimes have an emotional reaction (Arnold-de Simine 2013, 11). Museum professionals have approached memorialization by instilling “memory communities” (Arnold-de Simine 2013, 12). The ways memory is “mediated” in the museum is important to remember in understanding the relationship between objects and memory in Amache museum donations.

The World Trade Center memorials and museum have also played an important role in the analysis and preservation of difficult heritage. In the aftermath of the tragic events on September 11, 2001, locals came together right away to start the memorialization process. Mourners created a “viewing memorial walk,” which included the best viewing areas (Greenspan 2005, 377). Elizabeth Greenspan writes in her article, “A Global Site of Heritage? Constructing Spaces of Memory at the World Trade Center,” that people spontaneously create these socially constructed spaces of heritage that may be local, but that these sites of memory are really part of a global phenomenon. Furthermore, there is a sense of collectivity through the materiality at these “sites of heritage” (Greenspan 2005, 380). This could be writing on the walls, leaving groups of mementoes, and creating viewing areas as emergency personnel searched through the wreckage for survivors (Greenspan 2005, 377). When people create memorials by leaving objects at the site, like at the World Trade Center, there becomes a “physical creation of heritage space” (Greenspan 2005, 375). Greenspan also claims that these socially constructed

meanings will change over time. This is similar to the analysis of Amache family objects, where object meanings have changed over the course of seventy years. Today, there is now a 9/11 Memorial Museum whose mission is to honor the victims of the attacks and, “attest to the triumph of human dignity” (National September 11 Memorial & Museum 2015).

In *Places of Pain and Shame*, the authors stress that people more and more recognize the importance of preserving sites that may have a darker history than sites or institutions which collectively may be perceived as the “beautiful creations of the past” (Logan and Reeves 2008, 1). The authors state that, while it is true that the memories of tragedies may change over time, it is important to criticize when a new story is told only to better serve one’s own interests (Logan and Reeves 2008, 2). The book also includes a section on “atrocious tourism,” which is a growing interest in visiting horrific tragedies around the world, and should be considered as well. In accordance with other sources that concern the preservation and interpretation of difficult heritage, the authors state that these sites and the materiality associated with them is continuously contested, where the personal becomes political (Logan and Reeves 2008, 9).

*Preserving Memory* presents another way to look at difficult heritage, which focuses on how the Holocaust Museum was created. The author discusses the challenge to work with numerous constituents. Some people, for example, did not want a museum about the Holocaust in the United States. Creating the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, before the museum was designed and constructed, became a challenge for those involved. Different constituents, of course, want to see different components for the

museum. The question of who is to be included, and who should be left out of the story is another issue at hand which must be addressed. In the case of the Holocaust Museum, the author infers that the museum should be a part of national identity, and that the Holocaust is, “[t]oo important a story to be bounded by ethnic memory” (Linenthal 2001, 12).

Linenthal also stresses the importance of ‘who owns the memory,’ and the politics of representation, considering the emotional sensitivity of the topic at hand (2001, 38).

In *Displaced Heritage*, the Balkan Museum Network is addressed in its promotion of peacebuilding after conflict, as well as its association with memory construction.

Because of the losses to a specific ethnic group, the association of museums attempts to strengthen the groups’ identity. An exhibit was created that included personal objects of those involved in the BMN, which were casually laid out on a table for visitors to examine (Walters 2014, 97-98). Creating places to preserve heritage, whether it is a heritage site or museum, is one way in which to promote peacebuilding in places that have suffered a particular tragedy or loss (Walters 2014, 95).

These sources show how museums approach memorialization differently. They also highlight the significance of difficult heritage discourse in the museum. The next section will explain the importance of objects in this context. It will also explore how objects become integrated into the memorialization process.

### ***Object Biography and Object Agency***

My research involves an analysis of Amache family objects by examining their agency and their biographies in Japanese American internment. Generally, object

biography can be described as objects having a “life,” and understanding an object’s life, or history, can reveal information about humanity. Object agency, on the other hand, indicates that objects have an active role in people’s lives. Object biography and agency will be addressed in further detail in the analysis sections of this thesis.

*The Object Knowledge Framework* is a useful source in understanding object agency and object biography in a museum context. Elizabeth Wood and Kiersten Latham explain that it is important to situate an object so that a visitor does not perceive it as only providing entertainment (2014, 24). “The Object Knowledge Framework” relies on the interplay between the lived experience of the object and that of the visitor. In this way, the visitor’s “lifeworld” and the “objectworld” are synthesized into a “unified experience” (Wood and Latham 2014, 32). How the visitor interprets the objects’ lived experience is also important to note (Wood and Latham 2014, 27-28).

These authors focus on both object biography and agency in multiple ways. For instance, the authors are looking at both the role of the object and the role of the visitor in the museum experience. They also seek to address the lived experience of both the object and the visitor. The visitors’ perceptions about the world and their own biographies are important components that can be sometimes overlooked, but these certainly need to be understood and incorporated in museum exhibit design context.

Sandra Dudley also focuses on object agency and biography in her work. Her research is similar to *The Object Knowledge Framework*, in that it also discusses the relationship between objects and people in a museum setting. In this work, she states that, “object knowledge...constitutes the mechanism through which objects exert agency”

(Dudley 2013, 160). She also outlines different parts of an object biography, which can include the range from what the object is actually made of, to the different values and meanings it has had over time, as well as its different social contexts over time (Dudley 2013, 146). She states that, in recognizing object biographies, one must also understand the object's agency in "forming human experience" (Dudley 2013, 146).

Janet Hoskins explores the terms object biography and object agency in her work. She states that, "things can be said to have 'biographies' as they go through a series of transformations...and persons can also be said to invest aspects of their own biographies in things" (Hoskins 2006, 74). She also claims, while referencing Arjun Appadurai, that objects can have, "social lives" (Hoskins 2006, 75). Hoskins also suggests that objects have agency, "because they produce effects, they cause us to feel happy, angry, fearful, or lustful" (Hoskins 2006, 76).

Hoskins' main focus in, *Biographical Objects* is to understand the personal narrative of objects, which relates to the methods used in Amache museum donor interviews. Her research explains how stories about objects are reflected in the stories of people's lives, and are involved in the "production of selves and identities" (Hoskins 1998, 11). She also claims that one can better understand a person's life if one asks about his or her possessions. In her conclusion she states that, while objects may tell a particular past, one must also remember that these stories are all part of our shared humanity (Hoskins 1998, 183-184).

Appadurai and Kopytoff discuss the multiple roles of objects in Appadurai's edited volume, *The Social Life of Things*. In the former's perspective, things are given a



series of values throughout time through economic exchanges (Appadurai 2013, 3). Kopytoff states that through an object's life, it goes through a process, first through commodification and then, de-commodification. For example, a commodity could be as simple as a watch. De-commodification means that the object is no longer something that is bought, it now has personal value (Kopytoff 2013, 69). Using the same example, if the watch is now valued for its association with a family member, or was salvaged from a significant event, the object now has personal value. Kopytoff also explains that the biography of an object should be looked at similar to the biography of a person, with similar questions asked (Kopytoff 2013, 66).

Daniel Miller and Christopher Tilley are two important scholars in material culture studies. Miller defines material culture studies as, "the study of human social and environmental relationships through the evidence of people's construction of their material world" (Miller 1994, 3). Instead of using objects simply for scientific analysis, they are part of the construction of social identity (Miller 1994, 17). One quote that especially represents Miller's stance reads, "[i]t is not just that objects can be agents; it is that practices and their relationships create the appearance of both subjects and objects through the dialectics of objectification..." (Miller 2005, 38). Christopher Tilley's focus is on objectification. However, object agency is discussed in his work. Tilley describes agency by stating, "[t]he lived world is both an arena for action and construed through the actions of persons, a dialectic of objectification and embodiment" (Tilley 2006, 69). In his perspective, objects may have agency, but are more a part of a broader context, including the dialectic relationship between object and people.

## **Previous Research**

### *Objects associated with forced displacement*

There have been multiple case studies that are similar to my research which have explored the meaning of objects after times of distress. The following case studies include interviews conducted with displaced men and women in Cyprus, World War II veterans, and refugees from Thailand and Africa. Each researcher focused on some aspect of object agency and object biography in his or her work. The following case studies help contribute to the literature on the meaning of objects associated with difficult heritage throughout time.

Multiple authors have approached material culture studies and using oral interviews as data, in different ways. Sarah De Nardi identifies objects associated with World War II as “sites of memory and of feeling” (De Nardi 2014, 444). Her focus is on the body’s interaction, or corporeality, with mementoes in storytelling, including the materiality of memory and an embodied approach to understanding objects (De Nardi 2014, 444-446). De Nardi’s work reinforces the importance of examining the materiality involved in difficult life experiences. David Parkin’s work analyzes objects as a coping mechanism to transition into life as a displaced population; in this case, African refugees. An important detail in Parkin’s work is how objects may embody or reflect a previous lifetime before internment, yet they also play a role in personal survival during this experience (Parkin 1999, 308).

In Dudley's *Materialising Exile*, she states that, "objects are active participants in social life and change" (Dudley 2010, 3). In understanding object biography among refugees from Thailand, one must remember that people, things, and sensory experiences are all intertwined (Dudley 2010, 3). Dudley also stresses that understanding this relationship will help scholars better understand the concept of identity (Dudley 2010, 8). Through several of her in-depth interviews, she mainly focused on the sensory experiences and multiple values of objects throughout time. For example, she stated that there are "two kinds of feelings," the physical and the emotional, which are "intrinsically linked and historically and culturally situated" (Dudley 2010, 3).

Other authors have shown through their case studies that object biography and agency can help one understand identity. Zeynup Turan initially states that a collection of personal objects could symbolize a sense of security, in this case, safety among objects associated with an individuals' identity (2003, 2). She also shows how personal possessions, during the conflict between the Greek and Turkish populations in Cyprus, became transitional objects and were used as "social tools" of self-identity (Turan 2003, 3). A later article written by Rebecca Bryant also concerns displaced people in Cyprus, but instead focuses on how objects are, "a network of actors" used to talk about one's own life (Bryant 2014, 684).

### ***University of Denver Amache Project***

The primary goal of the DU Amache project is to, "...work in conjunction with the Japanese American community to research, interpret, and preserve the site of Amache

using a variety of methods, including archaeological research” (Clark and Driver 2015, 7). Dr. Bonnie Clark has conducted an archaeology and museum studies field school at Amache, as part of the DU Amache project, every other year since 2008. Community archaeology is an integral component of the project, as many volunteers at the field school are former internees or are descendants of those who were interned.

Archaeological work is done alongside oral history and archival documentation. The Amache museum is also maintained and improved through the field school.

Dr. Clark’s research mainly involves using the archaeological record to help understand how Japanese identity was expressed at Amache. This includes how ethnic identity was expressed in an institution intended to suppress Japanese culture. She also aims to understand how material remains represent acts of dominance or resistance at camp, as well as daily life in camp as an internee (Clark 2014, 1-3). For example, excavated artifacts associated with children, or artifacts indicating subtle internee resistance have been found, such as evidence of saké consumption in a place where alcohol was prohibited (Clark and Driver 2015, 103). Archaeological work is also focused on Japanese gardens at Amache, in order to understand place-making and ethnic identity in the context of incarceration (Clark 2014, 7).

### ***DU Masters’ Theses on Amache***

There have been multiple masters’ theses written about Amache which help preserve the history and materiality of this National Historic Landmark. Some master’s students have focused on understanding more about the children’s (Kamp-Whittaker 2010) and women’s (Shew 2010) lives at the internment camp. Another student, from the

University of Colorado, Denver wrote her thesis on the consumption of saké in camp (Slaughter 2006). Others have focused on understanding different aspects of Japanese culture, such as how traditional activities were implemented at Amache (Starke 2015), as well as how Japanese identity was incorporated in foodways (Skiles 2008). It is my hope that my thesis research will aid in the preservation and interpretation of Amache, as the above noted research has done.

## **CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Introduction**

Object agency and object biography, as it relates to people's identities and experiences, are two intriguing ways to study material culture. These approaches are especially substantial and complex if objects are associated with a tragic sequence of events, such as the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II and its aftermath. The new material culture studies incorporates interdisciplinary research to understand objects. This may include anthropology, archaeology, art history, sociology, psychology, and other fields. This chapter focuses on how anthropologists study material culture, but it is important to keep in mind that these scholars have referenced interdisciplinary fields in their work. Those invested in this area of research are concerned with the meanings of objects and the relationships with their subjects as well as the role of objects in social relations.

### **Object Agency**

Daniel Miller has written extensively on the new material culture theory, with special attention to object agency. In his work, *Materiality*, he instructs material culture researchers to look at an object as not solely the evidence of humanity, but instead in

terms of what cannot be clearly seen. This is the emergence of object agency. Humans may not necessarily realize it, but people give objects agency in everyday life. For instance, Miller gives an example where objects are anthropomorphized, such as when people blame their vehicles for breaking down (2005, 13). Another example references the article, “Why the Clothes Have No Emperor,” in which Miller explains how, “we are not just clothed, we are constituted by our clothing” (2005, 42).

In his terms, object meaning “transcend[s] the dualism of subjects and objects” (2005, 3, 5). Instead of studying objects and people separately, one should recognize the “network of agents,” both those of object and person, to understand materiality (2005, 11). Miller also argues that objects can dictate how people act by stating, “[t]he less we are aware of them [objects] the more powerfully they can determine our expectations... They determine what takes place to the extent that we are unconscious of our capacity to do so” (2005, 5). The passage below summarizes Miller’s stance on the importance of studying object agency:

“It is not just that objects can be agents; it is that practices and their relationships create the appearance of both subjects and objects through the dialectics of objectification, and we need to be able to document how people internalize and then externalize the normative. In short, we need to show how the things that people make, make people” (Miller 2005, 38).

In general, people do not realize that objects play an important role in their lives, and so, it is the understanding of the unconscious dialectic relationship between subjects and objects that is essential in understanding materiality. This includes how the

relationship between people and objects is, “determinant of our behavior and identity” (2005, 5).

This project has applied Miller’s work in multiple ways. His volume is one of the primary documents in the new material culture theory, and has helped build my theoretical framework. The Amache museum collections are not simply evidence of history, and they should not be interpreted without the donor’s story. This project is not just studying subjects and objects as separate entities, which Miller finds too simplistic. The relationship between the donor and the object, and how it relates to the donor’s identity and internment experience in general, is what is important here. Studying objects in terms of materiality is an invaluable theoretical approach to this project because it focuses on the relationships of objects and people themselves. By revealing the “unconscious nature” of how objects play a role in a person’s life, one can better understand the materiality of Amache.

Christopher Tilley’s work on objectification is a significant contribution to material culture studies. He defines objectification as, “the manner in which objects or material forms are embedded in the life worlds of individuals, groups, institutions or, more broadly, culture and society” (Tilley 2006, 60). Similar to Miller’s perspective, Tilley hopes that his theory will, “overcome the dualism in modern empiricist thought in which subjects and objects are regarded as utterly different and opposed entities” (Tilley 2006, 61). It could be said that both Tilley and Miller are against the so-called person-object approach, since they both believe it is overly simplistic.



Understanding objectification is important in the analysis of material culture and human identity. Tilley states, [t]hrough making, using, exchanging, consuming, interacting, and living with things, people make themselves in the process” (2006, 61). Since subjects and objects have a “conjoined” relationship, they both must play a role in each other’s identity (2006, 61). This can be revealed through exchanges or the creation of objects. Objects can be involved in the formation and alteration of ideas. Material culture is not just a reflection of social and cultural values and ideas. They are, instead, actively part of the process of formulating these parts of human existence. Tilley explicitly encourages the study of human culture through objects by claiming that people can never be separated from their objects. He also states that objects are a “medium” in which people can understand themselves. Without them, people would not know or be themselves (2006, 61). Tilley does not deny that objects have agency. The majority of objectification is based on the idea that objects are interactive in human lives, but he goes one step further in examining the dialectical relationship between subjects and objects. The fact that objects have agency through the process of objectification must mean that objects are essential in understanding a person’s identity.

Alfred Gell analyzes object agency through his theory of the “Art Nexus.” He defines agency as, “the source, the origin, of causal events, independently of the state of the physical universe” (1998, 16). People build social relationships with things throughout their lifetimes (1998, 18). He states that the “realization” of social agency between people and objects is called objectification (1998, 21). In his point of view, a

material object that emits another entity, is called an “index,” and this “permits a particular cognitive operation,” which he calls, “the abduction of agency” (1998, 13).

