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Scattered: The Assimilation of Sushi, the Internment of Japanese Americans, and the Killing of Vincent Chin, A Personal Essay

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Scattered: The Assimilation of Sushi, the Internment of Japanese Americans, and the Killing of Vincent Chin, A Personal Essay

Frank H. Wu†

ABSTRACT

In a personal Essay, Frank H. Wu discusses the acceptance of sushi in America as a means of analyzing the acceptance of Japanese Americans, before, during, and after World War II. The murder of Vincent Chin in Detroit in 1982 is used as a defining moment for Asian Americans, explaining the shared experiences of people perceived as “perpetual foreigners.”

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INTRODUCTION

Coming of age as the Japanese economy was coming to be envied for its rise, I started eating sushi when Americans were just willing, curiosity overcoming disgust inexorably, to sample it, chopsticks and all.¹ The late

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1. Regarding the arrival of sushi in America, *see generally* TREVOR CORSON, *THE STORY OF SUSHI: AN UNLIKELY SAGA OF RAW FISH AND RICE* (2008). *See also* CHOP SUEY AND SUSHI FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA: CHINESE AND JAPANESE RESTAURANTS IN THE UNITED STATES (Bruce Makoto Arnold et al. eds., 2018); JONAS HOUSE, *SUSHI IN THE UNITED STATES, 1945–1970*, 26 *FOOD & FOODWAYS* 40 (2018). In 1975, *Gourmet* magazine published a series of articles on Japanese cuisine, which were an important introduction. *See* Elizabeth Andoh, *The Seasonal Japanese Kitchen: Early Spring*, *GOURMET*, Mar. 1975, at 69. Sushi also underwent a “craze” in 1905. *See* H.D. Miller, *The Great Sushi Craze of 1905*, *AN ECCENTRIC CULINARY HIST.* (July 31, 2015), <https://eccentricculinary.com/the-great-sushi-craze-of-1905-part-1>, [<https://perma.cc/PT97-DDQF>].

For background on sushi in general, *see generally* KATARZYNA J. CWIERTKA, *MODERN JAPANESE CUISINE: FOOD, POWER, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY* (2015); SASHA ISSENBERG, *THE SUSHI ECONOMY: GLOBALIZATION AND THE MAKING OF A MODERN DELICACY* (2008); *JAPANESE CULINARY ACADEMIC, INTRODUCTION TO JAPANESE CUISINE: NATURE, HISTORY, AND CULTURE* (2016); OLE G.

celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain said the desire for sushi was a “big win.”² Back then, in the throes of economic war circa the early 1980s, characterized as another Pearl Harbor, “sushi” was synonymous with *nigiri*, raw fish atop vinegared rice perfected late in the Edo Period.³ Sushi is a metaphor. Initially, it was invasive. The hostility to sushi would seem baffling, in light of the developments. By 2006, sushi restaurants had attained the status of Americans’ favorite choice for dining out.⁴ In 2011, the documentary *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* was a sleeper hit at the box office, elevating the octogenarian star, proprietor of a Tokyo café in a subway station, to global celebrity.⁵

Culinary xenophobia had been vanquished. Only after “Japan Inc.”—as the seeming monolith of Japanese economic might was dubbed—bubble burst even more spectacularly than it had inflated, in a lost decade that birthed the “freeters” (young people who elected to stay unemployed), myself having accumulated a decade of practice dabbling *wasabi* (horseradish) paste to barely below the point of the overdose which cleared the sinuses in a thrilling moment, did I wonder what the menu meant by *chirashi*.⁶ The superlative bargain in Japanese food is chirashi. Unlike Sushi

MOURITSEN, *SUSHI: FOOD FOR THE EYE, THE BODY, AND THE SOUL* (2009); ERIC C. RATH & STEPHANIE ASSMANN, *JAPANESE FOODWAYS, PAST AND PRESENT* (2010); DAVID L. WANK, *CHINESE IMMIGRANTS AND JAPANESE CUISINE IN THE UNITED STATES: A CASE OF CULINARY GLOBALIZATION* 79 (James Farrar ed., 2009); *THE GLOBALIZATION OF ASIAN CUISINES: TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS AND CULINARY CONTACT ZONES* 79-99 (James Farrar ed., 2015). The image of Japanese at the time is exemplified by the late John Belushi performing as a samurai on *Saturday Night Live* skits, see “Saturday Night Live, Samurai Delicatessen (Jan. 17, 1976), <https://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/samurai-delicatessen/n8627> [<https://perma.cc/FV57-FYX3>].

2. Whitney Filloon, *Anthony Bourdain and Jose Andres Talk Racism, Sushi, and Rocco DiSpirito*, *EATER*, Feb. 15, 2016, <https://www.eater.com/2016/2/15/10999582/anthony-bourdain-jose-andres-interview> [<https://perma.cc/29G3-CC8S>].

3. Regarding pervasive “Japan bashing,” see generally NARRELLE MORRIS, *JAPAN-BASHING: ANTI-JAPANISM SINCE THE 1980S* (2013). An example among many is Theodore H. White, *The Danger from Japan*, *N.Y. TIMES*, July 28, 1985.

Regarding the American perception of Japan, see generally JOHN W. DOWER, *WAR WITHOUT MERCY: RACE AND POWER IN THE PACIFIC WAR* (1987); SHEILA K. JOHNSON, *THE JAPANESE THROUGH AMERICAN EYES* (1988); ANDREW C. MCKEVITT, *CONSUMING JAPAN: POPULAR CULTURE AND THE GLOBALIZING OF 1980S AMERICA* (2017). See also RUTH BENEDICT, *THE CHRYSANTHEMUM AND THE SWORD: PATTERNS OF JAPANESE CULTURE* (1946); DONALD RICHIE, *THE DONALD RICHIE READER: 50 YEARS OF WRITING ON JAPAN* (2001).

4. See Cindy Hsin-I Feng, *The Tale of Sushi: History and Regulations*, 11 *COMPREHENSIVE REVS. IN FOOD SCI. & SAFETY* 205 (2012). The popularity of sushi became a phenomenon for mass media investigation. See, e.g., Nick Tosches, *If You Knew Sushi*, *VANITY FAIR* (June 2007), <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2007/06/sushi200706> [<https://perma.cc/2ERM-YT9P>].

5. *JIRO DREAMS OF SUSHI* (Preferred Content, 2011).

6. Regarding the Japanese economy, see generally JENNIFER AMYX, *JAPAN’S FINANCIAL CRISIS: INSTITUTIONAL RIGIDITY AND RELUCTANT CHANGE* (2006); DAVID FLATH, *THE JAPANESE ECONOMY*, 2d ed. (2005); RICHARD C. KOO, *THE HOLY GRAIL OF MACRO ECONOMICS: LESSONS FROM JAPAN’S GREAT RECESSION* (rev. ed. 2009); *JAPAN’S LOST DECADE: ORIGINS, CONSEQUENCES, AND PROSPECTS FOR RECOVERY* (Gary Saxonhouse & Robert Stern eds., 2004). Regarding “freeters,” see Ethan Devine, *What Americans Should Understand About Japan’s 1990s Economic Bust*, *THE ATLANTIC*, May 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/05/the-slacker-trap/309285/> [<https://perma.cc/547P-6DN3>] (last visited Sept. 2, 2019).

A and Sushi B, this more specific title lacked a description for the uninitiated, vouchsafed for those already in the know. This dish is presented according to the principle that “the eyes eat first”: *sashimi* (slices of the meat), with other ingredients such as pickles, displayed over a bed of sushi rice. The literal translation of “chirashi” is “scattered.” (Movie posters, or flyers, are called by the term too, because of the way they are distributed all around.) In this personal Essay, I describe the dichotomies produced by Japanese food in the United States, as a means to contemplate how Asian immigration has been received. Eating sushi was once how Japanese conserved their identity; eating sushi now is how Asians become American. The murder of Vincent Chin in Detroit in 1982 was a fateful moment: as Japan gave the impression of invulnerability, Asian Americans were defenseless.

