

TELLING A DIFFICULT PAST:

Kishizo Kimura's Memoir of Entanglement in Racist Policy

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A LONG WITH EVERY OTHER Japanese Canadian, Kishizo Kimura saw his life upended by events that began in 1941. His experience of the tumultuous decade that followed was shared with tens of thousands of others. But his story is also unique: as a member of two controversial committees that oversaw the liquidation of property, Kimura was more closely implicated in the dispossession of his community than any other Japanese Canadian. Kimura's perspective, which he recorded in a memoir in the late 1960s or early 1970s, has never before been included in an assessment of the era or its policies. It should be. The memoir, now part of an archival collection at the Nikkei National Museum, offers an insider's perspective on the execution of an important and misguided wartime policy. In it, Kimura illuminates the complex pressures that intersected in the liquidation process and provides a vital perspective on a history in which he played a critical and overlooked role.

Like so many other Japanese Canadians, Kimura was ripped out of a remarkably successful integration into Canadian society by the events of the 1940s. In 1911, Kimura, then aged twelve, immigrated to Canada with his parents, arriving from Tottori Prefecture, a shipping centre in Western Japan. The family settled among other Nikkei in the Powell Street neighbourhood of East Vancouver, where Kimura attended both public and Japanese schools. In the three decades that followed, he enjoyed personal and professional success. After working in fish exports for more than a decade, in the 1930s Kimura helped to found two cooperative associations of Canadian exporters, establishing himself as an important organizer within an industry that employed many Japanese Canadians. He also married Hanuro Makino; he, his wife, and their children (the couple would eventually have five) continued to live just to the east of the historic centre of Japanese-Canadian settlement sur-

rounding Powell Street.¹ This life was interrupted and irrevocably altered by the years of internment.

The treatment of Japanese Canadians during the 1940s has received rightful and extensive attention from scholars and community members in the decades since. The acts of the Canadian government, with the complicity of the public, from December 1941, when Canada entered the war in the Pacific, to April 1949, when the legal restrictions on Japanese Canadians were finally lifted, constitute a low point in the much longer history of legalized racism in Canada. Between these dates over twenty-two thousand Japanese Canadians, the large majority of them British subjects of Canada, were uprooted from their homes. In the years that followed they suffered shared but varied experiences of state surveillance, internment, dispersal from British Columbia, and, for close to four thousand, deportation. In addition, and with no plausible connection to any concerns about the security of the coast, the Canadian government sold the property of Japanese Canadians without their consent.²

In many ways, Kimura weathered this storm better than most. Because of his work with the liquidation committees, he and his family were offered a special exemption from the Order-in-Council that uprooted Japanese Canadians from the British Columbia coast.³ Declining this offer, they instead relocated to Christina Lake, near Grand Forks, British Columbia, joining one of the “self-support camps” where relatively well-to-do displaced people suffered the exclusion associated with the larger internment process but also secured a greater measure of control

¹ Kishizo Kimura Fonds, Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre (hereafter NNMCC), Vancouver, http://nikkeimuseum.org/www/collections_detail.php?col_id=F46r; A. Katsuyoshi Morita, *Powell Street Monogatari*, trans. Eric A. Sokugawa (Burnaby, BC: Live Canada Publishing, 1989) 54; British Columbia Security Commission Permit No. 00076, 26 March 1943, Kimura Fonds, NNMCC, file 1, MS 42.

² For the details of these policies, see: Ken Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976); Ann Gomer Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1981); Patricia Roy, *The Triumph of Citizenship: The Japanese and Chinese in Canada, 1941-67* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007).