Material objects can also be indexes of the manufacturer, or artist. (1998, 23). Objects that become agents [the index] “exert agency” onto what he calls recipients (1998, 27). The last component in the Art Nexus theory is the prototype, which has a “visual resemblance” to the index by means of the nature of the abduction (1998, 27). An example of this is an apple painted on canvas to represent a specific meaning conveyed by the artist (1998, 36). In this way, objects project feelings or attitudes onto people, and we interpret these indexes through the process of abduction (1998, 13). The index, therefore, is dependent on social agency (1998, 16).

Like other scholars in this field, Gell accepts that objects can have agency, like human beings do, however they can only be secondary to people. He believes that objects have agency when, “they become enmeshed in a texture of social relationships” (1998, 17). He is careful not to suggest that objects do not have agency independently from people, but instead states that, “primary agents [human beings] distribute their agency in the casual milieu, and thus render their agency effective” (1998, 20). Objects can embody “parts” of people, and although an object has an ordinary function, they can also become, “a component of a particular type of social identity and agency” (1998, 21). Once an object embodies the qualities of a person, perhaps over some time, the object can have “moral entities in themselves” (1998, 21).

Another way Gell describes the social relationships between objects and people is through the terms, agents and patients. In any context, an agent has an effect on the

patient, but these roles can belong to both objects and people. A person (agent) can give agency to the object (patient), or vice versa. The patient does not always have to submit to this agency; it can be resistant towards it (1998, 23). This perspective helps combat notions of mysticism or object fetishism, because objects cannot have agency in isolation, it is only through this relationship that it can play an active role in causation (1998, 22).

Gell's work is essential in order to understand the relationships between person and object. Using the Art Nexus theory, one can better understand how objects achieve agency and effect people as "secondary agents." In the case of Amache, objects over time could have embodied qualities of the owner or family's personal identity, and now can exert agency. Objects that were altered from their original purpose during and after camp are now indexes, and the former internees who altered these artifacts are agents. These indexes can also be agents as well, with the former internees or new owners as patients.

Gell is cautious multiple times throughout his work, unlike other scholars, when he states that objects have agency, because he knows one can quickly dismiss this work as some sort of mystical theory of objects. He is not trying to say that objects are truly animated on their own. Yet, he is also forthright, in his explanation of the Art Nexus theory, providing multiple relevant examples of how this theory may work in real life situations. His approach may be limiting at times where he focuses specifically on fine art objects and artists, instead of everyday items, which are the majority of the objects studied for this project.

Janet Hoskins' work also contributes to understanding object agency. Her work on agency considerably focuses on art and the artist. As artists produce objects, their

identities are embodied in their works of art, and therefore, they are somewhat objectified. In this way, objects have agency in that they are used to showcase their own identities. Since objects may be made with this intention, Hoskins claims that objects “mediate social agency” (2006, 75). Hoskins also suggests that objects have agency because they cause emotion, such as anger or happiness (2006, 76). She embraces Gell’s work throughout the majority of her article, specifically with her attention to Gell’s “captivation” concept where an object’s unfamiliarity holds the attention of the viewer. In this sense, objects have “visual power” (2006, 76-77). This concept strictly focuses on the aesthetic component of an object, but nevertheless shows that objects can have agency.

Hoskins’ perspective on object agency is especially important to this project. Objects studied in this case study include many objects which were modified to fit the family’s needs during or after internment as well as one object that was made as an art piece. By keeping in mind that artists create objects with multiple intentions and these objects are part of their identity is important to understanding Japanese American internment and identity. The “captivation” concept could be applied to the new owners at the Amache museum, but also the descendants of internees. Many of the descendants interviewed have found objects associated with internment that they did not know existed or do not know what they even are. This will add further meaning to the role of object agency in former internees’ families’ lives.

This review of object agency has shown that there are multiple different ways to study and interpret object agency. These various perspectives will be considered in the analysis of this project. The above scholars have all expressed that object agency is an

integral part of the new material culture studies. Another important component to this field is object biography, which is the focus of the next section.

### **Object Biography**

The application of human qualities to objects, such as the latter having a biography, or a “social life” is a complicated concept to justify, yet it is a crucial component of the new material culture theory. Igor Kopytoff explains the concept of object biography from a processual point of view. He explains that the cultural attributes of an object biography produce multiple values during the course of the object’s life (Kopytoff 1986, 68). For example, an object can begin its life as a commodity and only have value in terms of economic exchanges (1986, 71). This, he states, homogenizes an object’s value. Yet, commoditization should be looked upon as a process and not a “state-of being” (1986, 73).

Later on, an object slightly shifts into, what he calls, “singularization,” which implies that the object has been chosen to be taken off the commodity path for value outside of the common exchange system. In this sense, “commodities are singularized by being pulled out of their usual commodity sphere” (Kopytoff 1986, 74). Kopytoff states that the object has now become “decommoditized” where, “everything is singular, unique, and unexchangeable” (1986, 69). There are different levels within singularization. Objects that are in this stage are said to be priceless or worthless, but can also transform from being “singularly worthless” to “expensively singular.” (1986, 80). An example of this could be a shell retrieved from a World War II battlefield.

Singularization is a relative phase, for example, an object could hold personal value to one individual, but may be perceived as a simple commodity to others (1986, 80). It is important to note that the two stages, commoditization and singularization, are never completely separate from one another. For example, singular objects can become so valuable, that they end up becoming expensive commodities (1986, 87).

The concept of singularization is critically important for this project. There are multiple ways objects from Amache went through this process of singularization. Mostly all the objects studied were once simple commodities, such as suitcases, a tea crate, uniforms, and yearbooks. At some point, these objects were chosen over others to keep after camp, and then chosen to be donated over other family items. Some objects, such as the suitcase and tea crate went through another process of singularization, where the objects were chosen to take to camp. Kopytoff suggests that these types of objects may have personal meaning or power amongst society. Singularization is also relative in the context of this project as well. A pin that was given to a former internee as a child may be viewed as strictly an artifact or even a common item to people who do not know the story behind it, or who may not have experienced the exchange for themselves.

Appadurai presents an alternate point of view on the object biography, with a few modifications. He enforces the importance of using this approach by stating that if one studies the different biographical stages of objects, one can learn more about the human experiences in objects (1986, 5). Understanding the social roles of commodities is an essential skill in understanding object biographies. He agrees with Kopytoff, in that, objects can leave and reenter commoditization, but claims it as a “state” instead of a

“process” (1986, 13). He also critiques Kopytoff’s singularization concept because he does not think it is as concrete as Kopytoff claims. Appadurai also notes that in order to understand object biographies, one must keep in mind the politics of knowledge about those objects at hand (1986, 41). The “tournaments of value” section in this article is a critical aspect of his essay because it highlights the competition of objects in order to be placed outside the path of commoditization. Instead of it being forgotten once its economic value is lost, it is rather kept aside for, “some power or value in ordinary life” or during times of creativity or crisis (1986, 21, 26).

The author also explains how the social lives of objects and the cultural biographies of them are different, yet interconnected. Cultural biographies are about the varying meanings and values throughout different contexts of specific objects. The social lives of things, on the other hand, are more about a class of objects (1986, 34). In a cultural biography, one studies a specific object, “as they move through different hands, contexts, and uses, thus accumulating a specific biography, or set of biographies” (1986, 34). He also states, “[i]t is the social history of things, over large periods of time and at large social levels, that constrains the form, meaning, and structure of more short-term, specific and intimate trajectories” (1986, 36).

Similar to Kopytoff, Appadurai enforces that objects are in competition with each other in order to be valued and kept from the normative commodity path. Amache objects have gone through a similar journey as part of their object biographies. His claim that understanding object biographies can help us understand human experiences is essential to this research because this project aims to prove that understanding objects through

their biographies can help one better understand the Japanese American internment experience and the former internees' identity. The work is limiting in some aspect because it mainly focuses on commodities and exchange in some ways that are not applicable to this project. Everyday objects are more the focus of this project.

Tilley's work also contributes to the understanding and application of object biography. He states that, "[t]he biographies of particular persons and particular things may be intertwined" (2006, 63). In this way, understanding an object biography can help one better understand a person's history because they are interrelated. Object biographies are also, in a sense, entangled in the history of cultures as a whole. He agrees with other material culture scholars, with the claim that objects can be anthropomorphized to the extent that they can have their own histories through objects' varying uses and circulations (2006, 63). These ideas can only be valid if they follow the definitions of objectification.

Although Tilley's work does not explain object biographies in as much detail as other material culture scholars, his contribution applies to this project in some ways. Along with his discussion of object agency, objectification means that this project will strive to see the lives of Japanese Americans and those of objects as together as entangled. They cannot be broken apart, and they are both similar and different. These two biographies can appear to be conjoined, using his terminology on subjects and objects.

Hoskins also discusses the new material culture theory and its relation to object biographies. Hoskins proclaims that objects do "have social lives" (Hoskins 2006, 74).



Object biographies are about being able to decipher how “objects are perceived by the persons that they are linked to” (Hoskins 2006, 78). She invites the study of everyday objects and their “biographical and historical resonances,” which become “more real as they become entangled in webs of cultural significance” (Hoskins 2006, 80-81). Hoskins admits, “...objects themselves may not be animated, but their relations have certainly animated many debates about the ways to understand society, culture, and human lives” (Hoskins 2006, 82). This is expressed through her literature review on the agency and biography of objects.

Hoskins focuses on two types of biographies. The first one involves the concept mainly discussed in this section, which is that objects can have biographies, similar to those of people. Her examination of various types of scholarly case studies highlights the importance and the many uses of the biographical approach to study objects. One case study used in Hoskins’ article that is of particular interest is Morin’s work, specifically when she references that there are, “three levels of mediation as characteristic of biographical objects – their relation to time, space, and the owner or consumer” (Morin 1969 in Hoskins 2006, 78). This quote breaks down the multiple components of an object biography that need to be considered in analysis. The changing nature of time, space, owner, and consumer in an object biography can certainly reveal meaning and values in culture and society.

Another significant part of this concerns how objects are affected by time. For instance, “the biographical object grows old, and may become worn and tattered along the life span of its owner, while the public commodity is eternally youthful and not used

up but replaced” (2006, 78). This quote defines the difference between ordinary commodities and personal possessions, the latter of which is of interest in this project. Hoskins attempts to reinforce that the biographical approach to objects can showcase their age, but this age is reflected in the identity of the people who owned it and the nature of its historical context.

Hoskins’ second approach in studying object biographies assumes that people’s identities and the stories of their lives are embodied in objects. In this way, objects are part of people’s biographies. She claims that personal objects are involved in the “narrative process of self-definition” (2006, 78). This is taken from her work on the personal narrative and storytelling as a formative process, in which she attempts to, “show how far certain possessions can come to be seen as surrogate selves” (Hoskins 1998, 1, 7). This means that objects are interactively involved and can reveal the nature of people’s lives, including their identity. This approach also studies how objects are perceived by their owners and other types of people (2006, 78).

Hoskins, like Miller, Tilley, Kopytoff, and Appadurai, reinforce that in order to understand objects, one needs to understand the entangled relationships between person and object. She may be more persuaded that objects have much more agency than other scholars believe in this field, but she does not feel that objects have lives of their own without people. Her work is relevant because she has claimed that, from her research, it is easier to ask people about their life stories through their personal possessions. The interviews conducted during this project produced an abundance of information about the donor’s family’s life, but each interview started by asking about their donated objects.

Both works by Hoskins assert the significance of using a biographical approach to study the meaning of objects. Examining object biographies and biographical objects can both be applied to this project. Her contributions, for example, that objects can reveal the biography of a person is important in understanding Japanese identity. The narrative analysis in the results sections of this project will apply the biographical objects concept. These theoretical insights, including that people can talk about their lives through their objects, and the notion that people can reveal other information about their lives by first asking about their objects, will be used to assess interview data.

## **Conclusion**

Although material culture scholars have focused on different aspects of object agency and object biography, they all seem to agree that this is an important, yet fairly new way of studying objects. Some scholars have expressed that others may criticize these approaches as an aspect of material fetishism or that it may take away the importance of studying people (Steiner 2001, 210 in Hoskins 2006, 75). However as Miller and Tilley suggest, it is not just about studying objects; it is about analyzing the dialectical relationship between people and their things. The scholarly work discussed enforces the fact that these ways of studying objects have revealed an abundant amount of information, both about specific people's lives and their identities and cultures as a whole. Objects should not be studied simply as a reflection of a person or a culture because this approach does not incorporate the complex meanings and values of material culture. Tilley points out that there should be more academic work done in using these

theoretical approaches to study ordinary objects and those associated with diasporic communities (2006, 70). This project attempts to contribute to filling this gap in the literature.

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS

### **Introduction**

#### *Research Goals and Objectives*

The main goals of this project consist of understanding how material culture contributes to Japanese American internment identity and the internment experience as a whole. It aims to examine and analyze the complex meanings, values, and roles of objects associated with the forced relocation of Japanese Americans. This includes understanding what the museum donation process is like for Amache museum donors, why internees kept certain family objects after camp, and how these objects travelled before and after incarceration.

This project strived to make a contribution to the preservation of Japanese American heritage through oral history. It helps fill a gap in the body of literature on Japanese American internment, but also has a role in understanding the cultural meaning of objects associated with difficult histories. It also highlights the importance of using and interpreting object biographies in material culture studies.

Although my research mainly involves those who have a relationship to Amache, I believe that my research can be important to the Japanese American community as a

whole. These include Japanese American community organizations, such as The Japanese American Citizens' League (JACL) and the Japanese American Association of Colorado (JAAC), and individual members of Japanese American society. This community also includes many who were interned or relatives and descendants of those interned in other internment camps in the country. Additionally, this work may be important to other museum professionals who manage Japanese American collections. Examining museum donors' stories and perspectives on their family objects is one way to accomplish these goals.

### **Research Design**

Methods used for this project include a structured preliminary questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, and examination of archival data associated with the donor's objects. Four in-depth interviews were conducted with Amache museum donors. Additionally, one interview was conducted with a donor who temporarily donated an object to History Colorado. The following subsections explain each major method in greater detail.

### **Preliminary Questionnaire**

A questionnaire was created in order to obtain relatively basic information about the donor's family history and the particular objects donated. The short one-page double-sided form included questions similar to a typical museum donor questionnaire. It asked the donor if he or she knew the object's manufacture, acquisition, and modifications over

time, if applicable. It also included questions about where the object was stored and/or displayed and how it was used in camp. Another set of questions asked about the donor's family life, including which block the family lived in at Amache. The last section on the questionnaire form generally asked why the object was important to him or her. This open-ended section included about half a page for the donor to write as much as he or she pleased.

This method was useful for the following reasons. Based on the information each donor filled out on the questionnaire, I was able to have a clearer understanding of what objects the donor gave to the Amache museum and what logistically has happened to the object between camp and the museum. In some questionnaires, I could better comprehend which objects out of the ones donated seemed especially important to them. If only one object was donated, I was interested in certain descriptions that indicated why the object was important. I was also able to learn more about the donor's family before the interview. The questionnaire was also useful for interviewees. Along with the consent form, interviewees were able to get a better sense of what I was looking for before the phone interview. This questionnaire also included similar questions used during the semi-structured interview, so interviewees could expect what kinds of questions were going to be asked. Participants were also informed about my research topic and objectives before the interview.

## **Semi-structured interviews**

In-depth semi-structured interviews are designed to reveal the significance of object agency and object biographies in this context. Objects studied include personal possessions that were brought from the homes of Japanese Americans to the internment camp in Colorado. They also include eBay items associated with Amache which were purchased for the purpose of donating these objects to the museum.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to give the interviewee some aspect of flexibility in the interview, but at the same time be structured enough to avoid going off topic. This type of interview was chosen based on H. R. Bernard's overview of interview techniques. Criteria for this method include using a probing technique and for interviewers who want to have the structure of an interview guide, but also have enough room for the interviewee's other thoughts on the subject (2011, 158). By the time interviews were scheduled, email correspondence between my informants and me had gone on a few weeks to a little over a month. By the time they were interviewed, they were familiar with me and so, it was my hope that they could converse with me freely. This type of interview was used so that I could understand more about how museum donors talked about their objects as well as what other information could be revealed by first asking them about their objects. It was my hope that interviewees would also take the opportunity to tell stories.

Using the semi-structured format, all interviewees were asked a similar set of questions. Each interview guide had about ten to fifteen questions. Follow-up questions and probing was used during the interview process. The interviews lasted from forty-five



minutes to an hour and a half. Time and expense limitations led to all the interviews being conducted over the phone, with the exception of one structured interview conducted over email.