Narrative commands understanding.⁷ The story of how raw fish came to be ingested by the United States is two stories. The first story is about the American mainstream gorging itself on sushi, so much so that global stocks have become endangered.⁸ Past is the time that sushi brought on collective nausea, a revulsion trumping the etiquette which would deter ridicule of another’s taste. Then it came under regulation, with the warning it could endanger health.⁹ Yet it has cachet, other than in the cruel variant of *ikizukuri* (food consumed while the animal is living).¹⁰ The second story is about the Japanese endeavoring to maintain quality, or more accurately cultural control over the aesthetic codes of *washoku* (traditional cuisine).¹¹ Following a cancelled Japanese government attempt to police the legitimacy of sushi overseas, formal societies were organized to self-regulate.¹² Such

7. The most important work on legal narrative is JAMES BOYD WHITE, *THE LEGAL IMAGINATION* (45th ed. (2018)). See also LAW’S STORIES: NARRATIVE AND RHETORIC IN LAW (Peter Brooks & Paul Gewirtz eds., 1998); RICHARD A. POSNER, *LAW & LITERATURE* (3d ed. 2009). See also H. Porter Abbott, *THE CAMBRIDGE INTRODUCTION TO NARRATIVE* (2nd ed. 2008). Regarding food narratives, see, e.g., Adam Steinberg, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Food: Using Food to Teach History at the Tenement Museum*, 34 *THE PUB. HISTORIAN* 79 (2012).

8. Issenberg, *supra*, note 1. See CHARLES CLOVER, *END OF THE LINE: HOW OVERFISHING IS CHANGING THE WORLD AND WHAT WE EAT* (2005); CASSON TRENOR, *SUSTAINABLE SUSHI: A GUIDE TO SAVING THE OCEANS ONE BITE AT A TIME* (2009); see also ANDREW F. SMITH, *AMERICAN TUNA: THE RISE AND FALL OF AN IMPROBABLE FOOD* (2012); Jason Brown, *Entering the Era of Convenience Sushi: Chances in the Cultural Meaning of Connoisseur Cuisine*, *Intersect* (2012).

9. CAL. HEALTH & SAFETY CODE § 114093 (2017).

10. Regarding food ethics, see generally PETER SINGER & JAMES MASON, *THE ETHICS OF WHAT WE EAT: WHY OUR FOOD CHOICES MATTER* (2007); RONALD L. SANDLER, *FOOD ETHICS: THE BASICS* (2014). Regarding *ikizukuri*, see Charles Spence, “Why Are Animate Dishes So Disturbing?,” 13 *INT’L J. OF GASTRONOMY AND FOOD SCIENCE* 73 (2018); Phil Vettel, “Fresh Faced Menu” *CHICAGO TRIBUNE*, May 4, 2001, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2001-05-04-0105040370-story.html> (describing controversy over new restaurant offering the delicacy).

11. See generally MATT GOULDING, *RICE, NOODLE, FISH: DEEP TRAVELS THROUGH JAPAN’S FOOD CULTURE* (2015).

12. See Rumi Sakamoto & Matthew Allen, *There’s Something Fishy About That Sushi: How Japan Interprets the Global Sushi Boom*, 23 *JAPAN F.* 99, 99–121 (2011); Anthony Faiola, *Putting the Bite on Pseudo Sushi and Other Insults: Plans to Scrutinize Restaurants Abroad*, *WASH. POST*, Nov. 24, 2006, at A1; see also SHOKO IMAI, *UMAMI ABROAD: TASTE, AUTHENTICITY, AND THE GLOBAL URBAN NETWORK* (2015); *THE GLOBALIZATION OF ASIAN CUISINES: TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS AND CULINARY CONTACT ZONES 57–77* (James Farrar ed., 2015). Regarding self-regulation, see Eve Zibart, *Can Sushi*

supervision may verge on conflict with equality norms, by implicitly discouraging non-Japanese, who would dare try their hand at the art, on the dubious grounds of innate affinity, or women, on the spurious basis of menstrual stigma.¹³ Authoritarian rules, however, have not dissuaded a public eager for novelty from trying out the fusion of Japanese food with everything else, as in the sushi-burrito, alongside ever more obscure grey market imports such as Japanese whiskeys, single malt and blended.¹⁴ Sushi is less susceptible to the anxiety about “cultural appropriation,” since Japan is not subordinate (though Japanese Americans did not occupy the same position when they started peddling sushi).¹⁵ Claude Levi-Strauss, in his science of mythology, posited that binary oppositions such as the “raw” and the “cooked” demarcate our respective worldviews.¹⁶ Sushi is raw, Eastern, submissive.

The visceral, feeling in our gut frames the rational, a limitation in the law that is invisible. Sushi has become marked politically, a token of liberal elitism in the catechism of “tax-hiking, government-expanding, latte-drinking sushi-eating, Volvo-driving, *New York Times*-reading, body-piercing, Hollywood-loving, left-wing freak show.”¹⁷ Sushi discloses the illusory nature of “authenticity” in “post-modernity,” as California rolls, spam *musubi* (spam topping rice, wrapped in seaweed), and innovation in the kitchen introduces recipes that would not be approved at the source of the inspiration.¹⁸

Be Saved? Japanese Chefs Struggle to Protect Their Art From Its Own Popularity, WASH. POST, May 2, 2001, at F1.

13. See Trevor Corson, *Does Race Matter for Sushi Chefs?*, THE ATLANTIC (May 18, 2009), <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2009/05/does-race-matter-for-sushi-chefs/17657/> [https://perma.cc/26SC-SWMQ]; N.C. Aizenman, *Chefs Are Putting New Accents on Sushi*, WASH. POST (Feb. 23, 2007), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/22/AR2007022202036.html> [https://perma.cc/6PQ7-9WU6]; Naomi Tomky, *Sushi Roles: Gender Equality Behind the Counter is Still a Long Way Off*, SAVEUR, Sept. 2018, at 17. See also EAST SIDE SUSHI (Blue Sun Pictures 2015) (depicting a fictional story of a Latina chef entering a sushi contest in Oakland, California).

14. Regarding the sushi burrito, see Becky Krystal, *The Remarkable Rise of the Sushi Burrito*, WASH. POST (Mar. 4, 2016), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/going-out-guide/wp/2016/03/04/the-remarkable-rise-of-the-sushi-burrito/?utm_term=.a12501cfe0fd [https://perma.cc/N5YT-HEBD]. Regarding whisky, see generally BRIAN ASHCRAFT, JAPANESE WHISKY (2018).

15. Rachel Kuo, *The Feminist Guide to Being a Foodie Without Being Cultural Appropriative*, EVERYDAY FEMINISM (Nov. 18, 2015), <https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/11/foodie-without-appropriation> [https://perma.cc/Q4C2-CEUH].

16. CLAUDE LEVI-STRAUSS, THE RAW AND THE COOKED, MYTHOLOGIEUQUES, v.1, (John Weightman and Doreen Weightman trans., 1983).

17. The phrase was used in a 2004 political ad targeting Democratic Presidential candidate Howard Dean, then the front runner; it became a meme. See John Tierney, *The 2004 Campaign; Political Points*, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 11, 2004), <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/11/us/the-2004-campaign-political-points.html> [https://perma.cc/8HX9-9T4R].

18. The issue of “authenticity” is much discussed in everything from performances of Shakespeare to how to lead life. A leading account of authenticity in life is CHARLES TAYLOR, THE ETHICS OF AUTHENTICITY (1992). See also SIMON FELDMAN, AGAINST AUTHENTICITY: WHY YOU SHOULDN’T BE YOURSELF (2015); ANDREW POTTER, THE AUTHENTICITY HOAX: HOW WE GOT LOST FINDING

Food has always been identified with people, as in “our people” versus “your people,” the shunning of the cuisine being prompted by the status of the community and sovereignty being vulnerable to a rage for refreshments unfamiliar.¹⁹ For the gourmand, food tends toward fetish. Sushi is not unique as representing an affiliated people: savory puddings fell out of favor as foreign; pizza pie was once ethnic food; slanders about Mexican beer being contaminated by urine are about Latino hygiene; the bagel was advertised as a “Jewish English muffin” to be noshed with any topping. Chinese food is as ubiquitous now even if “John Chinaman,” Celestials, Mongoloids, and Orientals were despised previously, and the flavor enhancer MSG has been

OURSELVES (2010); PETER YORK, AUTHENTICITY IS A CON (2014). Authenticity of food is critiqued in LARRY OLMSTED, REAL FOOD FAKE FOOD: WHY YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE EATING & WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT (2016); KRISHNENDU RAY, THE ETHNIC RESTAURATEUR (2016); LISA HELDKKE, EXOTIC APPETITES: RUMINATIONS OF A FOOD ADVENTURER 23–44 (2003)(discussing Chinese food); Todd Kliman, *The Problem of Authenticity*, LUCKY PEACH, Spring 2011 at 81; Peter Jackson, *Authenticity*, in PETER JACKSON, FOOD WORDS: ESSAYS IN CULINARY CULTURE 27 (2013); see also Nissan Haque, *Stop Worrying About Authentic Chai – There's No Such Thing*, SAVEUR (Mar. 16, 2017), <https://www.saveur.com/authentic-chai-a-many-splendored-thing> [<https://perma.cc/9JUE-LFS3>]; Sejal Sukhadwala, *The Bogus Quest for 'Authentic' Food*, THE GUARDIAN (May 28, 2012), <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2012/may/28/bogus-quest-for-authentic-food> [<https://perma.cc/7JA9-JPTB>].