³ Kimura, Memoir, 31. This is an undated manuscript, written circa 1970s, and located in the NNMCC, file 2, MS 42. For the purposes of writing this paper, I had the memoir translated into English. To this end, I commissioned two independent translations. The first (of the entire manuscript) was completed by Chihiro Saka, an MA student in the University of Victoria's Department of Pacific and Asian Studies whose first language is Japanese. The second translation, of selected passages, was provided by Daniel Lachapelle Lemire (a PhD student at McGill University in the Department of History who is fluent in both English and Japanese). Differences between the two were stylistic in nature rather than substantive. Finally, Dr. Michiko “Midge” Ayukawa kindly helped me to examine certain key passages of the original text alongside the translations, helping to clarify questions of terminology. The page numbers referred to in these citations indicate the location of the material in the Japanese-language text.



Figure 1. In this photograph [1926], Kishizo Kimura (far right), relaxes with friends on Bowen Island, BC. Kimura's personal photographs from this period include many such portraits of lives that would be permanently disrupted by the policies of the 1940s. Photograph used by permission of the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre.

over their living conditions than did most Japanese Canadians during the uprooting.⁴ In Christina Lake, Kimura obtained a pass from the British Columbia Security Commission, allowing him to travel within the restricted area of coastal British Columbia.⁵ As late as June 1943, while in Vancouver for his work with the Custodian of Enemy Property, he dined in public at the New Beijing Restaurant with non-Nikkei friends.⁶ Such relative privileges, however, came at a cost.

In 1942 and 1943, Kimura was drawn into the policies that would dispossess the fishers among whom he had worked and destroy the neighbourhood in which he had lived. The seizure of fishing vessels was one of Canada's first responses to war in the Pacific. On 8 December 1941, long before the larger course of policy had been set, the navy demanded that Japanese-Canadian fishers relinquish over thirteen hundred vessels, the large majority of which were shortly impounded along the Fraser River near New Westminster. On 13 January 1942, Order-in-Council P.C. 288 created the Fishing Vessel Disposal Committee, chaired by

⁴ See Mona Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence: Japanese Canadian Women, Memory, and the Subjects of the Internment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 168-72.

⁵ British Columbia Security Commission Permit No. 00076, 26 March 1943, Kimura Fonds, NNMCC, file 1, MS 42.

⁶ Agenda, 8 June 1943, Kimura Fonds, NNMCC, MS 42.

Justice Sidney Smith, whose mandate was to “make it possible for the present owners of detained vessels to freely negotiate for charters, leases or sales” of their vessels. Smith was joined on the committee by Naval Commander B.L. Johnson and by Kimura, who had agreed to serve as a representative of Japanese-Canadian interests.⁷

The reasons for the committee’s selection of Kimura as the Japanese-Canadian member are not entirely apparent. Most likely, the choice resulted from his prominence in the industry as well as some impression of his personality and politics. Kimura’s agenda of his business activities includes a 6 August 1941 meeting with a “Mr. Motherwell,” most likely J.A. Motherwell, the chief supervisor of fisheries.⁸ It was Motherwell who, just over five months later, called Kimura to invite his participation in the disposal of fishing vessels. In addition, Kimura indicates that other prominent Japanese Canadians supported his involvement with the committee.⁹ Whatever the case, in January 1942 Kimura accepted this appointment and began to participate in implementing a policy to encourage, but not (yet) force, Japanese-Canadian owners to sell their boats.

The policy would soon change. Although Japanese-Canadian owners cooperated with officials in allowing their vessels to be impounded, many initially resisted the sale of their vessels, hoping to return to gainful employment within the industry. On 24 February 1942, with the government’s decision to uproot the entire Japanese-Canadian population from the coast, such hopes largely dissolved. Hence, in early March the Fishing Vessel Disposal Committee entered into its “most active” phase, and half of the vessels were sold by the end of May. However, during this period it also “became evident” to the committee “that certain Japanese groups were determined to retain ownership of their vessels,” a stance that prompted the committee to adopt what it described as a “Forced Sales’ plan.” This plan, to sell vessels at prices the committee deemed reasonable, irrespective of the views of their owners, was at best tenuously legal, given the terms of reference in the Order-in-Council that created the committee. Nonetheless, Kimura, for the first time, became party to the sale of property against the will of Japanese-Canadian owners, and most of the remaining vessels were quickly sold. Several months later,

⁷ Report of the Fishing Vessels Disposal Committee, December 1942, Kimura Fonds, NNMCC, file 10, MS 43. On the disposal of the fishing vessels, see Masako Fukawa and Stanley Fukawa, *Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet: BC’s Japanese Canadian Fishermen* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2009), chap. 7; Sunahara, *Politics of Racism*, chap. 2; Adachi, *Enemy That Never Was*, 228–29.