Ethical considerations were implemented into each interview guide. This included avoiding questions deemed too emotional or those that would make interviewees uncomfortable. This is especially important because of the potentially sensitive nature of family history relating to internment. The consent form also informed interviewees that they were free to skip any question asked or end the interview at any time. Interviews were also based on the interviewees' schedule. Since these interviews were conducted over the phone, interviewees had the convenience of answering questions at their home. The majority of interviewees are also elderly, so it was important to speak loudly and clearly in order to have a successful interview. Interviews also could not be too lengthy in order to avoid fatigue.

Each interview guide had about four of the same questions. These included questions about why the object was donated, what was the donation decision process like, and if internment was discussed in the family. Another similar question included the donor's wishes for their object(s) in the museum. Depending on the donor's questionnaire, questions were asked about specific object histories and particulars about the donor's family history. Each question was formulated to help reveal object agency and biography, including why the objects were important to them and what were the histories of these objects in the family.

## **Variables and Dimensions**

There are a number of variables which influenced the meaning of objects to Amache museum donors. The museum donor's generation, whether he or she was interned or if he or she is a relative or descendant of those interned must be considered. Japanese American generations, such as Issei, Nisei, Sansei, etc. should be incorporated within this variable as well because of their importance to Japanese culture. Other variables include whether or not objects were talked about with the family, or whether the object was kept in storage or on display. Types of objects, including commercial objects, art objects, or objects modified during or after camp must be considered in analysis to understand changes in meaning between different object types. The museum donor's wishes for the object is important to keep in mind as well to help explain why they wanted their personal possessions in a museum. It was also noted if and why the museum donor has kept objects within the family instead of donating them to the museum. It was also important to know whether or not internment was discussed after camp at all, as well as the nature of their families' experiences after camp.

## **Population and Sample**

Amache museum donors are part of a very limited population. Donors in the Japanese American community live all over the country and range in age, from middle aged descendants of internees to older internees. Some were internees as children, but many others are children or other younger relatives of those interned. Many donors still play in active role in the preservation of Amache, either by attending the annual

pilgrimage or being involved in the community in some way. The already small population led to my minimal sample size, so non-probabilistic sampling had to be used for this project. My initial plan was to gather contacts from the annual pilgrimage and to contact suitcase donors. I attempted to interview recent donors, since their contact information would be the most available.

I also wanted to take the chance to meet those of the Japanese American community in person during community events in order to introduce my research ideas and build rapport. The first event I attended was the annual Day of Remembrance in February of 2015. Here I was able to talk briefly about my research with those who came to the DU Amache Project table. I was also able to listen to a panel discussion on the current discourse of remembering and preserving Japanese American internment. Many former internees attended the event. The moderator even asked the audience if they remember what kinds of items were brought to camp and what was left behind. Attending the Day of Remembrance was helpful in understanding the current discourse and introducing my research to the community.

Two major community events included the Amache Friends Reunion in Las Vegas in April 2015 and the annual pilgrimage to Amache in May of 2015. During these events, I was able to continue to discuss my research in greater detail and obtain contacts. During the Amache Friends Reunion, I was able to speak to multiple former internees about their memories of camp. I also asked them if they remember what they took to camp, or what they have now. In this way, I tried to understand what aspects people remembered about their objects over seventy years since Amache closed.

My initial method to gather contacts was through the annual pilgrimage in May. I predicted that some attendees would have the chance to bring items to the pilgrimage to donate to the Amache museum. I prepared consent forms and preliminary questionnaires for the donors. Unfortunately, no attendees donated items that day, but I was able to obtain one contact from the event. Attending the pilgrimage also gave me the opportunity to talk to former internees, from both Amache and other internment camps, and their family members about my research. I also participated in commemorative ceremonies at the site and was able to visit the Amache museum for the first time.

The lack of donors at the Amache pilgrimage led me to rely on six of Dr. Bonnie Clark's contacts. Most were previously interviewed before in alternate settings and were happy to be interviewed. I emailed each donor explaining my research and sent them a consent form and preliminary questionnaire with instructions.

### **Data Collection**

After initial agreement to conduct an interview, preliminary questionnaires and consent forms were sent out by mail or email and filled out forms were returned or sent back to me. Once I had these forms, I scheduled one interview with each participant individually. Interviews were conducted from July-September 2015. Most interviews were conducted during the months of July and September. The delays in email correspondence, receiving forms, as well as a few time constraints led to the extended time frame. Before the interviews were conducted, information about the donor and the

object donated was gathered from the Amache museum database. This included physical object descriptions, dates of when objects were donated, and images of the objects.

The first interview was conducted on July 15, 2015 with Mr. Bob Akaki and lasted an hour. Mr. Akaki's parents were incarcerated, his father at Amache, and his mother at Topaz. He donated a variety of items including a nurse cape and wimple, Amache yearbooks, and a boy scout's uniform. I wanted to interview him because he donated multiple items from eBay, and I wanted to understand more about that process, since my initial research design involved only family personal possessions. The second interview was done on July 27, 2015 with Mr. Edwin Yamada through email, since it was interviewees' preferred method of contact. He was a teenager in camp. He donated a tea crate that was used for storage before and after Amache. I wanted to interview him because I predicted there was an interesting story behind the tea crate and its relationship to Amache.

The third interview was conducted on August 3, 2015 with Mr. Dean Ogawa and lasted about forty-five minutes. His mother was incarcerated at Amache. He donated a suitcase, a dresser, a cot, and a scanned copy of his mother's diary. I was particularly interested in suitcases from Amache, and so I thought it would be beneficial to hear his story. The fourth interview was conducted on September 11, 2015 with Mr. Minoru Tonai and lasted about an hour and a half. He was a teenager in camp. Mr. Tonai has donated numerous objects that former internees have given to him to donate. His unique position as a leader in the preservation process led me to interview him.

The fifth interview was conducted on September 30, 2015 with Ms. Francis Palmer and lasted about forty minutes. She was a small child in camp, but does not have any memory of the experience. I wanted to know why she temporarily donated the relief sculpture and also her perspective on donating family objects to a museum. She was the only interviewee who was not an Amache museum donor. The sixth interview was conducted with Mr. Peter Furuta, who was a small child in camp, on April 2, 2016, and lasted about an hour and a half. Mr. Furuta and his brother, Steve, donated two trunks that were used during incarceration, among other items. I was interested in how the trunks helped curate Amache family objects after camp, since the restricted space only allowed for a limited amount of items. It is important to note that this interview is introduced in the fifth chapter of this thesis because it mainly concerned object agency.

Each phone interview was recorded on a device (FORUS Smart Phone Call Recorder) plugged into the cell phone, and files on the device were transferred through the connected USB onto a password protected computer immediately after the interview. During the month of September until January 2016, all interviews were transcribed. I transcribed all the interviews myself without using voice recognition software in order to improve accuracy. Each transcription document included a header with general personal information, but also included each interviewees' relationship to Amache and the particular objects donated. Transcription included documenting "umm's" and "uhh's," and pauses to help in narrative text analysis, which will be explained further in the next section.

## **Data Analysis**

This project involved the use of qualitative analysis, both interpretive and narrative text analysis. These text analysis methods were chosen based on Bernard's work in qualitative anthropology research methods. Interpretive text analysis was used in order to find meanings in the text and how these meanings are interconnected with culture, in this case the Japanese American community (Bernard 2011, 415). This text analysis also pays particular attention to themes, values, and symbols embedded in the text. This project used text analysis not only to find cases of object agency and object biography, but also how it relates to Japanese American internment overall.

Narrative analysis concerns the stories museum donors told during the interview. It is a useful method here because one can find regularities in how people talk about their experiences with their objects (Bernard 2011, 416-417). For example, narrative analysis can show how interviewees were excited about talking about their objects or simply indifferent. It is different than interpretive analysis in that one needs to analyze how people are talking in order to find patterns and themes applicable to the object agency and object biography concepts. These two methods were used for the semi-structured interview portion of the data collection.

Interviews were examined thoroughly in order to reveal patterns or themes in the discussions about donated objects. Transcripts were primarily used for analysis, but the audio recording was occasionally used for narrative analysis. Each interview was first examined by itself in terms of object agency and object biography, and then all were

compared and contrasted at the end of analysis. It is understood that each interview acts as an individual case study, and cannot be representative of the entire Japanese American community. Sections of texts were highlighted that might indicate object agency or stages in object biographies. Any text that showed that the object was meaningful to the donor was highlighted as well. All highlighted text was then analyzed within each theme and compared with other themes. Themes included particular emotions, family or Amache heritage, and similar patterns as to why Amache museum donors decided on the Amache museum instead of other repositories.

## **Conclusion**

Although my limited sample size does not allow my project to make general claims about the Japanese American community, there is much to be gained from the six interviews conducted during this project. The use of interviews and archival data, as data collection methods, including background research on objects after camp, were important in understanding how interviewees felt about their objects, which can sometimes get lost in standard museum donor forms. The use of interviews also helps reveal contemporary discourse about the material culture of Japanese American internment. Using both narrative and interpretive text analysis techniques can also reveal important insights into the meanings, values, roles, and interpretations of family objects after camp. Asking interviewees about their objects in different ways can also help us understand the value of material culture through the different stages of the context of forced human displacement.



## **CHAPTER FIVE: AMACHE FAMILY OBJECT BIOGRAPHIES**

### **Introduction**

As explained in the background and theoretical framework chapters, object biographies can help anthropologists learn more about human behavior and experiences. In this case, object biographies were interpreted from in-depth Amache museum donor interviews, while donors were explaining the different life stages of their family personal possessions. This chapter will first describe and analyze object biographies within each donor interview, in terms of how they relate to the Japanese American internment experience. Then, it will focus on an analytical discussion of all donor interviews, including overall themes and patterns amongst the object biographies.

### **Analysis of Amache Family Object Biographies**

#### ***Yamada family tea crate***

Edwin Yamada's tea crate was used in different ways throughout its time with the family. Mr. Yamada's father obtained it while working for the Monaka Tea Company in Los Angeles, California. Crates like this were used to transport tea leaves from Japan to

the West Coast. His father brought the crate home from work to pack up his family's belongings for the assembly center to which they were assigned. At Amache, the crate



Figure 5.1: Yamada family tea crate, Image Courtesy of the Amache Preservation Society

was used to store clothes and other items, like a dresser, in the family barrack. After internment, it was again used to transport their belongings first to Denver, and then, back to Los Angeles. Once settled after camp, the crate served as a storage container and stayed in their attic until it was donated to the Amache museum (Yamada, unpublished transcript, July 27, 2015).

The Yamada family tea crate is made of wooden planks held by metal strips and is about twenty by twenty-nine by fourteen inches in size. Throughout its lifetime, the crate has suffered multiple losses, cracks, and other structural damage. E.K Yamada, Edwin's father's name, is written in black ink vertically along one side. There are also remnants of labels from the Monaka Tea Company. It is currently displayed in the front

of the Amache museum, along with trunks and suitcases, in order to tell the story about travelling to and from camp.

The tea crate's multiple uses in time and space are unique and should be examined thoroughly. Initially, the crate was used for its intended purpose, which was to transport tea leaves for the Monaka Tea Company. It was seen as simply a utilitarian item. At this point, the object is in its commodity stage of life. It likely did not hold meaning outside of its intended function. The tea crate's secondary use as storage for personal possessions reveals much about the state of life for the Yamada family. Since the WRA only allowed one suitcase per person, this tea crate could probably hold more items, and could even possibly be more durable than a regular suitcase. At this secondary stage, the object could still be considered a commodity, however the tea crate could be slightly more meaningful than it was when it stored tea. The only change in its biography is its new purpose.

After camp, the tea crate is taken back to Los Angeles with the Yamada family and kept in the family's attic. The object is no longer just a commodity because it was chosen to be kept after incarceration. This could be because the family did not have anything else to transport their items, or that they did not have many possessions because of the loss of property due to incarceration. The family may have wanted to keep whatever they had. After the Yamada family heard about the Amache museum, the tea crate, originally a standard commodity with its sole purpose to ship tea, was donated to a museum to be preserved for generations. The object is now in its singularization stage of life. It is unique and has meanings unrelated to its original purpose. Its new museum

context makes the tea crate important not just to the Yamada family, but to the Japanese American community as well.

This analysis could be taken a step further by studying the tea crate as a biographical object, where object biographies can reflect people's lives. How can Yamada's discussion of the tea crate's biography reveal more about his family's internment experience? These excerpts below reveal the Yamada family internment experience:

Excerpt 1:

EY: The crate symbolizes that point in our family's lives when it contained almost every material thing we had after being sent to Amache. From that point onward, we had to reacquire everything we needed to again resume a normal life.

(Yamada, unpublished transcript, July 27, 2015)

Excerpt 2:

EY: My parents had to decide very quickly what to take with us to an unknown destination (Santa Anita and then Amache) with unknown living environments and amenities. We were severely limited as to the volume, weight, and allowable items (no knives, radios, flammables, potential weapons, etc.)

(Yamada, unpublished transcript, July 27, 2015).

Excerpt 3:

RC: What do you remember about the tea crate in camp?

EY: The tea crate sat at the end of my parents ['] bed and was used as our only piece of furniture we had (dresser, bureau, cupboard, etc.)

(Yamada, unpublished transcript, July 27, 2015)

In excerpt one, Yamada explicitly states how the object's use throughout time represented how hard life was during and after incarceration. Throughout the stages of the tea crate's life, it represented all of their material possessions at the time, which mainly only consisted of essential items, as discussed in excerpt two. Hardship continues in excerpt three, when it is used as a dresser or cupboard in the barrack to store clothing. It further is reflected in the family's decision to continue to use it after incarceration. The tea crate could have been used as a decorative piece, as many Amache items became after camp. However, it was not displayed and kept in the attic. This placement not only reflects hardship, but also the need to keep items associated with camp away in order to resume a normal life again. When asked if the family spoke about Amache after camp, Yamada states,

Excerpt 4:

EY: My parents were very reluctant later to discuss the internment experience. They seemed to feel that there was nothing they could have done to change the experience, it was extremely traumatic, and it was over. It was like a sore that was slowly healing. It did no good to tear of f [off] the scab and relive and suffer from the memories. We had lost almost every material that we had and we were sent to an unknown destination and future. My mother nearly died from pneumonia. My father was sent away to some unknown destination for an indeterminate length of

time. We all suffered physically and emotionally from being forced to live in that hostile environment. My mother was so traumatized that she did not discuss that episode in our lives with anyone she did know and trust very well. She absolutely and vehemently refused to attend the 1999 Amache reunion as it would bring back too many traumatic memories that she did not want to relive.

(Yamada, unpublished transcript, July 27, 2015)

The decision to keep the crate in storage is reflected in Yamada's parents' unwillingness to talk about internment with the family. Throughout a significant portion of their adult lives all that they possessed was inside a tea crate, an object which was never intended to store such items. This could be considered humiliating and traumatic. These sentiments are reflected in Yamada's discussion of his parents' suffering due to incarceration.

### ***Ogawa family suitcases, metal cot, and dresser***

Object reuse is continued in Dean Ogawa's story. There are also instances of object modification which will be analyzed further. Mr. Ogawa donated two suitcases, a modified metal cot, and a handmade dresser, to the Amache museum. A scanned copy of his mother's diary, which she kept at Amache, was donated as well. The suitcases will be discussed first, followed by the metal cot, and finally, the dresser.

The suitcase to be discussed has a tan and gold diagonal pattern and is thirteen by twenty-one by six inches in size. The suitcase's edges are medium brown and consist of

leather strips. There are two metal closures at the top of the trunk as well as a leather handle. The leather handle is secured by two metal clasps.



Figure 5.2: Ogawa Family Suitcase Image Courtesy of the Amache Preservation Society

Mr. Ogawa's father's suitcase has an interesting biography that can provide insights about the Japanese American internment experience. Below is Ogawa's discussion of how he used his father's suitcase while he was growing up:

Excerpt 5:

DO: But my mom made it a point to try to recycle way before the recycling phase, she wanted to make sure that there were ways that if you had something you could put it to use in some fashion....it might be in a totally different um...as a different use, but um things like the dressers and the suitcase, as long as they were functional, they continued to use those and I remember I used those-that suitcase even when I was in high school to go on short trips and things like that (Ogawa, unpublished transcript, August 3, 2015).

Excerpt 6:

DO: But yeah, I personally used that suitcase when I was in high school. I remember, to go on a trip.

RC: Was it boy scouts or something like that?