For an accessible critique of “authenticity” as itself artifice, in particular a Western concept, from an Asian (Chinese) philosophy perspective, see MICHAEL PUETT & CHRISTINE GROSS-LOH, THE PATH: WHAT CHINESE PHILOSOPHERS CAN TEACH US ABOUT THE GOOD LIFE (2016).

The Smithsonian Institution, with the Japanese American National Museum, documented the development of Japanese food in Hawaii in their 1999 exhibit, “From Bento to Mixed Plate.” See SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, *From Bento to Mixed Plate*, <http://smithsonianapa.org/now/from-bento-to-mixed-plate> [<https://perma.cc/48BY-Z9EK>] (last visited Sept. 28, 2018).

For a description of experimentation with sushi, see Tim Carman, *Is This the End of Real Sushi?*, WASH. POST, Jan. 25, 2012, at E1.

19. See HELEN ZOE VEIT, MODERN FOOD, MORAL FOOD: SELF-CONTROL, SCIENCE, AND THE RISE OF MODERN AMERICAN EATING IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY (2013); David Sax, *The Sriracha Argument for Immigration*, NEW YORKER (Mar. 27, 2017), <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-sriracha-argument-for-immigration> [<https://perma.cc/5754-VM36>].

Dietary recommendations premised on health considerations may be intended to promote cultural assimilation as well. See CHARLOTTE BILTEKOFF, EATING RIGHT IN AMERICA (2013).

Industrialist Henry Ford, for example, had assembly-line workers participate in an assimilation program designed by his corporate sociological department, to leave behind their former cultural practices and take up American habits. See GEORGIOS P. LOIZIDES, HENRY FORD'S PROJECT IN HUMAN ENGINEERING: THE SOCIOLOGICAL DEPARTMENT OF THE FORD MOTOR COMPANY, 1913-1941 (2014).

Some Europeans have reacted negatively to other Europeans sampling immigrant food. See Tova Danovich, *Why Food Has Become a New Target for Nationalists*, EATER (June 30, 2017), <https://www.eater.com/2017/6/30/15892900/italy-ban-ethnic-foreign-food-immigrants-kabab-nationalism> [<https://perma.cc/DF85-MNLU>]. Australia has had similar fears, primarily about Asian foods. See also Lara Anderson & Heather Merle Benbow, *Cultural Indigestion in Multicultural Australia: Fear of 'Foreign Foods' in Australian Media*, 15 GASTRONOMICA 34 (2015).

“Sovereignty” in the food context has become a movement for sustainability through localism, opposed to neoliberal globalism. See Hannah Wittman, *The Origins & Potential of Food Sovereignty*, in *Food Sovereignty: Reconnecting Food, Nature & Community* (2010).

Food also denotes socioeconomic status within a racial group. See generally S. Margot Finn, *Discriminating Taste: How Class Anxiety Created the American Food Revolution* (2017); PETER NACCARATO & KATHLEEN LEBESCO, CULINARY CAPITAL (2012); Cammie M. Sublette & Jennifer Martin, *Let Them Eat Cake, Caviar, Organic, and Whole Foods: Elitism, White Trash Dinner Parties, and Diet*, 36 STUD. IN POPULAR CULTURE 21 (2013).

deemed a toxin.²⁰ Food retains its appeal as symbol. It stays within the literary province of the consummate memoirist M.F.K. Fisher, even as it succumbs to scientific scrutiny, disciplined by academic study.²¹ To talk and write about a source of nutrition as more than protein, fat, carbohydrate, and trace chemicals, is as important as to cook and eat, culturally.²²

I. “BORN IN THE U.S.A.”

According to President Ronald Reagan, the “Great Communicator,” his

20. Regarding puddings, see Helen Zoe Veit, *A Backlash Against ‘Mixed’ Foods Led to the Demise of a Classic American Dish*, THE CONVERSATION, <https://theconversation.com/a-backlash-against-mixed-foods-led-to-the-demise-of-a-classic-american-dish-86293> [<https://perma.cc/NWN7-DXPK>] (last visited Sept. 28, 2018).

Regarding pizza, see LEE IACocca & WILLIAM NOVAK, IACocca: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY 13–14 (1986) (describing a celebrity executive, of Italian descent, being ridiculed for eating pizza). Regarding Corona beer, imported from Mexico, see Jonathan Peterson, *Brewer Will Battle False Rumor About Its Product*, L.A. TIMES (July 28, 1987), http://articles.latimes.com/1987-07-28/business/fi-5968_1_rumor-control [<https://perma.cc/S3E6-AMPV>] (describing settlement with rival beer distributor).

Regarding bagels, see generally MARIA BALINSKA, THE BAGEL: THE SURPRISING HISTORY OF A MODEST BREAD (2008).

Regarding Chinese food, see especially ANNE MENDELSON, CHOW CHOP SUEY: FOOD AND THE CHINESE AMERICAN JOURNEY (2016); Gabriel J. Chin & John Ormonde, *The ‘War’ Against Chinese Restaurants*, REGULATION, Summer 2017, at 32. See also YONG CHEN, CHOP SUEY USA: THE STORY OF CHINESE FOOD IN AMERICA (2014); ANDREW COE, CHOP SUEY: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF CHINESE FOOD IN THE UNITED STATES (2009); HAIMING LIU, FROM CANTON RESTAURANT TO PANDA EXPRESS: A HISTORY OF CHINESE FOOD IN THE UNITED STATES (2015). J.A.G. Roberts, *China to Chinatown: Chinese Food in the West* (2002).

Regarding the flavor enhancer monosodium glutamate, see Ian Mosby, *‘That Won-Ton Soup Headache’: The Chinese Restaurant Syndrome, MSG and the Making of American Food, 1968–1980*, 22 SOC. HIST. OF MED. 133 (2009). The concern about MSG might be based on a racial hoax. Ira Glass, *“The Long Fuse,”* THIS AMERICAN LIFE (February 15, 2019), broadcast available at <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/668/the-long-fuse>; transcript available at <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/668/transcript> [<https://perma.cc/W39W-ZU9M>].

21. The definitive selection of M.F.K. Fisher essays is M.F.K. FISHER, THE ART OF EATING (2004). For general food history, see HARVEY LEVENSTEIN, PARADOX OF PLENTY: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF EATING IN MODERN AMERICA (2003); JENNIFER JENSEN WALLACH, HOW AMERICA EATS: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF US. FOOD AND CULTURE (2013). See also MASSIMO MONTANARI, FOOD IS CULTURE (Albert Sonnenfeld trans., 2004). See Jennifer K. Ruark, *More Scholars Focus on Historical, Social, and Cultural Meanings of Food, But Some Critics Say It’s Scholarship Lite*, CHRON. OF HIGHER EDUC., July 9, 1999, at A17.

For food studies, see WARREN BELASCO, FOOD: THE KEY CONCEPTS (2008); LINDA CIVITELLO, CUISINE AND CULTURE: A HISTORY OF FOOD AND PEOPLE (2011); FOOD & SOCIETY, (Amy Guptill et al. eds., 2d ed. 2016); B.W. HIGMAN, HOW FOOD MADE HISTORY, (2d ed. 2011); RACHEL LAUDAN, CUISINE AND EMPIRE: COOKING IN WORLD HISTORY (2015); JEFFREY M. PILCHER, FOOD IN WORLD HISTORY (2005); JEAN-PIERRE POULAIN, THE SOCIOLOGY OF FOOD: EATING AND THE PLACE OF FOOD IN SOCIETY (Augusta Dorr trans., 2017). A leading early work, establishing the field of food studies, is SIDNEY W. MINTZ, SWEETNESS AND POWER: THE PLACE OF SUGAR IN MODERN HISTORY (1985).