⁸ Agenda, 6 August 1941, Kimura Fonds, NNMCC, MS 42.

⁹ Kimura, Memoir, 1.

with only 187 vessels remaining, the committee concluded its business, transferring the rest of the boats to the Custodian of Enemy Property.¹⁰ On 12 December of that year the committee met for a final time to review its closing report. That afternoon, at 1:15 PM, Kimura boarded a train bound for Grand Forks. He rejoined his family late the next day, having been delayed by heavy snowfall.¹¹

This might have been the end of Kimura's involvement in the administration of wartime policy, but the forced sale of the fishing vessels set an attractive precedent for officials. In March 1942, as Japanese Canadians prepared for their uprooting, two Orders-in-Council, P.C. 1665 and P.C. 2483, assured them that their real estate and chattels would be held in protective custody by the Canadian government.¹² Their assets, they were informed, would be protected for their benefit for the duration of the war. Almost a year later, however, the government abruptly changed this policy. After struggling throughout the summer to perform the task assigned to them, officials in the office of the Custodian encouraged a shift towards liquidation, a position that dovetailed with those of the city government of Vancouver and influential BC MP Ian Mackenzie.¹³ In January 1943, this position became law. Order-in-Council P.C. 469 empowered the Custodian of Enemy Property to "liquidate, sell, or otherwise dispose" of all property, real estate, and chattels belonging to Japanese Canadians.¹⁴ Three months, to the day, after returning home from his work disposing of fishing vessels, Kimura received a call in the evening, inviting his participation in yet another committee, again chaired by Justice Sidney Smith, which would oversee the liquidation of all property owned by Japanese Canadians in the Vancouver area. As the committee would later put it, because Kimura had already "proved to be a source of willing information and help," it was hoped that he would "be of comparable value" in the liquidation of the remaining property.¹⁵ Five days later, on 18 March 1943, Kimura attended the inaugural meeting of the advisory committee for the liquidation of property in the Greater Vancouver area. He was to remain on the committee until June, when

¹⁰ Report of the Fishing Vessels Disposal Committee, December 1942, Kimura Fonds, NNMCC, file 10, MS 43.

¹¹ Agenda, 13 December 1942, Kimura Fonds, NNMCC, MS 42.

¹² Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG2-A-1-a, vol. 1750, PC 1942-1665, 4 March 1942; LAC, RG2-A-1-a, vol. 1752, PC 1942-2483, 27 March 1942.

¹³ Report to the Under Secretary of State Regarding the Japanese Evacuation Section of the Office of the Custodian at Vancouver, BC, 26 June 1942, LAC, RG117, vol. 2; Sunahara, *Politics of Racism*, chap. 5.

¹⁴ LAC, RG2-A-1-a, vol. 1789, PC 1943-469, 19 January 1943.

¹⁵ Report of the Advisory Committee on Japanese Properties in Greater Vancouver, 30 June 1945, AM199, City of Vancouver Archives (hereafter CVA), file 7, box 513-E-2.

real estate owned by Japanese Canadians was first advertised for sale. During his service on the two committees, Kimura directly participated in the liquidation of 950 fishing vessels, 177 parcels of real estate, and an untold volume of personal belongings.¹⁶

In the years before his death, Kimura reflected on these pivotal eighteen months, writing an unpublished memoir that remained among his personal papers until his death, when it passed to his children. The manuscript comprises seventy-seven legal-size pages of dense but elegantly hand-written Japanese. Carefully summarized in a table of contents, the memoir is exclusively devoted to Kimura's service on the liquidation committees, beginning with the "circumstances" that led to his participation in the Fishing Vessel Disposal Committee and concluding with his resignation from the committee that oversaw the forced sale of Vancouver area real estate. In between, the text oscillates among a variety of strategies, offering a narrow documentary reconstruction of events, an explanation of Kimura's own difficult position, a reiteration of official justifications of the liquidation policy, a sense of the impact of these policies on Japanese Canadians, and reflections on the history of racism and second-class citizenship in British Columbia.