DO: Um, actually, it was um I think it was when I was a freshman in high school and we went on a debate trip.

RC: Oh, okay.

DO: And I took it, I had my clothes in it

(Ogawa, unpublished transcript, August 3, 2015).

Object reuse appears to be especially important to the Ogawa family. The suitcase used during internment may not have been in great condition while Dean Ogawa was growing up, but it was still functional, so it was still used. It is also important to note that Mr. Ogawa recognized the suitcase's association with his parent's internment while it was in his possession. This not only reflects how important it was to recycle and reuse during internment, but also how frugality was an important value, specifically to Dean Ogawa's family. The discussion of the suitcase's reuse is continued into a discussion of how other objects were reused before and after camp.





Figure 5.3 Ogawa family suitcase and the Yamada family tea crate displayed with other suitcases and trunks at the Amache museum

Excerpt 7:

DO: So, I think the fact that um there was one entry in the journal where my mother talked about having to borrow a sewing needle from a neighbor...

RC: Mhm.

DO: You know, like one sewing needle. So things like that were things that were not necessarily treasured, but were things that they didn't know whether or not they could replace them, especially during the camps, and so it was, ah I've heard

it referred to as a “Depression Day Mentality,” where people were more thwarted and more careful about taking care of their things and...and making sure that they um were...used a lot longer than people use them today. Um, you know, this is not from my parents, but I remember, um, well I remember, when they had the greenhouse, they saved a big bucket of whole nails, you know, like you use to build things?

RC: Mhm.

DO: And um, they would actually take the time to straighten a nail to reuse it, and um I was reading another book about the camps where that was kind of a common practice in the camps because they didn’t have access to a lot of materials.

RC: Mhm.

DO: And so, for that reason, my parents, it was just natural, for them to uh continue to save things, as long as they were in good shape, uh they found no reason to throw them away. Even in their later years, um, they did not throw away anything that could be used.

RC: And do you think that’s because of the whole internment experience, or do you think that’s just how your parents were in general?

DO: Um, I think a lot of that was influenced by the camps  
(Ogawa, unpublished transcript, August 3, 2015).

By encouraging Mr. Ogawa to speak about his family’s internment experience, he reveals more information about how other objects were reused by his family. The reused suitcases and nails are reflected in the need to be frugal during incarceration. Since Mr.

Ogawa's mother had to borrow a sewing needle, it reflects the scarcity of basic items at Amache. It is known that goods could be ordered through a catalog, or internees could go to a store in Granada or Lamar (with a pass), but it is nowhere near as convenient as freely going to the grocery store. Cost may also have been a factor, since most internee families were living off a limited budget. The stories about these reused objects, as seen as part of their biographies, reveals the lack of normalcy and the need to be frugal in a time of crisis.

Mr. Ogawa also donated a metal cot, which was used during incarceration. He stated that the cot was brought home from Amache, likely by truck, and used until it was donated to the Amache museum. The cot's legs were sawed off, so that it could be used as a bench in their home. Below is a discussion of the metal cot's biography:

Excerpt 8:

DO: Um...I...we used that as kind of a bench, and my mom...that was something she was huge on...she didn't want to just get rid of that cot, but it was not being well utilized, so she actually made a cover for the mattress...and she had me cut the legs off of the cot so that it would be the right height to sit on. And she made...um she bought some real thick fabric and she made some foam cushions, so that became, um like a sofa...that we used in our basement to sit on. And so, again, that was something that you know, my mom was just big on. This is something that can be used...and so, she had me um cut the legs off and I made some wooden arms to cover up the metal frame, and um she covered the old mattress...we put a sheet of plywood. It was...far from comfortable...it was like

sitting on a wooden bench, but my mom wanted us to preserve it and use it, not just preserve it, but use it.

RC: Mhm.

DO: To make it functional...

RC: Yeah...um yeah I saw that in the questionnaire you said that the legs were cut off, but I thought that was in camp, but now, it's interesting to see that after camp...for it to be used...

DO: Yeah, I did that after camp with a handsaw, and then again, um I don't know maybe it's something that was ingrained in me or maybe it was my mother told me to, I can't remember, but as I was packing up all the stuff, and I found those little, the ends of the legs.

RC: Oh!

DO: I didn't even throw them away after I cut them off....and I think that was an influence...and when I donated that cot to the museum I made it a point to take those, um, take those pieces that had been cut off  
(Ogawa, unpublished transcript, August 3, 2015).

The cot's modification, a significant phase in the object's biography, reveals insights about the Ogawa family internment experience. If the metal cot was just preserved, it may have just stayed in the family basement or attic. Instead, Mr. Ogawa's mother insisted that it continue to be functional. Frugality continues in this object biography, but it is also interesting to note that Mr. Ogawa kept the sawed off legs. The importance to save and reuse became instilled in him as well. During camp, the cot was

used for sleeping, and after camp, the cot was still used as furniture, but as a bench instead of for sleeping. Its function has changed, and has developed more meaning over time. Now the metal cot is a museum object, and can showcase how important object reuse was to Japanese American families after camp.

The last Ogawa family object that will be discussed will be the dresser made in camp. This object, like many others discussed, was reused after camp. Dressers and other types of furniture was constructed out of scrap lumber, so it is interesting to know that this unconventional, but very much functional, piece was continued to be used after incarceration. Mr. Ogawa used the dresser while he was growing up in his family home. Below is his discussion of the dresser:

Excerpt 9:

DO: Oh the dresser. Um my dad um was the one that um. The only reason I thought that that might have been made in the camps was my dad talked about um the things that they made in the camps, and my uncle um was actually interested in um building things.

RC: Mhm

DO: Um...we...we lived in Trinidad and we had a greenhouse and he was always um doing things as far as um building things...not on a real professional level....my dad would say that he was...you know...pretty pretty good at it and um he talked about other people in the camps being actually very good at building things.

(Ogawa, unpublished transcript, August 3, 2015).

Excerpt 10:

DO: Well, like the suitcases...

RC: Yeah, like besides the suitcases...

DO: Um the dresser was used until the day that I gave it...donated it to the camps.

RC: Oh, okay.

DO: Um, that was used um by my grandfather and then I used it in my bedroom...and then when we moved to Colorado Springs we used it um...that was used...literally until the day it was donated to the camps... (Ogawa, unpublished transcript, August 3, 2015).

The museum donation decision process is important to consider here. This dresser was continued to be used until the day it was donated to the Amache museum. As a museum artifact, the dresser should be considered not only associated with Japanese American internment, but as part of the family history as well. This dresser was used by the Ogawa family for generations, but also holds meaning about internee craftsmanship.

***Palmer family relief sculpture***

Francis Palmer's grandfather made a wood relief sculpture, depicting a squirrel, while interned at Amache. The carving was likely made from scrap wood and varnished with shellac. Ms. Palmer's grandfather, like most other carvers, likely obtained the shellac at the local store in Granada. In speaking with Ms. Palmer, she stated that she does not think her grandfather had any artistic experience or skills prior to his incarceration. After camp, it was kept in the family home until Ms. Palmer's mother gave

it to her as a family heirloom. Technically, the carving is now owned by her daughter. At this time, the carving is on loan at History Colorado. The museum has an exhibit about Amache, and her piece is displayed along with other works of art. When asked what the plans are for the carving after it is no longer on the display, Ms. Palmer explained,

Excerpt 11:

RC: Um, so I guess, what do you plan to do after it's off display?

FP: I am hoping, my fingers are crossed, that they will return it to me intact. It's on a five year loan...I'm a little nervous because it is a pretty old piece and I think our five years are expiring, so I hope that it will return to us intact.

(Palmer, unpublished transcript, September 30, 2015)

Excerpt 12:

FP: I have a second one. I gave one to my daughter, this was a piece that they had on display, the one that my son has is in not in as good of condition so we have at least one thing left, it's this one, that is if it will be returned to us...I am a little nervous.

RC: Oh. So you plan to give it to your next family member after?

FP: Well, I'll tell you, it's a hard decision. Um...my children are fourth generation, they are busy in their careers. My son in particular, he's a sociologist, he values the history. My daughter is a counselor, so she's often into people's heads, but um I am torn between donating it to the museum in Granada and I know they don't have temperature control...I don't think they have temperature control...they don't have a normal museum environment to preserve things that

are in a fragile state...I mean this is a piece of wood what's going to happen to it. It's got shellac on it I think...but it's old. I'm torn between donating it to Granada...I would have to discuss it with my daughter because I am giving this to her...this is her inheritance before I die...might as well enjoy it...my son displays his at home, but my daughter...who is more mobile...I grabbed it from her because I knew she was mobile and I thought...I don't want it to get lost in the move...between Boston and here...I said...I will keep it...I will keep this and if it's okay with you I will lend it to the Colorado museum, so I'm torn between that um I don't know how other people make the decision either to give it to the Granada museum or to keep it in the family, do you know how they do that? Because I am torn...

(Palmer, unpublished transcript, September 30, 2015)



Figure 5.4: Palmer Family Relief Sculpture, Image Courtesy of Ms. Francis Palmer



This carving has an object biography with special importance to the family. During camp, the carving was made during the abundant amount of leisure time many elderly internees had at Amache. After camp, it was treated as a family heirloom. Object meaning changed over time, from a hobby or craft, to a representation of the family's incarceration history. The latter was stressed even more, once it was given to Ms. Palmer's grandmother, mother, and herself, and now her daughter. Meaning certainly changes over time, depending on the owner. Ms. Palmer was quite concerned that the object could easily break during her daughter's constant moves. On the other hand, her daughter was okay with the carving to be on display at History Colorado. As a museum piece, the object represents works of art made during camp, and it is interpreted for the public with its own exhibit label. Its meaning and value has changed in this context, from a family heirloom to an overall piece of incarceration history in Colorado.

The relief sculpture's object biography reveals multiple meanings about the Japanese American internment experience. At first glance, one may view the object in a more positive light; it could simply represent internees' artistic skills. Although this is true, many internees who did not have jobs or did not go to school decided to create these works of art to escape boredom. Ms. Palmer stated repeatedly that she did not think her grandfather had any artistic experience before camp, but that he may have enjoyed it (Palmer, unpublished transcript, September 30, 2015). He also did not speak English, so unfortunately, she did not get the chance to ask him about the carving before his death. She also make it clear that as an Issei, her grandfather did not talk very much anyway. Most of her family, besides her aunt, did not talk about camp either, so the piece's

detailed history remained a relative mystery (Palmer, unpublished transcript, September 30, 2015).

However, much can be learned about the importance of family heirlooms, and the decision process to keep it in the family or donate it to a museum. It appears that Ms. Palmer would likely donate it to the Amache museum, if her family decides to donate it. The decision process is important to consider because these types of objects are not typical family heirlooms. The relief sculpture is also a reminder of her family's suffering during incarceration. This carving was not displayed at home. Instead, it was kept in storage throughout most of its lifetime, but that does not mean this object is not meaningful. This object is not a necessary item, like clothing or identification documents, yet it was kept after camp. It is not like transportation of goods from Amache to their final destination was easy, so this object likely had some unique importance, which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

### ***Beyond Family Collections***

This section involves interviews with Mr. Bob Akaki and Mr. Minoru Tonai. Mr. Akaki has donated family items, but he has also actively searched on eBay for Amache items with the purpose of donating them to the Amache museum. Mr. Tonai has a unique intermediary position in the donation process, in that many museum donors give him their family items to donate to the Amache museum. These case studies further reveal where internment collections travel after camp, even if they are unconventional.

Mr. Bob Akaki's story is a unique case in this project, since he is not only a descendant of internees, both at Amache and Topaz, but also an avid collector. His collecting interests include stamp history and internment history of all camps. In recent years, however, he has made a strong effort to search for items on eBay with the sole purpose to donate them to a museum. He has donated items to a range of internment camp museums, including Amache. Objects to be discussed and analyzed include a duffel bag, a handmade dresser, and a handmade vanity. Since many objects were donated from eBay, authenticity was of course an issue. Below is what Mr. Akaki stated:

Excerpt 13:

RC: Um, and then, do you ever question authenticity for these items?

BA: Um, you know I kinda look...I don't buy anything without a picture. And, if from the picture it looks like it has the right age, you know I haven't worried about too much of that stuff, not like the Vargas card, I was able to..umm...I contacted the seller and he told me who the card was supposedly given to, so I was able to look him up...and the archives database could find him at Amache, and then, when it's 442<sup>nd</sup> related stuff um the Go For Broke National Education Center has a website that lists all the names they have on their monument, so I looked to see where it was on there, and if you go to...there's another Go For Broke organization that actually has the uh U.S Army's table of organizations for the 442<sup>nd</sup> and the 100<sup>th</sup> and the 522<sup>nd</sup> and so you could actually look up a guy's name there.

RC: Okay.

BA: So I was able to um...between the two of them I could find out yeah, he was at Amache, uh and then I could find some of the signatures on it...I found them...you know...I found...I didn't look every one of them up...I figured if two or three of them were there they must all be there. You know, so I found two or three signatures...and oh yeah! Okay okay there it is...okay and then I looked up and he's on the Go For Broke Monument, and the thing that they have that the other Go For Broke database doesn't have, is that the Go For Broke Monument also lists all the men that served in the MIS, whereas, in the other one, it only has those that served in the 442<sup>nd</sup>. So if a guy was in the MIS, his name will be on the monument, but he won't be in the other, and some of those...there were some that were draftees...that uh may have completed basic training but never went to Europe, because by the time they were being staged to go to Europe the war was over. But they still qualified to be on the monument...so they won't be in the database because they weren't officially part of the 442<sup>nd</sup> but as far as the [inaudible] is concerned...it was a segregated unit...that you were Japanese American there was only one unit...you could go to basic training with everybody else, but you weren't going to be assigned to anything besides the 442<sup>nd</sup> (Akaki, unpublished transcript, July 15, 2015).

It appears that Mr. Akaki makes sure he does his research before he buys anything from eBay for the Amache museum. In speaking with him, and paying attention to the recent news, it seems that artifacts associated with internment are in high demand in the collecting world. For example, Mr. Akaki stated that skilled artwork made in camp can

sell for thousands of dollars on eBay (Akaki, unpublished transcript, July 15, 2015). Items that were purchased on eBay, and then donated to the Amache museum have an interesting object biography. Something like a Boy Scout uniform, could have personal meaning, but once it is on eBay, it is more a commodity than anything else. When Mr. Akaki purchases the object off eBay for the purpose of donating it to the museum, meanings outside of its commodification phase become the forefront, such as its internment history and meanings to its previous owners, if available. Below is an illustration of this process:

Excerpt 14:

BA: And you know, actually. I actually found a duffel bag on eBay from a guy in Poston.

RC: Oh, wow.

BA: And I was able to buy the bag and was able to donate it to the Poston Restoration Project. I never got to see it because I had it sent directly to them, but the woman I talked to there, her mother um was still alive at the time, I'm hoping she still is, but she says, my mom recognized it immediately. She says this is exactly, you know, her mom basically authenticated it for me. You know, she said, 'Yep, this is what we had, this is what it is, this is exactly it!'

RC: Wow.

BA: And it still had the guy's name stenciled on it, and I looked up in the database, and sure enough he's in there, and the Poston people looked him up and

they copied the camp directory, and said, yeah we found his name, and it tells you what barrack he was in, so that was pretty cool.

RC: Mhm. Um, and you were talking a little bit before that, like you want the objects to go to the Amache museum because um, they displayed them more, and they would have more meaning there, I'm just wondering, overall, what purpose do you hope these objects would serve at the museum?

BA: Well, the thing is, at the various museums, like the Amache museum, the stuff I donated to the Friends of Minidoka, and the Topaz Museum, and the Poston Project, um, yeah there's people, uh, there's other people that had no connection to those camps that will see that stuff, uh, and that will, uh will find it interesting, but what I...the thing that what my real motivation is, is that people that had family in the camps or even in the camps themselves will be the ones that will see that collection. And I think those are the ones that will really find that stuff interesting. Um, like I said, the reaction that I got from this woman's mother, I mean that just, that just made it for me

(Akaki, unpublished transcript, July 15, 2015)

This excerpt is important to understanding object biographies from eBay. This object was owned by an internee from Poston, then, during the course of its post-camp life it ended up on eBay. Finally, it was purchased on eBay, and brought back to its original home. Its meaning on eBay, as a commodity, is now much different as a museum artifact. Its monetary value is not as important as its personal and historic value.

However, its history as an item on eBay should not be forgotten because it is still a part of the object's biography and contributes to the multiple meanings over time.