For the reaction to “foreign” food, see DONNA R. GABACCIA, WE ARE WHAT WE EAT: ETHNIC FOOD AND THE MAKING OF AMERICANS (1998); RICHARD PILLSBURY, NO FOREIGN FOOD: THE AMERICAN DIET IN TIME AND PLACE (1998). Both the Gabaccia and Pillsbury books were published as sushi was beginning its ascent.

22. CAMILLE BEGIN, TASTE OF THE NATION: THE NEW DEAL SEARCH FOR AMERICA’S FOOD (2016); KATHARINA VESTER, A TASTE OF POWER: FOOD AND AMERICAN IDENTITIES (2015). ANDREW F. SMITH, EATING HISTORY: 30 TURNING POINTS IN THE MAKING OF AMERICAN CUISINE (2009).

victory in the 1984 election would bring “Morning in America.”²³ That year saw the first compact disc manufactured in America, popularizing the digital format invented in Japan and advertised as both perfect and permanent. Appropriately, this silver disc that would replace the vinyl album premiered with Bruce Springsteen’s “Born in the U.S.A.,” a celebration of working-class values that would be a breakthrough hit for the New Jersey rocker known as “the Boss.” With a slipcase cover depicting a man in blue jeans, a baseball cap stuffed into his back pocket, the title song told of an individual who had “got into a little hometown jam, so they put a rifle in [his] hand” and “sent [him] off to a foreign land, to go and kill the yellow man.”²⁴ The tune told the story of a brother’s demise at the hands of the Viet Cong and love for a woman from Saigon. Springsteen’s earlier *Nebraska* had featured a number, “Johnny 99,” about an autoworker, drunk and distraught, who had committed murder and then requested execution over imprisonment.²⁵ Springsteen’s patriotic appeal was so triumphant that President Reagan sought to use “Born in the USA” as his campaign theme song.²⁶ Springsteen demurred. He was by then an icon. His song was sympathetic to Asians. But they were distinct from Americans.

Sushi, the internment, and Vincent Chin are mixed together for me, because they are about coming-of-age, the transition from adolescence to Asian American-ness. For a preternatural geek, there is no assurance of acceptance as an adult. I entered college in 1984. The internment preceded the murder of Chin chronologically, but not personally. Each of us has unique version of history according to our experience and our education. Like most Americans schoolkids of the time period, I was not exposed to the internment until I sought out the information; even some whose parents had endured it were shielded from the truth. Before the Chin case, I wanted desperately to be “normal.” I would have run away from anything Asian. I blamed my parents, immigrants from China via Taiwan, for the common childhood cruelty of the teasing and taunting. Asian American children are accustomed to bullying no matter how much they attempt to copy their social superiors. You are “trying too hard.”

The essential event of Japan bashing was the murder of Vincent Chin.²⁷

23. Michael Beschloss, *The Ad That Helped Reagan Sell Good Times to an Uncertain Nation*, N.Y. TIMES, May 7, 2016, at B5. See generally LOU CANNON, PRESIDENT REAGAN: THE ROLE OF A LIFETIME 493–552 (2000).

24. BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, BORN IN THE U.S.A., on BORN IN THE U.S.A. (Columbia Records 1984).

25. BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, *Johnny 99*, on NEBRASKA (Columbia Records 1984).

26. See DAVE MARSH, BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: TWO HEARTS: THE DEFINITIVE BIOGRAPHY, 1972–2003 (2003): 372–384; Marc Dolan, “How Ronald Reagan Changed Bruce Springsteen’s Politics,” POLITICO (June 4, 2014), <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/06/bruce-springsteen-ronald-reagan-107448> [<https://perma.cc/N3XC-UL8J>]. See generally MARC DOLAN, BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN AND THE PROMISE OF ROCK ‘N’ ROLL (2013); JIM CULLEN, BORN IN THE U.S.A.: BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN AND THE AMERICAN TRADITION (2015).

27. Regarding Japan bashing in general, see Morris, *supra* note 3; U. S. COMM’N ON CIVIL RIGHTS, CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUES FACING ASIAN AMERICANS IN THE 1990S (1992); Jonathan Yardley, *The Sick Sense of Japan-Bashing*, WASH. POST (Mar. 9, 1992),

Japan bashing was the temptation to accuse Japan for all American misery. Vincent Chin became its representative casualty. A Chinese American, he was the victim of mistaken identity twice over: Japanese in lieu of Chinese (“you all look the same,” I was told repeatedly growing up) and perpetual foreigner instead of American. In the summer of 1982 in my hometown of Detroit, he was beaten to death with a baseball bat by two autoworkers, who happened to be white and apparently blamed him for the success of imported cars. The part-time waiter at a Chinese restaurant had been celebrating his bachelor’s party, so his wedding guests attended his funeral instead. The two defendants, who never denied the *actus rea*, commission of the act, were steadfast in insisting they had been wrongly impugned, because they had no *mens rea*, intention, rising to a hate crime—it had been nothing more than a bar brawl.

“It’s because of you little motherfuckers, we’re out of work,” they had shouted to instigate the beating, a witness testified at trial. Various racial slurs were used by the perpetrators, as attested to by others. The Motor City in that day depended on the Big Four US automakers, who took for granted an oligopoly of 99 percent market share before the oil crisis that segued into a moral crisis according to President Jimmy Carter, beleaguered with the Iranian hostage crisis as another in the series of crises leaving the nation paralyzed and powerless, the captivity of a nation counted by days on the evening news. An unremitting recession imperiled the livelihoods of everyone in a magnificent wreck of a city, a demonstration of American industrialization and deindustrialization alike. It was no wonder President Carter, moral but hapless, lost to challenger Reagan, the former Hollywood pitchman who pledged prosperity would prevail. Carter had been unable to halt the Japanese cars coming by container ship, with the funny names that would be scoffed at before miles-per-gallon (MPG) ratings mattered. Cars, status symbols for individuals, were representative of nations. To “buy American” was to be a patriot.²⁸ The American luxury land yachts managed as little as six MPG. “Jap crap” could achieve five-fold that figure. There had been no expectation that Asians would be capable of competing. The men who bludgeoned Chin were sentenced to probation for three years and a fine of three thousand dollars each.

Racial antagonism was conventional. It was candid. Asian Americans were a convenient target.

“Little yellow men,” Congressman John Dingell proclaimed, were

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1992/03/09/the-sick-sense-of-japan-bashing/38e0f2cb-ee7c-4ed2-a818-d6a3cc8b9c46> [<https://perma.cc/7D3H-G5N2>]. See also Masako Iino, *Asian Americans Under the Influence of “Japan Bashing,”* AM. STUD. INT’L, Apr. 1994, at 17. Regarding the Chin case, see WHO KILLED VINCENT CHIN? (Film News Now Foundation 1987); see also Frank H. Wu, *The Wheel of Justice: The Killing of Vincent Chin and the Death of the Motor City*, in ASIAN AMERICA: A PRIMARY SOURCE READER 286 (Cathy J. Schlund-Vials et al., eds., 2017).

28. See generally DANA FRANK, BUY AMERICAN: THE UNTOLD STORY OF ECONOMIC NATIONALISM (2000).

responsible for the economic woes of his constituents.²⁹ An early advocate of the World War II internment as a “reprisal reserve” of hostages, his father had held the same seat in the House of Representatives, hailing from the manufacturing heart of the Detroit metropolis.³⁰ The scion was heir to political power, ultimately becoming the longest serving member of Congress at more than 59 years’ tenure. Their inheritance of allegiance over generations was what they perceived in others. By their reckoning, the land of the rising sun was to be avoided, not associated with.

“A Jap’s a Jap, and that’s all there is to it,” Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt had testified to justify the internment he presided over.³¹ He perceived the Japanese as an enemy race.