This article uses Kimura's memoir to contribute to a growing scholarship on Japanese-Canadian memories and narratives of the 1940s. Pamela Sugiman and Mona Oikawa, in particular, have enriched our understandings of the uprooting and internment of Japanese Canadians by exploring the complexity of memory, the difficulty of communicating political violence, and the legacy of these events in the decades since.¹⁷ These scholars also share close personal connections with the events in

¹⁶ Report of the Fishing Vessels Disposal Committee, December 1942, Kimura Fonds, NNMCC, file 10, MS 43; Report of the Advisory Committee on Japanese Properties in Greater Vancouver, 30 June 1945, AM199, CVA, file 7, Add Mss 199, box 513-E-2.

¹⁷ Pamela Sugiman, "Life Is Sweet: Vulnerability and Composure in the Wartime Narratives of Japanese Canadians," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 43, 1 (2009): 186-218, 262; Pamela Sugiman, "A Million Hearts from Here: Japanese Canadian Mothers and Daughters and the Lessons of War," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 26, 4 (2007): 50-68, doi:10.2307/40543199; Pamela Sugiman, "Memories of Internment: Narrating Japanese Canadian Women's Life Stories," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 29 3 (2004): 359-88; Pamela Sugiman, "Passing Time, Moving Memories: Interpreting Wartime Narratives of Japanese Canadian Women," *Social History/Histoire sociale* 37, 73 (2004); Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence*. Also in this vein, but dealing with the collective memorialization of the uprooting, see Kirsten Emiko McAllister, *Terrain of Memory: A Japanese Canadian Memorial Project* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010). This scholarship builds upon, and yet is distinct in theoretical and methodological thrust from, an earlier scholarship that considered the implications of redress for race relations in Canada. See, for example, Roy Miki, *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2004); Audrey Kobayashi, "The Japanese Canadian Redress Settlement and Its Implications for 'Race Relations,'" *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 24, 1 (1992): 1-20.

△二三世にお願ひ

現代の標をプロテスト、デモ流行時代から見れば、よくも何十年と亘り、無為に、
 黙然的態度のみを過して来たものと嘲笑すべき人もあろうが、古くは選挙権獲得の
 訴訟事件があつたし、二世代表者の参政権に関する運動もあつた。漁業鑑札
 削減に對しては加拿大審院と英領枢密院で争ひ、双方共に日系人漁者は
 勝訴したもの、又ゾロ議会の於て漁業大臣と漁艦を給つ際隨意的差別
 可能権限を与へたため、涙との人だともあつた。近くは、日系人艦移動券に
 對するプロテストも、折角二世が行つてくれたが、これも残念な結果に終つた。
 時代、情勢が環境、立場等から後を思ひ、結果が生じてもあろうし、又思つた見解
 もあつたあろうが、決して一世が無識で、無為無策であつたこと、或は若人達に之を分
 理解して世をいたひ。

甚だくさいようではあるが、一世は日本の家業を扶助せねばならなかつたこと、俵倉
 此れを犠牲にして勉強しても就職の途はなかつたこと、参政権も獲得できず、
 英語は不応分であり、又排斥に依り職域が狭かつたこと、当時の家族の扶助にも
 當りぬけならなかつたこと、或も引續く悪くといふ排斥にも濃まらず、或程度の
 基礎を築いて来た点を思ひめぐらし、決して少力等を民族ではなさいことを理解
 して世をいたひ。ツマナナイ老婆安心と告げられたら結構だが、知らず知らずのうちに、
 民族的自己嫌惡の潜在意識を醸成しないうちに勤められたい。