Other objects to consider are a dresser and a vanity made by Mr. Akaki's father in camp. They are not a part of the Amache museum collection, but they are good examples of object reuse among the Japanese American community. They also reflect hard times during camp.

Excerpt 15:

BA:...What I wish I had access to was, in camp, my dad, like several others did actually took some of the scrap lumber and made furniture. One of the things he made was a vanity for his oldest sister, my aunt. And uh, he actually took the time to varnish and shellac that thing so it was preserved and that was in my grandparents' house when my cousin cleaned it out, when my sister hung onto that and it's...I don't know what she did with it, so she lives in California so I'm thinking it's sitting in a storage unit somewhere, I hope it's not rotting away. I think...and the only thing he made was, that they kept anyway was a dresser, and I remember it when I was a kid because we kept the Christmas decorations in it among other things. But it was this big bulky thing because it wasn't made out of cabinet grade wood, it was made of construction grade level because it was all they had you know, and, so, the vanity's the same way, and the thing is, well like drawers, well, if you were gonna make a dresser, or if you were gonna make a vanity, or make something like that, if you're gonna make it yourself out of cabinet grade wood, well you would want, you maybe decide that your dresser,

that the drawers you want to be four inches deep, right? Well, when you make it out of construction grade level with just crude tools, um you're not gonna want to take the time to rip a board down from six inches to four inches and make a side of the drawer.

RC: Mhm, that's a lot of work.

BA: So, the sides of the drawers and everything like that um is kinda dictated by what the size of the lumber was...my dad could find...so this dresser has huge drawers.

RC: Did you ask your family about it when you saw it?

BA: You know, I didn't find out about it uh...I didn't think much about it till later.

RC: Okay.

BA: And I did talk to my dad about it...he does recall making it back in...he said, yeah I made a vanity for...she was the older sister, and I think, because my aunt uh his other sister was going to leave um he didn't make something for her, but he said yeah I made a dresser uh because what most people used...they didn't have dressers...

(Akaki, unpublished transcript, July 15, 2015)

When asked why he thought his family brought back the vanity and the dresser, he said,

BA: You know, I don't know. Although the vanity is kinda neat, my dad, you know, he never wanted to say he was good at that stuff, but I remember when I



was in the Cub Scouts he helped make my soap box derby or my...Pinewood Derby is a deal the Cub Scouts had, each Cub Scout is given a, basically a little block of wood and you make a, you're supposed to make a racecar out of it and then they have a race and you know, the fastest car, fastest cars get prizes and stuff like that and he made just this gorgeous little race car, he did a lot of the carving, and the painting, I remember we had a [cut] or something like that, he made this really neat box [cut], and he was really good at that stuff, just never seem to want to take the time at it, and so I think he spent a lot of time um because while he was an internee until he got a job there, he had a lot of time. He had a lot of time on his hands and so I think he took a lot of time making that vanity for my aunt, and while he, like I said, he actually, he felt good enough about it that he got varnish or shellac and actually gave it a nice coating on it you know to preserve it, so I think he took a lot of pride in it, and I think that's why the vanity is what it is...the dresser not so much because like I said, it wasn't, he never, he never gave a coating or anything to it, but it was kind of, I almost want to say it was kind of a more utilitarian kind of thing because it beats having that stuff in a duffel bag.

(Akaki, unpublished transcript, July 15, 2015)



Figure 5.5: Handmade vanity, made by Mr. Akaki's father in camp, Image Courtesy of Mr. Robert Akaki

It is unknown at this time how the dresser was taken back to their home after camp, but it could have been transported by train. After camp ended, internees were given train tickets to their destination. Nevertheless, it was decided to be taken to their home. The dresser was not easily portable, so this object must have been a hassle to take back. The dresser, handmade at Amache, must have held some importance to the family. This object was once made of raw materials (construction grade wood), which was not intended to be used to make a dresser. Because it was all they had, the wood was used, with the added benefit of large drawers. It is interesting to note that this dresser was later used to store Christmas decorations in the family home. An object, made during likely the hardest time of Mr. Akaki's family's life, was now used to store items associated with joy and celebration. Now, the object is kept in storage instead of being used, so now it is likely that the object is meaningful because it is associated with the family, not for utilitarian purposes.

The section on why the vanity and dresser was kept after camp provides insights into understanding biographical objects. The construction of the dresser relates to his father's skill in woodworking. Mr. Akaki continues to talk about the story of how his father helped him build a Soap Box derby racecar. The addition of varnish is another component to consider. It is interesting that the vanity was varnished and the dresser was not. It could be that one object was meant to be preserved longer, but it could also mean that his father did not think about it.

The last part of this section will discuss Mr. Tonai's perspective on and experience with Amache items. When Amache community members ask Mr. Tonai where to bring their donated items, he tells them that the Amache museum is the best place.

Excerpt 16:

RC: How do you come in contact with the Amache museum donors? Do they come to you to donate?

MT: Oh, um. I was...I was president of the Japanese....Amache Historical Society before they even had an Amache Preservation Society. And so...I've been involved with them....getting things for them...and helping them...and what have you...so I've known John Hopper for a....long long time. And I've visited him several times and so whenever someone had something to donate to them....I would reference him and tell him to do that. Now, in the meanwhile, I was a board member of the Japanese American National Museum.

RC: Okay.

MT: And...uh...there were things that people came and brought to me...but I observed that at the museum they have SO many artifacts that they only show a certain number, and I found they were not showing a lot...so I kinda held back of giving them anything um...if someone wanted to give them directly, I would not stop them, you know. And I uh in the process...I did get some things from the Amache people that they wanted to uh wondered if I would help them donate these things...to the proper place...so I kept them. And we would display them at different Amache related things and things like that. (Tonai, personal communication, September 11, 2015)

His most recent donation to the Amache museum includes a display case of items like dance invitations made in the camp silk screen shop, and a basketball trophy from the Amache High School. In the interview, he stated that the display case was given to him by the owner's widow, and the trophy was given to him by the owner of the trophy, which was the basketball captain. He stated that the captain received the trophy in the mail after World War II, and was not sure what to do with it. Mr. Tonai asked the owner to give it to him, so that it could be displayed at the Amache museum (Tonai, personal communication, September 11, 2015). This information shows how these items came into Mr. Tonai's possession, and their new value at Amache reunions and then at the Amache museum. Mr. Tonai stated that these items are important in helping inform the public about Amache (Tonai, personal communication, September 11, 2015).



Figure 5.6: Dance Bids and Invitations donated by Minoru Tonai, Image Courtesy of the Amache Preservation Society



Figure 5.7: Basketball Trophy donated by Minoru Tonai, Image Courtesy of the Amache Preservation Society

This alternative donation process highlights the importance of community among former internees and their families. This component is critically important in object biographies outside of the typical family collection donation process. Mr. Tonai is an important leader in the Amache community network, and is asked what to do with family items on many occasions. Highly esteem community members, like Mr. Tonai, seem to be trusted so much that community members choose to give him their family possessions. It would also seem that the concrete relationship between Mr. Tonai and Mr. Hopper eases this donation process. Below is a more detailed account of their relationship and why he think it is important to donate items to the Amache museum:

Excerpt 17:

RC: And why do you want them to donate their items to the Amache museum in Granada?

MT: Well, one thing is, they will display it...they need it. They can use it...I have been in contact with John Hopper to make sure that they did need it and that they can display it. If they were not going to display it, I would find someplace else for them to bring it. But, I know that they wanted it. In fact, John right now, is trying to set up a separate high school, an Amache High School display. So all these things will be put right in there. And it works out fine for him.

(Tonai, personal communication, September 11, 2015)

Mr. Tonai's involvement in both the Amache Preservation Society and the Japanese American National Museum presents a unique perspective on where Amache items should go, since he has first-hand knowledge and experience at the JANM, and knows what usually goes on display and what stays in storage at the museum. His insider perspective has led him to believe the Amache museum is a better place to donate items, as long as it is needed there.

## **Discussion**

By examining these object biographies, there are reoccurring themes that emerge. It is not hard to see that object reuse is common among many of the families of those interviewed. There could be multiple reasons for this theme, such as a reflection of the

need to reuse items during camp or the desire to keep functioning objects after camp. Some may think that reusing an object after camp devalues its significance because it is not on display or that it is prone to damage by being reused. However, because these objects continued to be interactive in their daily lives, it shows that they have personal and family value. They were not kept only for historical or aesthetic significance.

Making sure nothing was wasted also relates to Japanese culture. The term *mottainai* is a value that one should not waste resources. It normally pertains to an object's intrinsic value (Olejarz 2011, 565). Japanese Americans may feel a sense of deep regret from wasting, specifically throwing away material items. Many former internees would incorporate object reuse in their lives because of both the cultural significance and the Japanese American internment experience.

The objects' different uses throughout time is another powerful theme to consider. Most of the objects had many different uses, depending on the context. For example the tea crate ended up storing the Yamada family's personal possessions over time. The cot was later used as a bench in the Ogawa family home. The dresser Mr. Akaki's father made in camp was later used to store Christmas decorations. Overall, many of the objects discussed in the interviews continued to be used after camp in different ways than were originally intended. This relates to how internees were forced to reuse objects due to wartime and incarceration

Multiple meanings over time is another theme. Sub-themes within overall meaning include Japanese American internment history and family meaning. These two meanings are intertwined in their object biographies. Neither can be considered without



the other. One of the major factors here concerns why museum donors gave their family possessions to a museum. It may be that the object can have a greater purpose for telling the story of Japanese American incarceration history. In Mr. Akaki's case, objects were "rescued" from eBay. Monetary value may have been more important than personal meaning, in this case. He donated these items for families of those interned and the general public to learn about their histories. Mr. Tonai shares a similar opinion, although he is more of a community leader among the Amache community, and is an intermediary figure in the donation process. Family meaning may be more important with the Palmer relief sculpture, since the carving was given to a family member through generations. Family meaning can be built up over time, in this way, even though Ms. Palmer never could talk to her grandfather about the piece.

## **Conclusion**

The themes that emerged from the interviews relate the nature of the Japanese American internment experience. Testimonies about how the interviewees' parents perceived objects associated with Amache, or new objects in their lives, show that reusing objects or repairing old objects was common. Camp life included having to work with the only materials that they had, including construction grade wood or one sewing needle. The behaviors that were needed in camp life seemed to have transferred to a "new normal" life outside of camp. In some cases, as in Mr. Ogawa's, these behaviors were transmitted to the internees' children. In this way, people who were not even in camp treated objects a certain way, as a result of incarceration.

In the next chapter, these objects will be discussed in terms of object agency. This analysis will concern how these objects played a role in family lives. There are other objects that interviewees talked about that will be considered here. Themes such as contributing emotion and meaning to objects and how memory is embedded in objects will be discussed.

## **CHAPTER SIX: AMACHE FAMILY OBJECT AGENCY**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will focus on how former internees' family objects play an interactive role in their families' lives. This means that their owners give them agency. It also means that the unfamiliarity or unawareness of an object could produce agency as well, as described in the material culture theory chapter. Objects can shape behavior or may stimulate an emotional response. For this project, object agency will be studied through the relationships between objects and their owners. I will examine the specific relationships between Amache family objects and donors, including the donors' family members. Similar to the chapter on object biographies, I will first analyze interviews with museum donors through object agency. Then, I will address specific themes and overall patterns amongst all the interviews discussed.

### **Object Agency in the Japanese American Internment Experience**

#### ***Object Agency and the Yamada Family***

The Yamada family tea crate was important through various stages during and after internment. It played a role in the family's life by serving as their sole storage item during incarceration. Since this was the case, the crate became valuable to them. Below is an excerpt where Mr. Yamada explains why the crate is important to his family:

Excerpt 1:

EY: The crate symbolizes that point in our family's lives when it contained almost every material thing we had after being sent to Amache. From that point onward, we had to reacquire everything we needed to again resume a normal life.

(Yamada, unpublished transcript, July 27, 2015)

As expressed above, the tea crate was interactively part of the Yamada family's life during incarceration. Mr. Yamada also states that the tea crate "symbolizes" an extremely difficult time in his family's life (Yamada, unpublished transcript, July 27, 2015). It is probable then that the crate, through its history and physical appearance, has a distinct relationship with its owner, as well as with the history of internment. The tea crate has a relationship with the Yamada family because it reminds them of the personal possessions they had during incarceration. The tea crate's small space (L 14'' x W 29'' x H 20'') reminds them of how difficult life was, and how it was again a struggle after camp to "reacquire" items to "resume a normal life" (Yamada, unpublished transcript, July 27, 2015).

These observations of the interview data show that the tea crate has agency, however, it may not have had as much of an influence after camp. This is because the tea crate was kept in storage until it was donated to the Amache museum. The family may

have wanted to distance themselves from it in order to regain a sense of normalcy after a traumatic experience. It is interesting to note, however, that they did not throw it away.

Wouldn't it make sense to throw out the crate if they wanted to forget internment?

There are multiple reasons as to why the crate may have been kept. At the time after Amache closed, Mr. Yamada and his family did not have many possessions. They may have wanted to keep whatever they had, even if the object reminded them of pain and suffering. It also may have not been such an emotional burden if the crate was kept in storage for the rest of its time with the Yamada family. It was still functional, and continued to store items until it was donated, but it was not directly involved in their daily lives.

Excerpt 2:

RC: When you inherited the tea crate in 2006 did you always plan to donate it to a museum? If not why did you decide to donate the tea crate to a museum? Why specifically did you choose to donate the tea crate to the Amache museum, as opposed to other museums that collect Japanese American objects?

EY: No. I decided to donate it to the Amache museum as it was the nearest locale to where it was used the most.

(Yamada, unpublished transcript, July 27, 2015)

If the two excerpts are used together, it seems that Mr. Yamada wanted to donate the crate because to him, it showed one of the most significant struggles from being incarcerated. The tea crate can help illustrate the struggle of having to pack up belongings into a limited space, not having furniture to store items in camp, and having

to ship goods to their new destination after camp. When asked why he decided to donate it to the Amache museum, it appears that location was the main priority. It was “the nearest locale to where it was used the most” (Yamada, unpublished transcript, July 27, 2015). Mr. Yamada wanted the tea crate to go where it is the most meaningful, but also to a place where it can be preserved, which in his opinion, is the Amache museum. In the end, he wanted the crate to continue to have agency, and in this way, it will have agency over museum volunteers and visitors.

### ***Object Agency and the Ogawa Family***

Object reuse discussed in the previous chapter also relates to object agency. Part of understanding this concept is analyzing how people ingrain themselves into objects. Mr. Ogawa discussed how his mother was always recycling and repairing old items as long as they could still be functional. This was part of Mr. Ogawa’s mother’s personality. It is also an influence from being incarcerated. What is also extremely important to address here, is Mr. Ogawa’s realization during the interview that the reason he kept the metal cot’s pieces might have been because of his mother. Below is the portion of the interview:

#### Excerpt 3:

DO: Yeah, I did that after camp with a handsaw, and then again, um I don’t know maybe it’s something that was ingrained in me or maybe it was my mother told me to, I can’t remember, but as I was packing up all the stuff, and I found those little, the ends of the legs.

RC: Oh!

DO: I didn't even throw them away after I cut them off...and I think that was an influence...and when I donated that cot to the museum I made it a point to take those, um, take those pieces that had been cut off.

RC: Mhm.

DO: I don't know if they kept them or not...but...Yeah...that's just kinda funny how...

RC: Yeah. So you're following in your mother's footsteps.

DO: Yeah.

RC: Mhm.

DO: And plus, I wanted to make sure that um they could tell how tall that cot really was (Ogawa, unpublished transcript, August 3, 2015).

This behavior is represented and interconnected in the objects Mr. Ogawa donated. The metal cot, for example, shows an effort to keep the object after camp, even if it was no longer needed for its intended purpose. The wear and tear in the suitcases show age and use over time. These objects are not just representations of the Ogawa family's suffering due to incarceration. They were interactive in the family's lives through generations, and it is through their agency that they should be interpreted, in order to better understand the role of objects in the Japanese American internment experience.

Taking care of items to prolong life was embedded in Mr. Ogawa's behavior because of his parents. Below is an excerpt that describes Mr. Ogawa's childhood.

Excerpt 4:

DO: Uh yeah, my parents were always very big on really taking good care of things. Um, and um...my family was able to preserve a lot of things just because they...they didn't take things like that for granted?

RC: Mhm.