Sushi is incomplete as metaphor. Asian food has become popular while Asian people have not. “It’s possible that Asian food is more prominent in the American imagination than the Asian people who produce it,” opined Hua Hsu in *The New Yorker* more than thirty years after Chin and seventy-five years after the internment. The name of the author and his placement in a periodical the paragon of sophistication itself is a declaration of sorts.³² Who we eat with and who serves us are not incidental.³³

II. DISCOVERING CHIRASHI

You can lose face at any meal in public. Dining alone within the sight of others is embarrassing even if you are confident nobody is staring. Yet you can feast by yourself at the sushi bar.³⁴ The moment is contemplative. There should be no shame in your solitude. You partake in ritual. The setting is exact. Everything ought to be just so. Since discovering chirashi for

29. Congressman Dingell appears to have used the term repeatedly. *See, e.g.*, Francis X. Clines and Warren Weaver, Jr., *Briefing*, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 16, 1982), <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/03/16/us/briefing-253650.html> [<https://perma.cc/6SAZ-T6Z8>]. He refused to apologize for the term. Adam L. Penenberg, *Good Riddance, John Dingell*, FAST COMPANY (Nov. 21, 2008), <https://www.fastcompany.com/1090144/good-riddance-john-dingell> [<https://perma.cc/5FX5-EAHK>].

30. ROGER DANIELS, CONCENTRATION CAMPS: NORTH AMERICA JAPANESE IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA DURING WORLD WAR II 33 (1981).

31. PETER IRONS, JUSTICE AT WAR: THE STORY OF THE JAPANESE-AMERICAN INTERNMENT CASES 193 (1983). *See also* JOHN L. DEWITT, HEADQUARTERS WESTERN DEFENSE COMMAND AND FOURTH ARMY, OFFICE OF THE COMMANDING GENERAL, FINAL REPORT: JAPANESE EVACUATION FROM THE WEST COAST (1942), <http://www.sfmuseum.org/war/dewitt1.html> [<https://perma.cc/8GSG-8AZ2>] (last visited Sept. 28, 2018).

32. Hua Hsu, *Chinese Food and the Joy of Inauthentic Cooking*, NEW YORKER (Nov. 23, 2015), <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/chinese-food-and-the-joy-of-inauthentic-cooking> [<https://perma.cc/TEE2-WFPY>].

33. *See generally* ALICE P. JULIER, EATING TOGETHER: FOOD, FRIENDSHIP AND EQUALITY (2013).

34. Eating alone versus eating in company has become the subject of sociological study. Julier, *supra*, note 28. *See generally* CHAD LEVIN, EATING ANXIETY 23 (2013). *See also* Nicola Davis, *Is It True That Eating Alone is Bad for You?*, THE GUARDIAN (July 6, 2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/jul/06/is-it-true-that-eating-alone-is-bad-for-you> [<https://perma.cc/3ELY-T7K8>]; Cody C. Delsitraty, *The Importance of Eating Together*, THE ATLANTIC July 18, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/07/the-importance-of-eating-together/374256> [<https://perma.cc/Y5JR-3A9C>].

myself, I have rarely ordered anything else at a Japanese restaurant if it is available, risking mercury poisoning with its symptomatic loss of memory.³⁵ I commend it to anyone who enjoys sushi and is ready to advance in experience. I secretly suppose that the chef realizes someone requesting chirashi is a kindred spirit who appreciates the science and the spirituality of a cuisine which embodies a culture.

Chirashi is especially pure. It is not only fresh, which all of the ingredients but the deliberately aged should be at any fine dining establishment, but also simple, which is not necessarily the ethos even among the *itamaa* (the *nihonjin*, ethnic Japanese, chief of the kitchen). Chirashi is on the verge of achieving cult status. It betokens the diversity of spice, as does *omakase* (the selection of the day) albeit coming out all at once rather than as a series of plates. We are signaling by calling for “chirashi” that our taste is discerning or perhaps discriminating in the positive sense, even as sushi is threatened by being in vogue.³⁶ Nowadays, suburban supermarkets stockpile it at the prepared foods counter with meatloaf.³⁷ Some people seem oblivious to its Asian provenance. Neither *ceviche* nor *crudo*, the Latin American marinated and Italian oiled cousins to Japanese raw fish, has suffered the same fame.³⁸

Yet after introducing *karaoke* and isolating the *umami* sensation, it turns out that Japanese conglomerates and their executives retreated rather than conquered.³⁹ Japan did not continue their dominance. The disgrace of a white working man is to submit to an Asian supervisor: for example, in the *Back to the Future II* movie, starring Michael J. Fox as Marty McFly, the embodiment of the Everyman was fired by a Japanese boss, the disgrace being delivered by fax machine.⁴⁰ In the absence of the Japanese big spenders, the proliferation of “sushi style” rolls complies with no criteria, ending up doused in *shoyu* (soy sauce) as would trouble anyone who has ever been within walking distance of Tokyo’s Tsukiji Market.⁴¹ The subtlety of sushi, like the details of any delicacy, cannot be sustained against the

35. See James Barron, *Warnings Don't Deter Lovers of Sushi*, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 24, 2008), <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/24/nyregion/24sushi.html?ref=nyregion> [https://perma.cc/3QHM-2N9G].

36. The notion that taste should be discriminating is critiqued as snobbery in PIERRE BOURDIEU, *DISTINCTION: A SOCIAL CRITIQUE OF THE JUDGMENT OF TASTE* (1979).

37. See Walter Nicholls, *Supermarket Sushi*, WASH. POST (Apr. 29, 1998), https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/food/1998/04/29/supermarket-sushi/a0811d12-99b1-40ac-b5aa-c4e8b18a0602/?utm_term=.d8e04a5ab1a0 [https://perma.cc/NPE6-SE8M].

38. See Dan Nosowitz, *Ceviche, Poke, Crudo, Carpaccio: Your Guide to Raw Fish Dishes Around the World*, MOD. FARMER (Feb. 4, 2016), <https://modernfarmer.com/2016/02/raw-fish-guide> [https://perma.cc/5N5B-8QVX].

39. Regarding *karaoke*, see generally XUN ZHOU & FRANCESCA TAROCCO, *KARAOKE: THE GLOBAL PHENOMENON* (2007). The authors note *karaoke* has disputed origins. Regarding *umami*, see generally OLE MOURITSEN & KLAUS STYRBAEK, *UMAMI: UNLOCKING THE SECRETS OF THE FIFTH TASTE* (2015).

40. *BACK TO THE FUTURE II* (Universal Pictures 1989).

41. See generally THEODORE C. BESTOR, *TSUKIJI: THE FISH MARKET AT THE CENTER OF THE WORLD* (2004).

demands of commercial production and mass consumption. More than one traditional Japanese dining room boasts a sign, “No California rolls!”—never mind the Hawaiian specialty of spam *musubi*.⁴²

At the upscale Japan Inn in Washington, D.C., where diplomats conducted business before it shut its doors forever, the abundant assortment of chirashi needed two lacquered boxes.⁴³ In the piscine, there was everything from the starter of *tamago* (omelet from chicken egg, an item that served as a test of quality), *sake* (salmon), and *hamachi* (yellowtail) to the *ama-ebi* (sweet shrimp, meaning raw; fried heads ushered out separately as they were done), *ikura* (salmon roe), and *uni* (sea urchin). In the vegetal, there were the bonus items from seaweed to dried bonito flakes to shiitake mushrooms cooked and seasoned and enoki mushrooms likewise but more faintly, and the full range of *tsukemono* (preserves), such as *beni shoji* (pickled red ginger), *fukujinzuke* (relish), *takwon* (daikon radish, naturally dyed golden yellow), and the single sour *umeboshi* (pickled plum). As generously decorated as the lids of the containers were, the treasures were within. It remains rare, even among those who fancy themselves “foodies,” to encounter *sakura denbu*, the “floss” processed from fish, a relation of *rou song*, its Middle Kingdom porcine peer. There must be rice of course.⁴⁴ Without rice, whatever else is put away cannot constitute a meal.

Japan Inn was furnished to live up to its name, as if we had chanced upon it hiking through the forest in the movie *Rashomon*.⁴⁵ There was no glamour to lure the crowd incompetent to distinguish *maguro* (tuna) from *toro* (fatty tuna). Instead there was that air of discretion; if the handful of surviving salarymen on the other side of the paper screen imbibed too much, you ignored their boisterous camaraderie recalling better days before the crash. The owner emblazoned the tapestries with her *mon* (family crest), a trio of arrow feathers, the central shaft inverted. The servers were as choreographed as the *kuroko* (Japanese stagehands dressed in black) who are silent and stealthy as they set the scene.

My wife and I went there when we felt we could splurge. That is part of the charm of chirashi. If you were to opt for the equivalent quantity of

42. The California roll is credited to a Canadian, who has since been honored by Japan. See Danny Lewis, *Japan Honors of the Creator of the California Roll*, SMITHSONIAN (June 16, 2016), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/japan-honors-creator-of-california-roll-180959446> [https://perma.cc/V2WG-EM8F].