Figure 2. On page 47 of his memoir, Kimura begins his "Prayer to the Nisei and Sansei," imploring younger generations of Japanese Canadians to consider historical context when assessing the actions of their elders. Photograph by author, used by permission of the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre.

question as both had family members interned in Canada. Their sensitive research illuminates the ethical complexity and methodological difficulties of work in this area as scholars enter into, and attempt to analyze, a trauma that “people have lived with [for decades]” and that they tell purposefully and commemorate selectively.¹⁸ This scholarship has also reinforced the importance of continued work on this topic.

¹⁸ Sugiman, “Life Is Sweet,” 210.

As Oikawa puts it, “racism is very present for racialized people in Canada”; for Japanese Canadians, and indeed for wider Canadian society, the events of the 1940s continue to shape experiences of race today.¹⁹

Whereas previous work examining the memory and communication of the internment emerges from ethnographic and oral historical research, this article is rooted in a traditional archival source. Nonetheless, like oral history testimony and public memorials, the memoir presents an opportunity to analyze the “process of conveying the history of the Internment,” even as it aids recovery of the events of the past.²⁰ Kimura’s children donated the memoir to the archives of the Nikkei National Museum, and in it Kimura often addresses himself directly to younger generations. Yet he wrote the memoir in a language, Japanese, that none of his children could read. His lengthy rumination on his own role in the 1940s, including its sometimes impassioned pleas for understanding on the part of younger Japanese Canadians, thus constitutes a complex artefact in the difficult process of telling the history of political violence in Canada.

Topically, Kimura’s memoir differs in focus from the existing scholarship. Whereas scholars have concentrated principally on the dislocation wrought by the uprooting, Kimura’s role during the war draws attention squarely to the process of property liquidation, which has always been a topic of concern but seldom the centre of analysis.²¹ Although scholars have sketched the liquidation in broad strokes, its origins, rationalization, unfolding, and impacts remain inadequately understood. The role of Kimura in the process has never been examined.

The liquidation deserves further analysis in its own right. Because of the decision to liquidate property, Japanese Canadians had no homes to which to return when restrictions were lifted in 1949. Because of the liquidation, there is no historic Japanese-Canadian neighbourhood in Vancouver, or, for that matter, in Canada. The liquidation transformed individual lives and the broader landscapes of Canadian ethnic and urban life. The area where Kimura and his family settled, as Audrey Kobayashi

¹⁹ Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence*, 301. See, in particular, Chapter 9 for the enduring importance of the internment for present-day experiences of Japanese Canadians. See also Sugiman, “Million Hearts from Here.”

²⁰ Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence*, 79.

²¹ The scholarship on these events has always recognized property liquidation as a key wartime policy and a key violation of the rights of Japanese Canadians. But it has not yet generated the level of sustained analysis that have other policy areas. For scholarship on this topic, see: Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence*, 106–11, 199, 213; Sugiman, “Life Is Sweet,” 200; Sugiman, “Million Hearts from Here,” 52, 56–57; Roy, *Triumph of Citizenship*, 240–47; Sunahara, *Politics of Racism*, chap. 5; Forrest Emmanuel La Violette, *The Canadian Japanese and World War II: A Sociological and Psychological Account* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948), chap. 9.

observes, still “bear[s] the tragedy” of the policy.²² The abrogation of a fundamental entitlement of a liberal society, the forced sale of Japanese-Canadian-owned property, is a history that we must continue to learn and to tell.