DO: And so, even growing up I remember my parents were big on the children taking care of their toys, and my wife and my grandkids now, well, they're her grandkids, but they're my grandkids by marriage, are amazed at the condition of some of the toys that I used to play with. Um...because they are still in such good shape. You know, things like, um Lincoln Logs, like that that I played with as a little kid, and they are still in really good condition, and in the original containers, and I think that's the influence my parents had because again, when you're talking about having to borrow a sewing needle from a neighbor...um that just shows you how frugal and how careful they had to be with the things that they had...

(Ogawa, unpublished transcript, August 3, 2015)

Mr. Ogawa's note that other family members have commented on the unusually pristine condition of his childhood toys shows that these toys have agency. Mr. Ogawa even explicitly states that it "shows...how frugal and how careful they had to be with the things they had..." (Ogawa, unpublished transcript, August 3, 2015). Objects can embody people's behaviors and attitudes, and this is a clear example of this concept. The remarkable condition of the toys directly reflects Mr. Ogawa's mother's frugal attitude.



These toys embody Mr. Ogawa's mother's need to be frugal and to reuse objects as much as possible, a behavior that stimulated from the Japanese American internment experience.

Descendants of former internees often found items that were never discussed or even that they knew about. One of these objects is a diary that Mr. Ogawa's mother kept in camp. Here is his discussion on the diary:

Excerpt 5:

DO: Now, that particular diary...my mom never did talk about that...when I came across that I was kind of surprised.

RC: Oh really, she didn't talk about it?

DO: No, she never read excerpts from it uh it was actually when I was just cleaning out old paperwork when my mom had died uh that I came across that and I showed it to my sister and we talked about it. But neither one of us I don't think ever recall her specifically making reference or bringing the diary out and talking with the aid of the diary. And frankly maybe she had forgotten she had even wrote it.

RC: Mhm. Really?

DO: But she was even...in her later years...she was good about jotting down little notes in the uh little notebooks and calendars.

RC: Mhm...yeah because it has like the time and the weather in like every entry...it's like...really really great.

DO: Yeah, she was really big on the weather...even in her later years...but um you know I think a lot of that had to do with the fact that she just never really um liked the um wind.

(Ogawa, unpublished transcript, August 3, 2015)

Mr. Ogawa was first surprised when he found the diary, but then took the time to look at it with his sister. The diary revealed hidden memories about their mother's experience. In a way, the diary helped bring them together to explore their family's painful history. It played a distinct role in understanding their mother's internment experience. As they read the diary, they learned about parts of their mother's life that make more sense to them now, such as the way she always made remarks about the weather and how she often made small notes around the house. After their mother's passing, this object has played a role in Mr. Ogawa and his sister's life by giving them knowledge about their mother, and therefore, has agency.

When asked why he decided to donate these items to the Amache museum, he stated:

Excerpt 6:

DO: Well, because I thought they would...um...uhh help tell the story of what um my parents had gone through during the um...concentration period...the camp period.

RC: Mhm.

DO: And...uhh...found that they would do more good than just being stored in a basement or...ultimately um you know given to Goodwill or someplace like that. I wanted it to be preserved in a museum setting.

RC: Mhm...and I guess I wanna know why specifically did you choose to donate everything to the Amache museum as opposed to other museums that collect Japanese American objects?

DO: Umm...I umm...actually visited the museum on...two occasions and I was impressed with the way the museum was...um being set up. I know that it had been there for a while, but um it had been really kind of gone to the next level and um I thought that that the way they presented the information um was a very good depiction of what actually transpired during the camps.

(Ogawa, unpublished transcript, August 3, 2015)

Here, Mr. Ogawa was interested in preserving his family's items in a museum, because eventually, he would not be able to take care of it, and it would likely be given to Goodwill or a similar establishment. He also stated that the reason he chose the Amache museum was because of how the objects were displayed, and that it, "was a very good depiction of what actually transpired during the camps" (Ogawa, unpublished transcript, August 3, 2015). In his opinion, the Amache museum presents the Japanese American internment history well. These items are important to him since he wanted his family's possessions in a museum. He knows that they would deteriorate or become lost as his family members move on with their lives. The metal cot, dresser, and other items played a meaningful role in his family's life, so it makes sense that he wants them preserved. He also wanted to make sure they were donated to the right place, and in this case, he believed the Amache museum was the best facility.

### *Object Agency and the Palmer Family*

During the interview, Ms. Palmer was consistently enthusiastic about her Amache family possessions and Amache collections as a whole. She was concerned about the preservation and interpretation of these objects. There were multiple instances where it appeared that she was emotionally attached to these objects by the way she spoke about them and her word choice. These observations suggests that her personal possessions have agency in her life. Below is an excerpt revealing enthusiasm while talking about her family's personal possessions. Ms. Palmer discusses her aunt's written stories about her time in camp.

#### Excerpt 7:

FP: And so, she has...since the computer age came, she stored them all on our computer, and she gave...I have copies, and I sent a bunch of these copies they're about ten stories you know life in camp...how it was in Santa Anita and just everything that, it was just... from a teenager's point of view...written very shortly after the event...I offered them to JANM and the curator writes back to me and says, "oh these are wonderful, do you have the originals?" And I'm going, she wants the originals? From 1946, I mean I've got copies on the computer...so I was visiting the family down in July when I was in Los Angeles and I say, this person wants to have...if Auntie has the originals...so the daughter who's caregiving for her now because Auntie is now 87 and she's not real [conversive] and her memory is good but she can't verbalize it, she gives this big file marked Amache, and it has the camp directory and all the reunions that Auntie helped

organize and then and low and behold...there are handwritten in pencil on lined paper... stories from 1946 with the teacher's grade and the comment on it.

RC: Wow!

FP: They are the originals. I get all excited! So I write back to the curator at the National Museum and say, I can't believe this, we have the originals they're in pencil so she must have written them in class and the teacher's grade...and she got an A on everything, and the teacher wrote down a comment, "these are good, you should write a book about this!" That's in 1946...

RC: That is amazing...

FP: And I haven't heard back from the museum, and that's been three months, so that's my thing, is that things get lost in the shuffle, because they got people giving them boxes of things, to me, as a former history major (laughs) and who is interested in artifacts and ancient stuff, um, to me the contemporaneous thing is so valuable that you would think they would gobble it up, but if they're getting thousands of contemporaneous things they aren't going to have time, and they have a very small staff, so that is the reason why Granada would be a better place for grandpa's sculpture than a large place where they have so much to choose from, there's no guarantee it would be shared on display...

(Palmer, unpublished transcript, September 30, 2015)

Like other museum donors that were interviewed, many were worried to give their family items to a larger museum because it would likely not be on display, and in their perspective, somewhat forgotten because it was not being used. It is probable that

museum donors would think that their objects would not have agency at a larger museum. Furthermore, they might be even more worried that they would not have agency because they did have agency in their own lives. Phrases like “getting excited,” “so valuable,” “can’t believe this,” show that Ms. Palmer is consistently enthusiastic about the objects (Palmer September 2015, 5). They mean something to her, and she is not going to donate them just anywhere. She wants them to be in a place where her objects show a similar sense of agency that they had in her life.

Below illustrates her stance in more detail:

Excerpt 8:

RC: Mhm...yeah that’s what a lot of museum donors have been telling me...is that it would only sit on a shelf.

FP: Exactly, exactly that is the horrible thing that we think may happen.

RC: Mhm. Okay, so you said your son has one on display at his house?

FP: Yes, it’s just on a ledge. (laughs)

RC: Okay.

FP: I has the original string which has deteriorated...it has the original thumbtacks on each side of the carving, and I love it because it’s packaging string, the white paper, white kind of string, we used to wrap packages with right before all this modern, you know, tape came up, we did it with a little white string, I don’t know if you’re even old enough to remember the old white string that old packages came in.

RC: (laughs) Mhm.

FP: And that makes it precious to me...so anyway he just has it on a ledge...at least he's enjoying it.

(Palmer, unpublished transcript, September 30, 2015)

Here, it appears that the material aspects of her son's carving is important to her. The passage that includes the packaging string is particularly of interest. The original packaging string and thumbtacks, although deteriorating are what makes this carving important to her. Why does this object speak to her in ways unlike other family objects? It may be because of the original materials, specifically the white string, which could be reminiscent of her coming of age years or could be a window into the memory of her grandfather. Again, the phrases, "horrible to happen," "I love it," and "precious to me" uttered by Ms. Palmer show how she is not simply indifferent to these objects (Palmer, unpublished transcript, September 30, 2015). She is showing emotion and enthusiasm towards these objects, in this case, her grandfather's relief sculpture.

Excerpt 9:

FP: And the thing I think I also described when I described it to...uh Melissa Dupris from History Colorado...I love it that Grandpa...he sketched on the back of the wood which is not treated with shellac...the outline of what he projected to carve...just like you'd seen with Leonardo da Vinci would do pencil sketches of something he would do later in a painting, Grandpa's idea of the animals and the figures is on the back in pencil!

RC: Wow!

FP: And so, he chose not to carve this side, he carved the other side, but it shows the plan in his head, and I just...I think it's great! And that's why my son has that...I suspect this one might have it too, but I don't remember...but I described all that to Melissa before I started to...when I was telling all the excited things about it...yeah.

(Palmer, unpublished transcript, September 30, 2015)

The above excerpt shows that the relief sculpture is indeed meaningful to Ms. Palmer. The way she describes the pencil sketch on the back of the carving reveals that she is proud of her grandfather's amateur artwork. Preservation is also important to her in this passage. Even though her son's carving does not have the shellac on it, the integrity of the pencil sketch, after all these years, is significantly meaningful to her. The carving reminds her of the memory of her grandfather and his experience at Amache. It is through this object that multiple emotions and reflections come to mind, which is how the relief sculpture has agency.

Ms. Palmer's son is also important here. He decided to display the carving at his home, instead of keeping it in storage. This means that the carving was meaningful enough to him to keep it displayed at home, where visitors are able to see it, and I imagine, he sees it quite often in his daily routines. Displaying an item at home also implies that he took the time to figure out where and how to display it. He could have simply kept it in storage, away from everyday life, but instead, decided that this piece should be with him during his daily activities, which shows that the carving does play an active role in his life.



### *Object Agency and the Furuta Family*

Mr. Peter Furuta donated two trunks, which were owned by his father, Mr. Peter Asao Furuta. Both trunks are thirteen by thirty by seventeen inches, and are army green with metal clasps and leather handles. Their father's name is painted onto the side of the trunks. The family used the trunks to transfer items back and forth from Amache. Similar to the above interviewees, Mr. Furuta and his brother, Steve, decided to donate the trunks to the Amache museum because it was where the trunks were most used. Below is his explanation:



Figure 6.1 Side view of the Furuta family trunk. Image Courtesy of the Amache Preservation Society

#### Excerpt 10:

PF: Somebody said, 'Put it on eBay,' and I said, it's not about the money...like a lot of people want...what am I gonna get? 25 dollars...50 dollars...you know, and I had noticed at Manzanar that they had a model of what the camp might have

looked like...and there were trunks! You know, so I said...and I tried to give them to the museum in Los Angeles, but there was no curator, at the time, I don't know about today, but...

RC: at JANM? The Japanese American National Museum?

PF: Yeah. I don't know if they have one, but at the time, at the end of 2014- uh '12, when we were trying to find...after a couple of months after my mother had passed, I...we tried to call...try to give it to somebody who would know what to do with it. And they said no...in fact, even at Manzanar...so somehow we got ahold of...there was a museum in Amache, and I said, 'well that's the perfect place to go because that's where it *was*...as far as the trunks,' I don't even know how we did it, we had a...my dad had a car...a '35 Chevy, it wasn't very big and...and uh, you know, I just remembered they were there...

(Furuta, personal communication, April 2, 2016)

Mr. Furuta and his brother wanted the trunks to go to the Amache museum because that was where it was used the most. His family objects have the most historical significance at this site. It is also interesting to note that he said, “[i]t’s not about the money” (Furuta, personal communication, April 2, 2016). He infers personal historic, and family value precedes monetary value. During the interview, Mr. Furuta was enthusiastic while discussing the Amache site and museum. The quote, “[w]ell that’s the perfect place to go because that’s where it *was*...as far as the trunks,” shows that he values the Amache museum and believes his trunks can play a role in illustrating the Japanese American internment history. Below is another quote, where his enthusiasm continues:

Excerpt 11:

RC: What was it like coming back to Amache for the pilgrimage?

PF: So in 1988, when my brother...he drove from San Francisco to... and he went to Denver...went to Amache...and he was telling me that, for him to get to Amache, he had to go through a couple of towns, and it was nothing like what it was as it is today...it was just...overgrown with weeds...and stuff...so...he went back to his birthplace and in 2013 when I went...and I said, 'hey man, there's a museum!' and he said, "WHAT?" and I said, "yeah, I took the trunks there...it's not a big one...but it's there...like downtown...Amache...in Granada...in downtown Granada they have a little corner building...they have artifacts...that people donated...

(Furuta, personal communication, April 2, 2016)

The Furuta brothers' conversation, in particular his brother's excitement, shows that community members want Amache's material culture to be preserved. It appears that personal history is especially important here. During the interview, while Mr. Furuta spoke about the trunks, he told many stories about his father. For example, he spoke about his father's job in Cleveland during the war, hiding a Coleman stove for fear of being arrested for 'stolen' property, and about how his father was a football coach for the Amache High School. These stories suggest that the trunk reminds him of his father greatly. The donated trunks at the Amache museum can tell the general story about internment, but can also speak about Mr. Furuta's father, who originally owned the trunks.

### *Beyond Family Collections and Object Agency*

Like the previous chapter, this section will include insights from Mr. Bob Akaki and then Mr. Min Tonai. The role of objects in Mr. Akaki's life is somewhat different than the previous museum donors. This is because of his active attempt to find items on eBay for the purpose of donating them to the Japanese American internment museums. It could be said that the act of giving Amache family items is what is important here. Below is an excerpt that illustrates this idea:

#### Excerpt 12:

RC: Mhm. Um, you were talking a little bit before that, like you want the objects to go to the Amache museum because um, they displayed them more, and they would have more meaning there, I just wondering, overall, what purpose do you hope these objects would serve at the museum?

BA: Well, the thing is, at the various museums, like the Amache museum, the stuff I donated to the Friends of Minidoka, and the Topaz Museum, and the Poston Project, um, yeah there's people, uh, there's other people that had no connection to those camps that will see that stuff, uh, and that will, uh will find it interesting, but what I...the thing that what my real motivation is, is that people that had family in the camps or even in the camps themselves will be the ones that will see that collection. And I think those are the ones that will really find that stuff interesting.

Um, like I said, the reaction that I got from this woman's mother, I mean that just, that just made it for me.

(Akaki, unpublished transcript, July 15, 2015)

The last section of this excerpt is of particular interest. The quote, "the reaction that I got from this woman's mother, I mean that just, that just made it for me," infers that there is some meaning here (Akaki, unpublished transcript, July 15, 2015). The duffle bag that he found on eBay has agency because it played a role in the mother's memory of the tangible history of incarceration. It also has agency because, through the act of giving, Mr. Akaki felt that his donation was worth the work and money involved. The duffle bag also helped create conversation between the museum employee, her mother, and Mr. Akaki about life in camp. This is one example of how internment objects given to museums at internment sites serve a special purpose.

In another excerpt, Mr. Akaki tells the story about how he donated a movie ticket to the Friends of Minidoka.

Excerpt 13:

BA: And uh, one of the things I was able to find from Minidoka was, there was a ticket to the movies.

RC: Wow!

BA: And another pass...another thing that was from the cooperative there, included a movie pass, and the guy I talked to there, his mother was still alive, and she was at Minidoka, and she says, 'Yes! I remember the movies, yes we had tickets like that, because what they did was the gymnasium of the building that

was used for the school. Um Saturdays, they turned it into a theater, and we had to go to the Co-op and we had to buy tickets like this to go see the movies!' So uh, that will go on the...in the, he told me that they have a display about um, you know, kind of leisure time activities, and they have a display about the movie theater, he said, those things will go right into our display, so they were really excited to get it. You know, and the reaction from his mother, 'this is, yeah, this is exactly what we had!' See, that's the thing that's really neat.

(Akaki, unpublished transcript, July 15, 2016)

In this example, a movie ticket can help reveal the story of leisure activities at camp, in this case, Minidoka. Similar to the duffel bag, the museum staff's mother's memory was sparked by the movie ticket. It is these kinds of interactions that make the object important to the Japanese American internment community. This movie ticket has more agency as it is put on display with other objects that remind former internees about how they spent their leisure time while interned. The reactions from the museum staff and family members seems to be the most important part of the donation process, in Mr. Akaki's perspective. Together, through the act of donating, and the reactions of the museum staff because of these objects, shows that they still have agency. These items will continue to have agency as long as they stay interactive in telling the history of internment, through literal storytelling by former internee's families, or through museum displays.