43. See Foraging, *Japan Inn's 88 Little Plates*, WASH. POST (Apr. 23, 2003), https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/food/2003/04/23/japan-inns-88-little-plates/e811a9e4-105b-44a8-b032-8a1ce44107fd/?utm_term=.a1481a82b20b [https://perma.cc/SF5B-5LX8].

44. See generally EMIKO OHNUKI-TIERNEY, *RICE AS SELF: JAPANESE IDENTITIES THROUGH TIME* (1994); see also RENEE MARTON, *RICE: A GLOBAL HISTORY* (2014). Although rice in the form of instant “rice-a-roni” was dubbed “the San Francisco treat,” that product had European origins. See The Kitchen Sisters, *Birth of Rice-A-Roni: The Armenian-Italian Treat*, NAT'L PUB. RADIO (July 31, 2008), <https://www.npr.org/2008/07/31/93067862/birth-of-rice-a-roni-the-armenian-italian-treat> [https://perma.cc/N9BQ-QJ37].

45. RASHOMON (Daiei Tokyo Studies 1950).

food in another format, it would be twice the cost. We calculated it: my wife preferred lobster teriyaki, and that extravagance was more than offset by the frugality of the chirashi. We were honored to be recognized as regulars at the forty-year fixture in the upper Georgetown neighborhood. (The family's subsequent venture, Chez Mama San, was an experiment in *yoshoku*, Japanese versions of Western entrees. Yet another tale of East meets West along the lines of *yoga* and paintings following Western schools.⁴⁶)

To eat sushi, as an Asian American, is to face down the prospect of humiliation. It is to embrace the conduct that is caricatured by the stereotype: practicing martial arts regardless of casual childhood cruelties of teasing and taunting, challenged as “Bruce Lee” to playground fights, or taking up photography, notwithstanding the mockery of the Japanese tourist in Hollywood satire or even by the otherwise enlightening cultural critic Susan Sontag.⁴⁷ Bullying extends to the cafeteria, the “ick” reaction to an immigrant child's lunchbox contents, the expropriation of milk money.⁴⁸ Asian Americans are taught they have to avoid Asia to be accepted as American.

III. RECOVERING THE INTERNMENT

Ironically, my wife, who falls between *nisei* and *sansei* (second- and third-generation Japanese American), has always had somewhat an aversion to raw fish. Her father, an immigrant who claimed to be from a fishing hamlet so small he had to swim to school, had ingested enough of it as a child that he was eager to adapt to the American palate. In the internment camp mess halls, the “weenie royale” and its like replaced chirashi and its like, even as the spiteful speculation spread that the Japanese-American prisoners were feted with steak on a regular basis while others subsisted on rations.⁴⁹ My wife, growing up in the Midwest well after World War II, was compelled to be as ordinary as possible, conforming to the majority.⁵⁰ So I, Chinese and

46. See Eve Zibart, *Come Home to Mama-San*, WASH. POST (Dec. 16, 2005), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/12/15/AR2005121500434.html> [https://perma.cc/3BJJ-W36N]. See generally JANE LAWSON, *YOSHOKU: JAPANESE FOOD WESTERN STYLE* (2005); Norimitsu Onishi, *Spaghetti Stir-Fry and Hambagoo: Japan Looks West*, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 26, 2008), <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/26/dining/26japan.html> [https://perma.cc/28PA-2K7D].

47. Regarding Bruce Lee, see Shanlon Wu, *In Search of Bruce Lee*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 15, 1990), <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/15/magazine/about-men-in-search-of-bruce-lee-s-grave.html> [https://perma.cc/FA6V-W5UQ]. See SUSAN SONTAG, *ON PHOTOGRAPHY* 10 (1973).

48. See Ruth Tam, *How It Feels When White People Shame Your Culture's Food – Then Make It Trendy*, WASH. POST (Aug. 31, 2015), https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/08/31/childhood-friends-called-my-food-chinese-grossness-how-did-it-become-americas-hottest-food-trend/?utm_term=.a431d0bf188a [https://perma.cc/W9PS-UJYN]. See also Krishnendu Ray, *Migration, Transnational Cuisines, and Invisible Ethnicities*, in *FOOD IN TIME AND PLACE* (Paul Freedman et al. eds., 2014).

49. See The Kitchen Sisters, *Weenie Royale: Food and the Japanese Internment*, NAT'L PUBLIC RADIO (Dec. 20, 2007), <https://www.npr.org/2007/12/20/17335538/weenie-royale-food-and-the-japanese-internment> [https://perma.cc/9VA7-S2R3].

50. See generally NAOMI HIRAHARA, *LIFE AFTER MANZANAR* (2018); GREG ROBINSON, *AFTER*

not Japanese by lineage, am the committed enthusiast among the two of us for her ancestral aesthetic, including artistic ideals such as *wabi-sabi* (the allure of fallibility revealing the human hand at work, a Japanese nationalist style distinct from Chinese refinement in crafts such as ceramics).⁵¹ If you are sensitive to the histories that impinge on one another, to be Chinese would make one much more figuratively distant from the Japanese than any European, despite the literally close relationship of the two countries. Proximity promoted rivalry. The inhabitants of Taiwan, some of whom seem nostalgic for Japanese imperialism as they are confronted by the amalgamation of mainland Chinese Communism/capitalism, still put on the table fare derived from the Japanese.⁵² My mother was fond of a savory egg custard main dish, *chawan mushi*, with its hidden tidbits of chicken and dried shrimp. The Koreans, once subjects of the Japanese Empire, boast of their own version of chirashi, called *hwe dup bap*, with more of a salad style dish with the addition of hot sauce.⁵³ Koreans and Japanese would not quarrel with one another that the two forms should not be mistaken for one another, any more than the populations.

Asian Americans all have these anecdotes about food as a marker of difference and indicator of assimilation.⁵⁴ When I was a kid, my brothers and I turned up our noses at what my mother toiled to make every afternoon. The repast was a traditional Chinese meal, usually featuring a steamed whole fish. We clamored for hamburgers and hot dogs, spaghetti and meatballs, and whatever else was being devoured next door, in the naïve belief that earnest mimicry would ensure our welcome. Our friends' parents would never

CAMP: PORTRAITS IN MIDCENTURY JAPANESE AMERICAN LIFE AND POLITICS (2014). See also ALICE YANG MURRAY, HISTORICAL MEMORIES OF THE JAPANESE AMERICAN INTERNMENT AND STRUGGLE FOR REDRESS (2007). See also David Mura, TURNING JAPANESE: MEMOIRS OF A SANESI (2005); Gene Oishi, "The Anxiety of Being Japanese-American," N.Y. TIMES (April 28, 1985), <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/04/28/magazine/the-anxiety-of-being-a-japanese-american.html> [<https://perma.cc/MHX9-Z3CB>] (last visited, Sept. 2, 2019).

51. See generally LEONARD KOREN, WABI-SABI FOR ARTISTS, DESIGNERS, POETS & PHILOSOPHERS (1994); DONALD RICHIE, A TRACTATE ON JAPANESE AESTHETICS (2007).

52. See *Ex-Taiwan President Lee Teng-Hui Under Fire For Calling Japan the 'Motherland,'* S. CHINA MORNING POST (Aug. 21, 2015), <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/1851501/ex-taiwan-president-lee-under-fire-calling-japan> [<https://perma.cc/VV8T-YUNP>]. See generally LEO T.S. CHING, BECOMING JAPANESE: COLONIAL TAIWAN AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY FORMATION (2001).

In contemporary America, sushi is increasingly provided by Chinese entrepreneurs. David L. Wank and James Farrar, "Chinese Immigrants and Japanese Cuisine in the United States: A Case of Culinary Glocalization," in Farrar, ed., *supra* note 1, at 79–99; Ana Swanson, *Why So Many of America's Sushi Restaurants Are Owned by Chinese Immigrants*, WASH. POST (Sept. 29, 2016), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/09/29/the-fascinating-story-behind-who-opens-sushi-restaurants-and-why/?utm_term=.eb0cab457699 [<https://perma.cc/8HHE-4GEH>].