Perhaps most notably, Kimura’s position is distinctive because he was not only a victim of dispossession but also a participant in its administrative process. Examining Canada’s “exclusion era” (when Chinese immigration was taxed and then barred), Lisa Rose Mar finds a political history that was “far more integrated than scholars presume” as Chinese Canadians participated in the implementation of discriminatory law. According to Mar, ongoing collaboration between Chinese and Anglo actors was necessary, even when it came to the “most direct processes of exclusion.”²³ The history that Kimura tells in his memoir offers another instance of the complicated processes of racist policy.²⁴ As with Chinese exclusion, the liquidation of property owned by Japanese Canadians presented officials with significant practical problems, not least of which was a linguistic barrier.²⁵ As in the case of Chinese Canadians, a small number of Japanese Canadians stepped into this breach, facilitating the operation of power. But these figures have not yet received the sustained attention that Mar provides for Chinese Canadians and exclusion. Examination of the best-known “broker” of the wartime regulation of Japanese Canadians, Etsujii Morii, has been only glancing.²⁶ Other key figures, including Kimura and Yasutaro Yamaga (who served on the committee that liquidated rural properties), have been virtually left out

²² Audrey Lynn Kobayashi, *Memories of Our Past: A Brief History and Walking Tour of Powell Street* (Vancouver: NRC, 1992), 8.

²³ Lisa Rose Mar, *Brokering Belonging: Chinese in Canada’s Exclusion Era, 1885–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 131. In this way, as Mar suggests, the administration of policy was similar to the production of knowledge about “Orientals” in North America, which also required the participation of Japanese and Chinese Americans (and Canadians). See: Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Mar, *Brokering Belonging*, chap. 4. For additional discussion of the role of Chinese migrants as “managerial elites” in the processes of exclusion, see Kornel S. Chang, *Pacific Connections: The Making of the US-Canadian Borderlands*, American Crossroads (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

²⁴ There is little evidence that Kimura was a long-time broker between Japanese Canadians and the state. Although his business activities brought him into contact with Canadian officials before the war (including J.A. Motherwell, who, as chief supervisor of fisheries, would play a role in the seizure and liquidation of Japanese-Canadian-owned fishing vessels), there is no archival record to suggest that he played a role in pre-war policy.

²⁵ Among the many administrative challenges facing the Custodian of Enemy Property was the difficulty of finding “interpreters” to work in the Vancouver office. See Report to the Under Secretary of State Regarding the Japanese Evacuation Section of the Office of the Custodian at Vancouver, BC, 26 June 1942, LAC, RG117, vol. 2.

²⁶ See, for example, Sunahara, *Politics of Racism*, 16–17; Miki, *Redress*, 44–45.

of this history. Close examination of the brokers who were necessary to the operation of Canadian law reveals a history far more complex than stories of heroes and villains, oppressors, victims, and resisters.

Certainly Kimura viewed this history as complex. Telling the story of his participation in an “integrated” political history, Kimura positions himself as what we might now understand as an anti-racist. Kimura would likely have agreed, had he lived to read it, with Timothy Stanley’s recent argument that “just as there are *racisms*, so too are there *anti-racisms*.”²⁷ Within the circumstances that he and his generation confronted, Kimura argues, the most effective resistance was often cooperation. As we shall see, however, Kimura struggled to convey this reading of his experience to younger Japanese Canadians. The message that anti-racism has, in Stanley’s words, “no essential form,” strained to cross generational and historical divides.²⁸

Like the thousands of other Japanese Canadians who communicated their experiences of the 1940s to their children and grandchildren, and the hundreds who have given formal interviews on this topic, Kimura was a historian of the internment. Among the many teachers of this subject, however, Kimura had unique access to the documentary record. In addition to his memory of events, Kimura had in his possession the official records of the liquidation, copies of which he preserved among his personal papers. Before any scholar gained access to the government record of these events, Kimura penned an account of dispossession that was grounded in the archives as well as in his recollections.