The reason why Mr. Akaki is passionate about collecting and donating internment objects is likely because of his interest in history. Throughout the interview, when I asked

about an object, he would dictate the background research he conducted along with the story of how it was donated. This is probably also why he prefers these objects to be on display instead of sitting on a shelf or staying hidden in an attic or storage unit. While on display at a museum, objects are provided context, and with the company of other associated objects, can tell the story of a particular subject of internment history. The history and stories behind the object appears to be especially important to Mr. Akaki, because of his inquisitiveness and knowledge of artifacts, and determination to donate objects to a museum. Below is an excerpt that combines his passion for stamp collecting and his knowledge of internment history.

Excerpt 14:

BA: And I have a page basically, for each camp, and for my collection, I'm interested in denomination, that is the, price of the stamp, and, as a stamp collector, what kind of stamp, and there are basically...during the war the post office didn't make a whole bunch of different kinds of stamps...because what do you need to print a stamp? You need a steel frame...what do you need to make guns...you need steel...so they didn't make a whole lot of...they didn't have to spend the time or money to make different kinds of stamps...so there was a Three Won the War stamp, probably would think they made 150 million of them...well they made about 3.5 billion of them. You know, so I list the type of stamp that was on the letter and the destination, because it's kind of interesting to see where the mail went...plus there were different kinds of rates...I think like I said before, there were kind of special rates...one of those rates don't exist anymore...um but

to stamp collectors...they're very interesting...for example...back in those days, it actually, I can still remember this when I was a kid, is that, for example, if you sent Christmas cards, you can send Christmas cards at an reduced rate.

RC: Okay.

BA: Now, the regular rate at that time, to send a letter was 3 cents...if you decided not to seal the envelope, and that's something you might do at Christmas time because all it says is Merry Christmas and you write your name on it, because people did things different back then...you know with a Christmas card, depending on where it was going, could be sent instead of 3 cents, could have been sent for 2 cents, if you didn't seal it, and could actually be sent for a penny and a half, and back then, the post office had 1 ½ cent stamps you could buy for that rate...and there was even a special rate...if there was a medium sized town, for example, or even a large city, if you sent it within the city, and you didn't seal the envelope, you could send it for a penny...but only one of the internment camps qualified for that rate...it was actually Heart Mountain, but if you wanted to send a Christmas card to someone in Amache to somebody else at Amache, you could send it for a penny and a half. And you'd go to the Amache post office and buy 1 ½ cent stamps.

RC: And you have some of those?

BA: Uh, I actually have, and in fact, the envelopes still have the Christmas cards inside them

RC: Oh wow.



BA: You almost never see that, but I actually have a Christmas card, because I mean my aunt...was kind of a pack rat...that's where some of my covers came from, I actually have, a Christmas card that she got from somebody at Amache, so it was sent through the mail, they actually took it to the post office, and it was picked up by the mail carrier, and it's got a 1 ½ cent stamp on it, it's got an Amache postmark, and it's addressed to her. And I've also got one...she knew somebody that was interned at Manzanar, so I have that Christmas card too...you know, it's a Christmas card so it's postmarked in December, and it's not sealed, and it's got the 1 ½ cent stamp on it (Akaki, unpublished transcript, July 15, 2015).

Mr. Akaki's detailed discussion about the history of reduced rate stamps, including the history of mailing Christmas card during the war, shows what aspects of the objects he has in his private collection or has donated are important to him. For example, some people could be solely interested in an object's aesthetics, or some people could be only interested in what the objects mean to their families. Mr. Akaki finds these objects interesting because of the history. As reflected in the above excerpt, he talks about the internment items in association with their history, both local and general. He first describes the history of stamp prices, then about mailing Christmas cards, and then later on, talks about his aunt's Christmas card. He also shows enthusiasm in explain how important and rare it was to find a letter with a 1 ½ cent stamp. This excerpt is especially important because it joins his interest for stamp collecting and Japanese American internment history, with reference to a family object.

One of the components of object agency is about analyzing objects and their relationships with their owners. Mr. Akaki's aunt's Christmas card is an example of this concept. The Christmas card envelope, stamp, and card not only are important in Mr. Akaki's life because of his stamp collecting, but the family history is important here as well. Here is where the Christmas card, stamp, and envelope have agency. To Mr. Akaki, the general internment history may be more important than the family history, but nevertheless, the envelope, card, and stamp have an interactive relationship with their owner.

When asked why he wanted to donate these items to the Amache museum, Mr. Akaki stated:

Excerpt 15:

BA: Um, well I'll tell you how I started...I got the whole thing started because I'm a stamp collector.

RC: Okay.

BA: And once upon a time, I decided one of my collections would be...uhhh...initially it was just going to be a cover which is an envelope or a postcard...uhh either to or from each of the ten camps.

RC: Mhm.

BA: And then...I found out there's a lot more to it than that. You know, there were all sorts of different destinations...there were all kinds of services that the post office had then that we don't have now...like special delivery and airmail...things like that. And so it just kind of...ballooned from that. And so one

of the search things I put out of on eBay, just named the camp names, besides uh...the covers and postcards...I started seeing artifacts show up there.

RC: Mhm.

BA: And in 2002, umm...I visited both Amache and Topaz, those were the two camps my parents were in. Um...and then found out there was a museum there. So when I went across things...um...well at that time...the museum kinda came after that, but I did found out about the Amache Preservation Society. And...so, when I'd see items for either Amache or Topaz, well actually I have for several other camps as well, uh in the meantime, but I said, gee, would you like to have something like this for your collection? Um...because I happened to see something out there and I'd be willing to try to buy it and donate it. That's kinda how that started. So you know, every now and then something would pop up and I'd send an email, and say, "you interested?" uh because there were things that they weren't interested in...I think um...Amache has...the Amache museum for example, has a complete collection of yearbooks.

(Akaki, unpublished transcript, July 15, 2015)

Mr. Akaki stated that he is first a stamp collector, but he is also interested in internment history. It appears that the reason why he wanted to donate items to the Amache museum was because of his relationship with Mr. John Hopper, who is the director of the Amache Preservation Society. He wanted to help Mr. Hopper because of the outstanding work he has done to preserve the Amache site and museum. His passion

for collecting and his interest in internment history are meshed together through his donated objects, even though most were purchased on eBay.

There were instances in the interview with Mr. Tonai that show object agency is important in the Japanese American internment experience. The first discusses why he wants items donated to the Amache museum:

Excerpt 16:

MT: Well, one thing is, they will display it...they need it. They can use it...I have been in contact with John Hopper to make sure that they did need it and that they can display it. If they were not going to display it, I would find someplace else for them to bring it. But, I know that they wanted it. In fact, John right now, is trying to set up a separate high school, an Amache High School display. So all these things will be put right in there. And it works out fine for him.

(Tonai, personal communication, September 11, 2015).

Like other museum donors, Mr. Tonai prefers items to be donated to the Amache museum because it would be displayed and used to educate the public about Japanese American internment. From the interview, it seems that he believes these objects would continue to have agency after they are donated. A quote of importance here is, “[i]f they were not going to display it, I would find someplace else for them to bring it” (Tonai, personal communication). It appears that Mr. Tonai does not just want these objects preserved. Object agency is what is important here. In a way, these objects are having more agency when they are away from their owners, because items discussed during the interview were in storage or their owners did not know what to do with these items.

Excerpt 17:

MT: ...In fact, John right now, is trying to set up a separate high school, an Amache High School display. So all these things will be put right in there. And it works out fine for him. Except for the chest of drawers...and the gourd...the gourd I sent...it did not have to do with the Amache High School...it was owned by somebody from my own block. That I got because I was on the board at the museum, and one guy called me up and says, 'I got this gourd! Uh...from Amache and uh...somebody left it here...what shall I do?' And I said, 'give it to me.' And I took it and I checked it and it was from a person from 9L...my block! They had a gourd contest from 1945 and they won! So I thought that would be a good memorabilia for John.

(Tonai, personal communication, September 11, 2015)

There are a number of different values embedded in this excerpt. Personal value is reflected in this excerpt, since the gourd was from his own block. The enthusiasm that the object comes from where he lived in Amache is reflected in the interview. Like Mr. Akaki, object research is also important to him. He conducted his own research on the gourd, and found out it was associated with a gourd contest at Amache. This excerpt shows that this item is important to him, but he also sees the importance it would have at the Amache museum.

## **Discussion**

Object agency is clearly an important factor, especially when it relates to the relationships of objects owned by former internees and family members. From the four interviews analyzed, there are a number of patterns and themes that can be addressed. These include the desire to preserve family items in a museum setting, the meaning of objects initially after and long after camp, and include the relationship of objects and their owners during their daily lives. They also include the difference between the meaning of objects to former internees and to their children, the importance of place and people in making a decision to donate, and the meaning behind a lack of object agency

The desire to preserve family personal possession in a museum setting shows that these objects have agency over their lives. One may ask, if people care about these objects so much, why get rid of them? If they did not care, it would have been reflected in the interviews. Through word choice or the way they spoke about their items, it seems that they would be disheartened if these family items were lost forever. They understand that these objects have importance beyond their family home. These objects can reveal important information about the Japanese American internment experience, if they are interpreted correctly with the donor's story.

The meaning of objects right after resettlement appears to be significant for a number of reasons. For example, nonessential items, such as a handmade dresser, or a small relief sculpture, were brought back home after camp. Although most interviewees were uncertain as to why their parents brought these items back, it still shows that they were at least worth bringing. They must have had some type of agency over their lives. It

is likely that the few possessions they had in camp were the only belongings they had left, and they were headed into an uncertain future.

From the interview analysis, object meaning shifts over time. Former internees' children mostly found their family's items in attics and basements. Others were given their items as family heirlooms. Many people whose parents have died likely have had to go through their parents' belongings, and find things that they never knew existed. Family heirlooms are, in general, important to the family, but it is interesting that Ms. Palmer temporarily donated one to a museum. Mr. Furuta stated during the interview that his family rarely spoke about camp. The trunks were kept in his mother's garage until they were donated, and were never displayed or discussed at home. When Mr. Furuta's daughter interviewed his mother about camp for a school report, she would not talk when his daughter used the tape recorder (Furuta, personal communication, April 2, 2016). It was only after she turned it off, that his mother talked about camp. This theme may be because items were so soaked in traumatic experiences that it was too painful or damaging to keep them in their daily lives. Yet, they were still important as family or historic items, so they did not throw them out.

Some people continued to use objects, such as the dresser and metal cot, continuously until it was donated. These objects played a direct role in the owner's lives by being used daily. Another example is Ms. Palmer's son's relief sculpture. He chose to display the piece at home. This shows that he finds the piece meaningful to his family's history. Evidence that these items were not discarded and are chosen to be displayed or commonly used means that they had agency over their owner's daily lives.

One important aspect of these interviews to consider is whether or not the interviewees were former internees or their children. Ms. Palmer and Mr. Yamada were former internees, however, Ms. Palmer does not remember anything about camp since she was a small child at the time she was incarcerated. Mr. Yamada, however, was a teenager, and he remembers some parts of camp. He remembers where the tea crate was in his family's barrack, for example. His tea crate may have more direct agency than others, since he was there when the tea crate was used in arguably, its most important context. It does not mean that children of those interned do not value their family's items, but the agency these objects have is slightly different. There is not that direct relationship from actually being in camp, so memories of camp would not be sparked in this situation. Instead, these items remind them of their parents' suffering.



Figure 6.2: Francis Palmer and her family getting on the bus to the assembly center. Ms. Palmer is seen in the center of photo, fifth from the left. Image Courtesy of Ms. Francis Palmer

The “why donate” question can reveal much about object agency. The answer to the question can first answer if these items were important to them or not, and it can answer why it is important in greater detail. Mr. Yamada stated that he wanted the tea crate to go to the place where it was used the most. He also stated that the tea crate



represents their families' poverty due to incarceration. Ms. Palmer wanted her relief sculpture to help tell the story of internment by showcasing her grandfather's artwork. Mr. Ogawa similarly wanted his items to help tell the story of camp. He believed the Amache museum was the best place to donate his items because he appreciated Mr. Hopper's work and how the items were displayed. Mr. Akaki also wanted to enhance the Amache museum's collection by finding items on eBay. He was the most focused on how objects can illustrate history.

Object agency is present in all these cases. It appears that in general, most donors wanted their personal possessions to be donated because it would help tell the story of internment. They understand that these objects are not merely evidence, but that their families' stories of their painful past are embedded in these objects. The tangibility of history can both grab a visitor's interest and can also help illustrate history in a way that the written word can never achieve. Amache museum donors recognize the impact objects can have on telling the story of internment, and therefore, acknowledge that their family items do have agency.

## **Conclusion**

Object agency is essential in understanding the role of Amache family objects in the Japanese American internment experience. It can tell us why objects are important to investigating Japanese American incarceration in the United States. This concept is also important to understanding the relationship between objects and people, and why analyzing this relationship is important to address at all. Since object agency is present

amongst museum donors, it is exciting for the material culture studies field and the Japanese American community. It shows that objects should be studied further through object agency. In this way, anthropologists can understand the multiple layers of object meaning and how it is important to the Japanese American internment experience.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION**

Object agency and object biography are complex concepts, yet they are critically important when it comes to understanding the relationship between people and their objects. They are also vital in studying how objects can tell us more about human experiences. In this project and many other scholarly works cited in this thesis, object agency has shown to exist and be tremendously relevant in understanding how people live their lives after tragedy, as well as what is important to them. This analytical technique is not purely materialistic. What is important is studying the relationships between people and their objects, in order to better understand human behavior and experiences.

Studying Amache family objects, through the role they play in people's lives, and how they reflect people's behaviors and attitudes, has produced interesting results here. The donor interviews suggest donors' personal possessions hold historic, personal, and family value. Generally, they want to donate their family items to the Amache museum because they see that such objects are meaningful, and need to be preserved in a professional setting. Object reuse and object modification are some important patterns seen within this project. Amache families do not want their objects thrown out, and they certainly do not want their objects to just sit on a shelf. They want their objects to have

agency, meaning that their objects will have an impact on future generations, because they know their family possessions can tell the story of internment in alternate ways than written histories.

Reasons why former internee families decided to donate items to the Amache museum are important to discuss. Most wanted their objects to be on display, as opposed to a larger museum, such as the Japanese American National Museum, where many collections are kept in storage. Donors were also worried that larger museums had duplicates of their items, so they might not be as valued as in the Amache museum. Location was also key. Some donors decided their possessions should go where they were used the most. This brings up an interesting case though, since the majority of the Japanese American community resides on the West Coast. This means that most of the interested community would have to travel a long distance to see items at the Amache museum.

Other reasons for donation included the community aspect of the Amache museum. A few donors expressed gratitude for the way Mr. Hopper and his students, as well as the Amache Preservation Society, have taken care of the museum and site. Building a rapport with Mr. Hopper allowed museum donors to believe their objects would be going to a safe place. Museum donors wanted their items to not only be on display, but to go to a place where museum staff could be trusted and their objects would be appreciated.

Although the community in Granada is crucial to the donation process, the Amache community is equally important to consider. Most interviewed donors expressed

that they wanted their objects to help tell the story of Amache, but specifically to people who had a connection to Amache. This population could include people who were interned, or friends or relatives of those incarcerated. In this way, donated objects help strengthen the community aspect at the Amache museum by presenting personalized histories that are often not incorporated in larger museums.

These reasons all tie into the object agency concept. Museum donors want their objects to have agency for future generations, such as playing a role in public education. If these objects were in collections storage without ever being on display, kept in an attic or basement until they deteriorated, or were placed for sale, they would lose the agency analyzed in this project. As museum objects, these personal possessions have a new type of agency, this time, over visitors' perceptions. The public will react to the humanity embedded these objects, for instance, their personal histories. Yet, the personal value does not automatically disappear. The two are intertwined in creating the story. Museum donors believe their personal possessions can tell different stories about Japanese American internment, and would fit in with other displays at the museum. Some donors are not particularly interested in the monetary value of their objects. Instead, they believe the objects have more value in a museum, where they can help teach visitors about internment history.

Object biography is another concept crucial to material culture studies, but can be puzzling, at first. How can objects have biographies, a concept normally attributed to people? Studying object biographies involves analyzing the evolving or simply different uses, values, and meanings, of items over time. The concept links anthropology and

material culture studies by examining objects along with studying human behavior. This project has shown that objects do have biographies, and by studying them, anthropologists can better understand human experiences. In this case, the two concepts provided insights into learning more about the Japanese American internment experience.