53. See generally JUN UCHIDA, BROKERS OF EMPIRE: JAPANESE SETTLER COLONIALISM IN KOREA, 1876–1945 (2014).

54. See generally ROBERT JI-SONG KU, DUBIOUS GASTRONOMY: THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF EATING ASIAN IN THE USA (2013); ROBERT JI-SONG KU, EATING ASIAN AMERICA: A FOOD STUDIES READER (2103); Pascale Joassart-Marcelli et al., *Food, Ethnicity, and Place: Producing Identity and Difference*, in FOOD AND PLACE: A CRITICAL EXPLORATION 211 (Pascale Joassart-Marcelli & Fernando J. Bosco eds., 2017).

become our parents' friends, and for that matter we could not be so sure that our friends were friends either. My parents shopped downtown at Eastern Market for the Great Lakes freshwater species they had substituted for what was found in the old country.⁵⁵ An old-fashioned emporium of stalls hawking every comestible, the butcher alongside the cheesemonger, the florist and the fishmonger, it was one of the few civic spaces where black and white, Arab and Jew, Latino and Asian, all gathered. I marveled at the chitterlings in glass display cases and the trotters hanging from the rafters. Our elders assuredly were not taking us for sushi. I was not acquainted with fine dining until adulthood, because we ate only at Chinese restaurants. That typically meant over in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, with its more easygoing multiculturalism, except – in common with my future wife – for the special occasion at the Red Lobster chain (my late father-in-law brought his own *shoyu*). I assumed, with the reasoning of a child, that in Canada, everybody was foreign. Yet I cannot complain. I never went hungry at night.

The internment was a revelation. Suddenly the “gaslighting” of my youth, being admonished that I needed to fit in better; that you had to be able to take a joke; as a child to retort, “sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” then as a college student not to be too “politically correct,” made sense.⁵⁶ I had not been told about the internment, though I did have a friend in high school who was a quarter Japanese, a fact that he let slip only after we were pals but would not have been guessed. But I was writing a term paper in college, and in the stacks of the library I found only a handful of books, all of them the entirety of what had been published about Asian Americans to that point, and among the titles were studies of this episode. I read the two leading anthologies cover to cover.⁵⁷ I could claim, credibly, to be an expert, possessing information ignored by my teachers. Even those who were acquainted with African Americans had scant knowledge of Asian Americans beyond stereotypes they could not sense were degrading.

Well before Pearl Harbor, Japanese immigrants and their American-born children were loathed by other Americans, such as the Native Sons of the Golden West who believed California was reserved for the white race.⁵⁸ The legislative enactments that discriminated against them included racial

55. See Detroit Historical Society, *Encyclopedia of Detroit: Eastern Market*, DETROIT HIST. SOC'Y, <https://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/eastern-market-historic-district> [<https://perma.cc/3LM7-PP3L>] (last visited Sept. 28, 2018).

56. See generally ROGER DANIELS, PRISONERS WITHOUT TRIAL: JAPANESE AMERICANS IN WORLD WAR II, (rev. ed. 2004); ROGER DANIELS, CONCENTRATION CAMPS: NORTH AMERICA JAPANESE IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA DURING WORLD WAR II (1981); GREG ROBINSON, A TRAGEDY OF DEMOCRACY: JAPANESE CONFINEMENT IN NORTH AMERICA (2009); ERIC Y. YAMAMOTO ET AL., RACE, RIGHTS & REPARATION: LAW AND THE JAPANESE AMERICAN INTERNMENT (2d ed. 2013). Regarding the war years, see generally DAVID M. KENNEDY, THE AMERICAN PEOPLE IN WORLD WAR II (2003).

57. ASIAN-AMERICANS: PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES (Stanley Sue and Nathaniel N. Wagner eds., 1973); ASIAN-AMERICANS: SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES (Russel Endo et al. eds., vol. 2 1980).

58. ROBINSON, *supra*, note 56.

segregation in San Francisco schools, culminating in the White House negotiating a “Gentleman’s Agreement” with Japan under which the Japanese already present would not come under further denigration if additional Japanese could be prevented from joining them.⁵⁹ The Chinese Exclusion Act eventually was extended into an Asiatic Barred Zone.⁶⁰ The Japanese who were resident could not pass the test of being “free white persons,” neither the pale color of their skin nor their acquisition of American values being sufficient.⁶¹ They thus could not naturalize. As “aliens ineligible to citizenship,” a category corresponding to Asian, they could not own land.⁶² They also were prohibited from intermarriage with whites and acquisition of professional licenses.⁶³

The racism of the internment, like that of the Chinese Exclusion Act, omitted from textbooks was explicit not implicit. It was blatant, overt, even prideful, allied to Jim Crow, anti-Semitism, Indian genocide, and the nationalism of the “old stock” that would even set apart swarthier European ethnics as not quite white. There was no denying the facts, so they could only be covered up. It wasn’t an interpretation in my own head, susceptible to cursory dismissal. A blue-ribbon federal commission summarized that the internment had not been justified by military necessity, and the absence of evidence against the Japanese Americans in the aggregate had been known during internment (rather than being ahistorical hindsight).⁶⁴ The official study concluded that the program was the product of wartime panic, poor leadership, and racial prejudice. In 1988, Congress granted redress of \$20,000 per person, pennies on the dollar.⁶⁵ German Americans and Italian

59. Shiho Imai, *Gentlemen’s Agreement*, DENSHO ENCYCLOPEDIA, [http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Gentlemen’s Agreement](http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Gentlemen%27s_Agreement) [<https://perma.cc/AL9Y-MW3S>] (last visited Sept. 28, 2018). THEODORE ROOSEVELT, *THE ROUGH RIDERS/AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY* 632–40 (Library of America, 2004) (describing Roosevelt’s account of the Gentlemen’s Agreement); EDMUND MORRIS, *THEODORE REX* 483–84 (2002).

60. Immigration Act of 1917, Pub. L. No. 301, § 29, 39 Stat. 874 (1917).

61. *Ozawa v. United States*, 260 U.S. 178, 180 (1922). See generally IAN HANEY LOPEZ, *WHITE BY LAW: THE LEGAL CONSTRUCTION OF RACE* (1996).

62. *Terrace v. Thompson*, 263 U.S. 197 (1923); see Keith Aoki, *No Right to Own? The Early Twentieth-Century “Alien Land Laws” as a Prelude to Internment*, 19 B.C. THIRD WORLD L.J. 37, 38 (1995).

63. Hrishikesh Karthikeyan & Gabriel J. Chin, *Preserving Racial Identity: Population Patterns and the Application of Anti-Miscegenation Statutes to Asian Americans, 1910-1950*, 9 ASIAN AM. L.J. 1 (2002). Regarding professional licenses, see *Takahashi v. Fish & Game Comm’n*, 344 U.S. 410 (1948).

64. COMM’N ON WARTIME RELOCATION AND INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS, *PERSONAL JUSTICE DENIED*, (The Civil Liberties Public Education Fund & The University of Washington Press 1977).

65. Civil Liberties Act of 1988, Pub. L. No. 100-383, § 105(a)(1) 102 Stat. 903, 906. Japanese Latin Americans, kidnaped from their homes and shipped to the United States, were omitted from the resolution. For histories of the redress movement, see LESLIE T. HATAMIYA, *RIGHTING A WRONG: JAPANESE AMERICANS AND THE PASSAGE OF THE CIVIL LIBERTIES ACT OF 1988* (1994) (offering a history of the redress movement); see also WILLIAM MINORU HOHRI, *REPAIRING AMERICA: AN ACCOUNT OF THE MOVEMENT FOR JAPANESE-AMERICAN REDRESS* (1988); THE MASS INTERNMENT OF JAPANESE AMERICANS AND THE QUEST FOR LEGAL REDRESS (Charles McClain ed., 1994); MITCH MAKI ET AL., *ACHIEVING THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM: HOW JAPANESE AMERICANS OBTAINED REDRESS* (1999); NIKKEI FOR CIVIL RIGHTS & REDRESS, NCCR: *THE GRASSROOTS STRUGGLE FOR JAPANESE AMERICAN REDRESS AND REPARATIONS* (2018).

Americans were not interned on a mass scale, though foreign Germans and foreign Italians were on a limited basis. Even so, during the Congressional debate, comparisons were made to the conduct of the Japanese government toward American prisoners of war, recapitulating the assignment of Japanese Americans to the role of enemy combatants. (Contrary to such bigotry, the vengeance of the Japanese would be inflicted to the maximum degree on Japanese Americans.)