In the immediate postwar era Japanese Canadians made important efforts to document the economic impacts of uprooting and dispos-

²⁷ Timothy John Stanley, *Contesting White Supremacy: School Segregation, Anti-Racism, and the Making of Chinese Canadians* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 31, 30 (emphasis in original).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 208. If Kimura is distinctive among the survivors of the uprooting, I, too, am distinctive among the authors presently writing on this topic. The scholarship to which this article is most closely linked was written by people for whom the history of internment carried intimate personal, familial, and communal significance. Some emphasize such connections as essential to responsible scholarship on these topics. Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence*, argues that, because of her background, she is bound to “live with the consequences” of her work within the community in ways that a non-Japanese Canadian might not. She asks non-Japanese-Canadian scholars to consider: “Why are you writing about Japanese Canadians? Do you consider the effects of your representation on Japanese Canadians?” (250). It is difficult to accept the premises underlying this line of questioning. (As a Jew, do I “live with” the consequences of my work within the “Jewish community”? Are non-Jews free from consequence when they write Jewish history? I’m not so sure.) Nonetheless, even without this focus on the identity of authors, questions about consequences of scholarship seem both fair and suitable for a historian of any background working on a topic that retains political relevance today. By sharing my writing with Japanese Canadians (including Kimura’s own children) and seeking collaborative relations with scholars and community organizations, I perhaps open myself to “living with” the consequences of my scholarship.

session, in part as they prepared presentations for the Royal Commission that investigated but only partially addressed these harms.²⁹ Nonetheless, when Kimura wrote, the only published scholarly treatment of property liquidation was a chapter in Forrest La Violette's 1948 book on the treatment of Japanese Canadians during the 1940s.³⁰ La Violette, then in the sociology department at McGill University, emphasized the importance of the property liquidations. "The chief cause," La Violette concludes, of a "loss of faith in the Canadian government on the part of the evacuees ... was the decision to enforce liquidation of property," a decision that La Violette characterizes as "entirely racial and without concern for Canadian citizenship."³¹ But before Kimura, no one writing on the liquidation policy had access to the documentary records internal to the process, much less to the unrecorded conversations and activities of the committees that oversaw dispossession. A thirty-year restriction on access to government documents prevented scholars from reading the internal records of the liquidation process.³² Even Ken Adachi, whose seminal work, *The Enemy That Never Was*, appeared in the year of Kimura's death, wrote without the benefit of the most pertinent records.³³

Kimura had documents. He had preserved copies of the official records of the committees of which he was a part and his day-journal from the wartime years chronicled his activities, including private conferences

²⁹ Kimiaki Nakashima, "Economic Aspects of Japanese Evacuation from the Canadian Pacific Coast: A Contribution to the Study of the Economic Consequences of the Relocation of Social Groups and Displaced Persons" (MA thesis, McGill University, 1946); Sunahara, *Politics of Racism*, chap. 8.; Henry Irvine Bird and Canada, Royal Commission to Investigate Property Claims of Japanese Canadians Evacuated from Coast Areas of British Columbia in 1942, *Report upon the Investigation into Claims of Persons of the Japanese Race Made ... Pursuant to the Terms of Order-in-Council P.C. 1870 of July 18th, 1947, as Subsequently Amended* (Ottawa: The Commissioner, 1950).

³⁰ La Violette, *Canadian Japanese and World War II*. La Violette's examination of this topic, though frequently cited, has sometimes been mischaracterized by subsequent scholars. Ann Gomer Sunahara, for example, charges La Violette with uncritically accepting the government's justification of its policies and ignoring Japanese-Canadian dissent, and Oikawa characterizes the book in a similar fashion. See Sunahara, *Politics of Racism*, 1-2; Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence*, 26-28, 43, 50-51. These charges are unfair when directed at a book that situates the policies within a history of long-standing racism, suggests alternatives to the liquidation, and documents Japanese-Canadian opinions, organizations, and legal challenges to the government policy. Nonetheless, *Canadian Japanese and World War II* has important shortcomings and reflects La Violette's uncritical attitude towards the internment itself. For a more balanced treatment of La Violette, see Greg Robinson, *After Camp: Portraits in Midcentury Japanese American Life and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), chap. 2.

³¹ La Violette, *Canadian Japanese*, 203, 214.