Studying the multiple contexts, uses, values, and meanings over time helps one better understand the object, but also the people behind it as well. Again, the tea crate is a wonderful example of how one object can reflect a traumatic period in a family's life. The suitcase used during internment and again for a high school debate trip shows that the meanings and values of objects associated with internment change within different contexts.

Object location, along with whether or not families spoke about internment is an interesting pattern, when studying Amache family object biographies. If the families' spoke about internment, objects were more interactive in their lives. If they did not, objects were mainly hidden. In some cases, internees' children found many items that they never knew existed in attics or basements. Hence, this project illuminates the meaning of objects to Amache internees' descendants. This relationship shows that objects did play a role in how families moved on with their lives after incarceration. It also reveals insights into how internees' children reconciled with their family's tragic history, either by donating objects to the museum, or keeping them in the family.

From this research, personal possessions reveal insights about the Japanese American internment experience. It is not only reflected in objects that came from Amache. There are also objects that were obtained after incarceration, yet still reflect

internment, likely due to the amount of agency objects have for their owners. For example, Mr. Ogawa's Lincoln logs show how his family valued taking care of items, since internees had to conserve what they had. It is possible that this phenomenon may continue for generations, which shows how impactful this experience really is, and how crucial it is to study experiences through objects.

Amache collections should be interpreted with the donor's story because it is crucial to studying an object. The relief sculpture would nearly not be as significant without the personal meaning revealed in the donor interview. With these stories and testimonies, which provide insights into why these objects are actually important to their owners, one can better understand the Japanese American internment experience. This project pays special attention to life after incarceration. It shows how this traumatic experience made an impact on former internees and their families, because it is apparent in the things they possess.

This project provides a greater understanding of the Japanese American internment experience, through objects. Patterns and themes revealed through this case study suggest that these objects are meaningful and contribute to understanding the personal nature of the Japanese American internment history. It also shows how studies in material culture are important to understanding difficult heritage. This thesis has proven that much can be learned if we look at the things people cared about and the things people simply decided to take with them after incarceration.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

There are many ways the research presented in this paper can be expanded. For example, the sample size used in this project was fairly small. A larger and more representational sample size would allow for greater claims about objects and the Japanese American population as a whole. People who have different backgrounds, opinions, and types of objects may produce different results.

One way this project could be further explored is by combining this research with archaeological evidence at Amache. Since object reuse and modification were two prominent themes in this project, archaeological artifacts that show object reuse or modification could be compared and contrasted. By examining artifacts in both of these contexts, one could obtain a multilayered approach to studying the same concepts explored in this project.

Another way this project can be developed more is through face-to-face interviews. Due to time and financial restraints, phone interviews were the best option at the time this project was initiated. Transcription recordings might be virtually the same, but facial reactions and body language would be interesting to analyze, especially in terms of object agency. Coming to donor's homes is another instance where this project could be improved, since the interviewer could see how his or her interviewees lived, and if it reflects the donor's objects in any way.

Further intensive material culture analysis could be explored as well. Because the museum is typically only regularly open in the summers during the field school, I was not



able to come to the museum to view the objects studied. The field school occurs every other year, on the even years, and this research was conducted in 2015. If I was able to spend an extensive amount of time studying these objects in person, more information could be gathered, and it could further my analysis. Instead, I mainly focused on museum donor interviews as the primary data collection method. It is my hope that researchers will continue to explore this fascinating field of study, and that new themes and patterns will emerge within object agency and object biographies.

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## APPENDIX A: PRELIMINARY QUESTIONNAIRES

### 2015 Amache Donor Questionnaire

**Donor Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ Bob Akaki \_\_\_\_\_

**Object:** Group 1: Nurses cape and wimple, Santa Anita visitor's pass, vargas card, Amache fire badge; Group 2: Boy Scout hat, High School Yearbook, Camp scrapbook, Copies of Camp Newspapers

There also may be other items that I don't remember.

**When and how did you acquire this object?**

Group 1 items were all bought on eBay.

Group 2 items were all acquired by family in camp. They took them with them when they left. They were discovered by my cousin while cleaning out our grandparents' house (late 1990s). He stored them for awhile and gave them to me in 2013.

**What do know about the object's acquisition and/or manufacture?**

Group 1: The nurse's cape and wimple and the vargas card were sold by family members who provided some information. The fire badge came from a collector of fire badges. The visitor's pass origin is not known.

Group 2: All items were accumulated by family in camp.

**How was this object stored and/or displayed, during and after camp?**

Group 1: Unknown

Group 2: I do not recall seeing them while growing up. They were stored somewhere in my grandparents' home.

**Was this object modified in any way?**

***For example, was this object repaired, and if so, how?***

Group 1: None of the objects appeared to be modified

Group 2: These items probably were in storage since 1945. They show normal aging except for the scout hat which was in its original box.

**Which barrack did your family live in?**

Originally assigned to 12E-7B moved to 8G-7B in early 1943

**How was this object used in camp?**

Group 1: Unknown

Group 2: Self-explanatory, I think.

**Additional comments:**

***You may use this space to describe why your object is important to you. For example, we would like to know if you have any particular memories with this object in camp, or why you chose to keep it after camp.***

Nurse's cape and wimple were from a woman interned at Amache who left on indefinite leave to complete her training in Rochester, NY where she lived the rest of her life. I think I gave the name of the nurse to the Amache museum when I donated it.

Vargas card was bought in eBay. Seller gave me the soldier's name. I looked up his name in Nat'l Archives and 442<sup>nd</sup> book. Details are in the write up I gave to the Amache museum.

Visitor's pass- was also bought on eBay. I researched name in Nat'l Archives database.

When I saw that they were at Amache I decided to bid on it to donate to the museum. Mr.

Hopper said that some of the family had actually visited the museum and were in the visitor's registration.



Group 2: Boy Scout hat was so well preserved it just seemed like it should be in a museum. The scrapbook includes flyers for many social activities in camp probably produced at the silk screen shop. Might be close to complete. High School yearbooks are highly sought after. They usually sell on eBay for \$250-\$400. My uncle did not finish high school in camp because he was drafted when he turned 18 in late 1944. I wanted to make sure it was preserved in a museum collection where it really belongs. Other miscellaneous papers included Dad's meal ticket, aunt's meal ticket, aunt's credentials for Granada Pioneer (gave access to Admin crew). Family may have started saving the camp newspapers since one aunt was an editor. The meal tickets help to illustrate everyday life in camp. I think the family kept a lot of items from camp for no special reason. My cousin and I theorize that since they lost everything when they went to camp they just sort of became packrats.

**2015 Amache Donor Questionnaire**

**Donor Name:** Dean Ogawa

**Object:** Suitcases, bed/cot and dresser

**When and how did you acquire this object?**

Father on his death in June, 2008

**What do know about the object's acquisition and/or manufacture?**

Nothing

**How was this object stored and/or displayed, during and after camp?**

Used by family

**Was this object modified in any way?**

*For example, was this object repaired, and if so, how?*

The cot was cut/ legs shortened.

**Which barrack did your family live in?**

**How was this object used in camp?**

Bed

**Additional comments:**

*You may use this space to describe why your object is important to you. For example, we would like to know if you have any particular memories with this object in camp, or why you chose to keep it after camp.*

## 2015 Amache Donor Questionnaire

**Donor Name:** Francis Palmer

**Object:** Wood relief sculpture depicting a squirrel

**When and how did you acquire this object?**

Inherited from creator's daughter, who is my mother.

**What do know about the object's acquisition and/or manufacture?**

My grandfather carved this in Amache, sometime between 1942-1945

**How was this object stored and/or displayed, during and after camp?**

The carving was kept at the carver's home in Los Angeles until his death in 1962, given by his widow to his only child. My mother then gave it to me. It has never been displayed before its exhibit at History Colorado.

**Was this object modified in any way?**

*For example, was this object repaired, and if so, how?*

There are no known repairs. It is in remarkably good condition given its age

**Which barrack did your family live in?**

8K-12A

**How was this object used in camp?**

This carving has simple packaging white string and two thumbtacks in the sides. We presume the carving was hung like a picture in Amache in their 12A barrack room.

**Additional comments:**

*You may use this space to describe why your object is important to you. For example, we would like to know if you have any particular memories with this object in camp, or why you chose to keep it after camp.*

This shows my grandfather learned to carve in Amache. These are the only two carvings we know exist. He was 52-55 years old in camp and probably had free time to make this. In Los Angeles, he was busy working and did not make any art object we know of before Amache.

I do not know why my grandparents kept 2 carvings grandpa made in Amache but I think it is because he made these and was proud to keep them. From 1945 to his death in 1972 and my grandmother's death in 1983. I don't remember the carvings were ever displayed in their home. So I assume they were kept in the home stored away.

## 2015 Amache Donor Questionnaire

**Donor Name:** Edwin Y. Yamada

**Object:** Tin foil lined wooden crate

**When and how did you acquire this object?**

I inherited it from my mother's estate in 2006.

**What do know about the object's acquisition and/or manufacture?**

My father was the L.A. Manager of the Monaka Company, a Japan/USA import-export business in the 1930s. Among imports was Japanese tea which was shipped in tinfoil lined wooden crates, one of which my father obtained and used to ship our family's goods to the Santa Anita Relocation Center, to Amache, to Denver, then to L.A.

**How was this object stored and/or displayed, during and after camp?**

It was stored in our barracks room and used like a cedar chest to store bulky items and clothing. It was then used again to move our goods to Denver, Co. Again used for storage, used to ship items to L.A., CA, then used lastly to store items in L.A.

**Was this object modified in any way?**

*For example, was this object repaired, and if so, how?*

Not that I know.

**Which barrack did your family live in?**

8K-10D

**How was this object used in camp?**

As a storage chest

**Additional comments:**

*You may use this space to describe why your object is important to you. For example, we would like to know if you have any particular memories with this object in camp, or why you chose to keep it after camp.*

This crate was important to me for its value as a reminder of a long span in our family's history and our travels from the pre-WWII era through Post-WWII times. The crate is a unique item which an interesting travel history.

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDES

### Interview Guide: Mr. Bob Akaki

1. How did you start collecting and searching for items on eBay?
2. Is the collecting of Amache items more of a hobby or a determined search?
3. Do you know of others who collect Amache artifacts on eBay, and do you speak with one another often?
4. Can you describe how you conducted background research on the objects you bought from eBay before donating them to the museum? Was it easy or hard to find source information?
5. Why did you decide to donate 'Group 1' and 'Group 2' to a museum?
  - a. Why specifically did you choose Amache museum, as opposed to other museums that collect Japanese American objects?
6. Do you have anything from Amache displayed at home?
7. You expressed that you donated the meal ticket because it represented Amache everyday life, and that you donated the Boy Scout uniform because it was so well preserved. How else did you choose what to donate to the Amache museum? What items did you choose not to donate?
8. Can you talk a little more about why you feel the Amache yearbooks should be in the museum and why this specific item is important to you?
9. What is your hope that your objects will serve at the museum?
10. Do these objects remind you of your childhood?

11. You state that you imagine that your parents probably kept a lot of things from camp because they lost everything from being in camp, and consequently, become 'pack rats.'



### **Interview Guide: Mr. Peter Furuta**

1. Where is your family from originally?
2. Where did your family go after camp?
3. Which barrack did your family live in at Amache?
4. Did your parents ever talk about Amache with the family? If so, what did they talk about?
  - a. Did they ever talk about packing for the relocation center and Amache?
5. What family items, besides the suitcase, did you donate to the Amache museum?
6. When and how did you acquire the suitcase?
7. Why did you decide to donate it to a museum?
8. Why did you decide to donate it to the Amache museum, as opposed to other museums that collect Japanese American objects?
9. Do you know what was brought in the suitcase?
10. How was this object used in camp?
11. Why do you think your parents decided to keep these items after camp?
12. How was the object stored and/or displayed during and after camp?
13. Was this object modified in any way? (For example, was it ever repaired?)
14. What purpose do you hope the suitcases and other items will serve at the Amache museum?
15. How did you choose what to donate to the Amache museum? What items did you choose not to donate?

### **Interview Guide: Mr. Dean Ogawa**

1. Why did you decide to donate the suitcases, dresser, and other items to a museum?
  - a. Why specifically did you choose to donate these items to the Amache museum, as opposed to other museums that collect Japanese American objects?
2. What purpose do you hope the suitcases and other items will serve at the Amache museum? Why are the suitcases and other items important to you?
3. How did you choose what to donate to the Amache museum? What items did you choose not to donate?
4. Did your parents ever talk about Amache with the family? If so, what did they talk about?
  - a. Did they ever talk about packing for the relocation center and Amache?
5. Do you know what was brought in the suitcases to camp?
6. How were these items used by the family in camp?
7. Were the suitcases used for anything else during camp?
8. Did your family talk to you about how the dresser was made? If so, can you tell me that story?
9. Do you know about how these items were brought to Trinidad, Colorado? (ex. Shipping, by hand?)
10. Why do you think your parents decided to keep these items after camp?

11. How did you decide what to keep or discard from Amache when going through your father's possessions?
12. Were any items used or displayed at home after camp? How were the items stored?

### **Interview Guide: Ms. Francis Palmer**

1. Why did you decide to temporarily donate the carving to History Colorado?
2. Was History Colorado specifically interested in the carving, or anything from Amache?
3. Where was it stored/displayed before it was displayed at the museum?
4. How was it brought back to Los Angeles after Amache?
5. Did your grandparents and parents ever talk about camp? Was the carving ever a topic of conversation when talking about Amache?
6. Do you remember the carving, or something similar, being made at camp?
7. Why do you think your grandfather and then your mother kept it?
8. What do you plan to do with the carving after it is not on loan anymore?
9. Were you involved in how the museum decided to display it or write a label for it?
10. Do you have other items from Amache? Why have you kept them? Would you ever consider donating something from Amache to a museum?
11. What did your grandfather do for work and leisure before Amache?

### **Interview Guide: Mr. Minoru Tonai**

1. Can you tell me how you got involved with working with museum donors?
2. In general, what has this experience been like for you?
3. What kinds of questions do donors ask you when they give you their things to donate? What questions do you ask them?
4. Are the donors from around where you live or do they contact you from across the country or abroad?
5. How do you go about transporting these items to the museum?
6. Do you still keep in contact with donors?
7. Have you encouraged others to donate their family items?
8. Why do you prefer to donate the items to the Amache museum, as opposed to other museums with Japanese American collections?
9. Why do you think these objects should be in a museum, specifically the Amache museum?
10. What is your opinion of other museums that collect Japanese American items?
11. What purpose do you hope these items will serve at the Amache museum? How do you think these objects help tell the Amache incarceration camp story?
12. How do you think these items should be displayed?
13. Do you remember if people asked you questions or commented on the objects displayed at the reunion?
14. Do any of the objects you helped donate have any personal connection to you? If so, how?

15. Do any of the objects spark remind you of specific events or memories of camp?

16. Have you donated any items from your own family? Do you still have items from

Amache at your home? Why have your chosen to keep it/ donate it?

### Interview Guide: Mr. Edwin Yamada

**Thank you very much for agreeing to answer questions about your tea crate. Please answer these questions to the best of your ability. If you do not know or remember something that is asked below, feel free to skip the question, or you may reflect on stories that you were told.**

1. How did your family decide what to bring to Santa Anita? What possessions did your family decide to carry, and what kinds of items were sent to Santa Anita in the tea crate?
2. Do you remember if any other families at Santa Anita or Amache used tea crates or other similar items for storage or shipping?
3. What do you remember about the tea crate in camp?
4. What kinds of items, besides clothing, were kept in the tea crate in camp?
5. Why do you think your parents decided to keep the tea crate after camp?
6. Where and how, in particular, was the tea crate stored in your parents' home?
7. Did you or your parents ever share stories about the tea crate with others? If so, did they involve discussions of the internment experience?
8. Are there other ways you discussed the internment experience with your family or others?
9. When you inherited the tea crate in 2006 did you always plan to donate it to a museum? If not why did you decide to donate the tea crate to a museum?
  - a. Why specifically did you choose to donate the tea crate to the Amache museum, as opposed to other museums that collect Japanese American objects?
10. What purpose do you hope the tea crate will serve at the Amache museum?

11. You explained in the questionnaire that you value the tea crate because of its importance to your family's history and its unique travel history. Can you expand in writing about the family value and historical value of the tea crate both during and after camp?
12. Did you keep other items from Amache? If so, what are they, and are they displayed at home or kept in storage?