It is impossible to predict how people will behave, as in following a recipe there are too many variables to take it as if it were a list of rules guaranteeing an outcome. My late father-in-law exemplified equanimity that could be called characteristic with sensitivity to the risk of affirming the cliché.⁶⁶ He bore no grudge toward the United States government that had imprisoned him, his California native wife, and their infant daughter. He was suspected without charges or trial. He was released from the Tule Lake internment camp on the condition he join the Army as a civilian.⁶⁷ Thanks to his bilingual skills, he was able to train as a cartographer. He gained a career in a profession he otherwise would not have been able to pursue on either side of the Pacific Ocean. His positive attitude was a form of racial resilience.

Yet when I met him ensconced in the tufted velour recliner of his later years, he immediately recounted the story of who had aggrieved him in life. He had been cheated by kinfolk. His eldest sister's husband had relieved him of his life savings upon his landing in Los Angeles. The "old man" — how my father-in-law always referred to the fellow even after he himself had surpassed the age of the culprit— promised to make him a partner in a shoe business. He instead was relegated to the role of clerk sizing the feet of migrant farmworkers. Our intimates are more likely than strangers to harm us.⁶⁸ We recollect ourselves as we were then. Our roles are set. Scottish intellectual Thomas Carlyle bequeathed us the notion that history is the biography of great men. His opinions are rightly dismissed for his endorsement of chattel slavery in his 1853 pamphlet entitled with the "n-word."⁶⁹ Contrary to Carlyle, our history is the biography of ordinary men.

66. See PBS NewsHour, *Jacque Pépin Says Following a Recipe Can Lead to Disaster*, PBS.COM (Apr. 13, 2016), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/jacques-pepin-says-following-a-recipe-can-lead-to-disaster> [<https://perma.cc/7JD3-KUSQ>].

67. Regarding Japanese American military service, see TAD ICHINOKUCHI & DANIEL AISO, JOHN AISO AND THE M.I.S.: JAPANESE-AMERICAN SOLDIERS IN THE MILITARY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE, WORLD WAR II (1988); see also JAMES C. MCNAUGHTON, NISEI LINGUISTS: JAPANESE AMERICANS IN THE MILITARY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE DURING WORLD WAR II (2007); C. DOUGLAS STERNER, GO FOR BROKE: THE NISEI WARRIORS OF WORLD WAR II WHO CONQUERED GERMANY, JAPAN, AND AMERICAN BIGOTRY (2015).

68. See, e.g., Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Stranger and Non-Stranger Crime*, BJS.GOV (June 27, 2017), <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=941> (defining "stranger" and "non-stranger" for statistical purposes); see also Michael Wilson, *Killed By a Stranger: A Rare Event, But a Rising Fear*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 17, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/18/nyregion/killed-by-a-stranger-a-rare-event-but-a-rising-fear.html> [<https://perma.cc/HDC8-2SGD>] (describing the rarity of stranger killings in spite of the media attention such killings receive).

69. Different printings of Carlyle's piece appear with either "Negro" or the "n-word" in its title. The standalone pamphlet version was titled *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question* (1853).

In my estimation, my late father-in-law was an individual of importance.

Shortly before our adventure to scatter his ashes from whence he had come but never returned to, the Japanese Ambassador to the United States greeted us at a reception, and, upon learning of the upcoming mission, asked the name of that hometown. My wife replied with a polite laugh that he would not have heard of it, and he said, with a politer smile, that he was, after all, the Japanese Ambassador, so please try him. When she divulged our destination, the urbane gentleman was nonplussed: he admitted he had no idea where that place was on the island nation. He would have been as much an outsider in the remote village of Wakayama prefecture as we were.

The closest landmark was an infamous site of history only a decade prior, bound up with corrupted food: not too far away from where we were en route, in the shadow of a mountain that defined the landscape, a Japanese woman had spiked curry with arsenic, a pot of which she dispensed at a local festival. Her malevolence injured dozens and killed four.⁷⁰ According to prosecutors, she was motivated by her alienation from the other housewives in the neighborhood, not feeling she was respected as she was due. She violated the trust needed to share a supper.

We reached the rural settlement, via bullet train and then rental van, welcomed by the widow of the youngest brother among the siblings, a third wife, we were assured sequentially not simultaneously, whom he had wed when she was a teenager and he was fifty years old. The cosmopolitan of the neighborhood, she had been the first to install an indoor Western toilet (i.e., sit down, not squat), circa 1983. The other cousins we met were honest, working-class people. One fellow, who had recently retired from his job as truck driver for a major brewery, initiated us into his private custom of *asa-beru* (morning beer). I feel guilty even now. He offered me *tako-yaki* (octopus in dough balls), but I declined despite my ideal of being adventurous. They showed us around. Their English was better than our Japanese. Looking at the little bay, we confirmed that the main house of the extended clan indeed was accessible only by water, during high tide. One's livelihood there, not merely nourishment, likely depended on seafood from time immemorial.

My father-in-law had not exaggerated about his origins. "Edwin" was the name he had given himself when he took leave of his community. He wanted his English title to be dignified but not an imitation of the royal who would abdicate, Edward VIII, but by the time I called him to request the hand of his younger daughter, he was known to all as "Eddie," and he was too distracted by the football Super Bowl on television to object to the union. To have migrated a century ago would have been remarkable. Although we remember those who surprise us with their arrival, we forget those who shock us with their departure. It is the same individual who takes such a

70. See Murray Sayle, *Poison: Why a Puzzling Village Crime Has Unnerved a Nation*, NEW YORKER, Nov. 22, 1999, at 114.

journey, provoking a response by riding into town but not riding away into the sunset, who lies beyond the ken of his friends, new and old. Those are the two archetypal tales to be told, and they turn out to be one, dependent only on perspective.⁷¹ But the traveler alone is aware of the differences between origin and terminus, directly rather than from hearsay and rumor.

Japanese Americans such as my father-in-law sought acceptance after World War II. They ceased to be the perpetual foreigner by turning into the model minority.⁷² They were cast as exemplars of the American “fair play” that had been denied to them. Commentators celebrated their accomplishment as a means of criticizing, in the terminology of the most influential article published about them, “problem minorities.”⁷³ The fear of the ascent of Japan and the resentment of Asian American overachievement coincided with the spread of sushi, as if absorbing their victuals figuratively would ease lingering apprehensions about foreign persons who were surrounding the body politic.

CONCLUSION

Diet is mandatory, rendering it perforce normative. “Ethnic food” is all about the back stories. Since we are what we eat, observers react to us by watching our dining habits.⁷⁴ Americans once adjudged Japanese food to be exotic to the point of inedible. Yet America has been made up of, and by, foreigners who have become a people through the mythos of breaking bread as at Thanksgiving.⁷⁵ Chirashi could be celebrated among the meals defining us as *e pluribus unum*.⁷⁶ What appears to be but random is in fact an elegant arrangement. That is the abiding power of food.

71. The saying about there being only two stories is variously attributed. Stephen Metcalf, *Town Without Pity*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 4, 2007, at 24.

72. See generally MADELINE Y. HSU, *THE GOOD IMMIGRANTS: HOW THE YELLOW PERIL BECAME THE MODEL MINORITY* (2015) (describing the history of the “model minority” myth).

73. William Petersen, *Success Story, Japanese American Style*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 9, 1966, at 20–21.

74. The quote is from JEAN ANTHELME BRILLAT-SAVARIN, *THE PHYSIOLOGY OF TASTE, OR, MEDITATIONS ON TRANSCENDENTAL GASTRONOMY* (M.F.K. Fisher trans., Vintage Classics 2011) (1949). See also BELASCO, *supra* note 21, at 15–33 (linking cuisine to personal identity).

75. See VIVIAN NUN HALLORAN, *THE IMMIGRANT KITCHEN: FOOD, ETHNICITY, AND DIASPORA* 128–141 (2015). Regarding Thanksgiving generally, see MELANIE KIRKPATRICK, *THANKSGIVING: THE HOLIDAY AT THE HEART OF THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE* (2016).

76. See generally Lavanya Ramanathan, *Why Everyone Should Stop Calling Immigrant Food “Ethnic,”* WASH. POST (July 21, 2015), https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/food/why-everyone-should-stop-calling-immigrant-food-ethnic/2015/07/20/07927100-266f-11e5-b77f-eb13a215f593_story.html?utm_term=.aac47e184b29 [<https://perma.cc/H5H7-XEPA>] (discussing the relationship between immigrant cuisines and the history of dining out in the United States).