³² M. Ann Sunahara and Wright Glenn, "The Japanese Canadian Experience in World War II: An Essay on Archival Resources," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 11, 2 (1979): 78-88.

³³ Adachi, *Enemy That Never Was*. According to Sunahara, most of Adachi's research was conducted in the 1950s. See Sunahara, *Politics of Racism*, 1.

and meetings.³⁴ Building upon these records and his memory, the memoir recounts the liquidation processes in precise detail, day by day, and sometimes even by the hour. He describes the formation of the two committees on which he served, the contours of their responsibilities, the topics and contents of their meetings, and, to a limited extent, the consequences of their decisions.

The memoir begins with a phone call a month after the outbreak of war. "On January 8th ... there was a phone call from the chief supervisor of Fisheries," who wanted, "to consult in secret." From there, further calls and meetings: "[on the] 12th, early in the morning, there was a phone call ... on the 15th, [I] visited Justice Smith's private room ... to have a private talk."³⁵ Kimura's telling of these details echoes the "vulnerability" that Sugiman identifies as a theme in oral histories of internment. Kimura communicates the sudden intrusion of the liquidation process into his personal life: phone calls out of the blue and early in the morning, unexpected requests that he join clandestine meetings. Although Kimura participated in executing the liquidation, this participation was part of the sudden state intervention into the lives of Japanese Canadians.³⁶

Kimura's vantage point from within these conversations allows him to describe "matters that," in his view, "were impossible to be published at the time"; even now, with the official documents available for public viewing, the memoir conveys important material that may change historical accounts of the larger policy.³⁷ Whereas accounts of property liquidation have tended to privilege the federal cabinet and the Orders-in-Council that empowered officials to forcibly sell the property of Canadian citizens, the records of the advisory committees, including the memoir, suggest that significant discretion devolved to the committees entrusted to implement federal policy. In each case, the committees discussed the advisability of liquidation as against other possible approaches to Japanese-Canadian-owned property. Indeed, the committee that oversaw the liquidation of Japanese-Canadian-owned real estate and chattels in the Vancouver area was specifically charged, as its first order of business, with evaluating the "fundamental principle, whether or not the real estate owned by Nikkei could be sold."³⁸ Its second responsibility, "in the case that it is acceptable to sell," was to "suggest the sales method

³⁴ Kimura's personal papers constitute a collection at the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre in Burnaby, British Columbia.

³⁵ Kimura, *Memoir*, 1-2.

³⁶ Sugiman, "Life Is Sweet," 192-94.

³⁷ Kimura, *Memoir*, 1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 53. Here, and elsewhere, we translate Kimura's use of "Nikkei-jin" into English as "Nikkei." Nikkei-jin would translate more literally as "people of Japanese descent" or "lineage."

that is considered to be the most appropriate.”³⁹ Both matters granted significant discretion to the advisory committee. The committee could have advised against liquidation, especially given that the vast majority, an estimated 90 percent, of Vancouver area properties under Custodial supervision had already been rented to paying tenants.⁴⁰ The committee might also have advocated closer adherence to the processes of the earlier liquidation of the fishing vessels, wherein officials had initially sought at least the nominal approval of Japanese Canadians. Instead, the Vancouver property committee recommended liquidation, disregarding the approval of owners. The opportunity to press for a more humane, or indeed merely civil, approach was lost.

The memoir helps us understand such decisions. Kimura details the process by which narrow, technical discussions served as the ostensible basis for policies that disregarded citizenship and shattered individual lives. The Japanese Fishing Vessel Disposal Committee determined that Japanese-Canadian-owned boats should be sold, rather than leased for the duration of the war, as a conclusion of its discussion of the complications of “partial damage” insurance in the fishing industry. In contrast to industry standards for larger, more valuable ships, “the insurance companies [did] not condition [smaller] vessels with ... partial loss insurance,” requiring instead policies that covered the entire value of each vessel. This policy increased the cost of insurance for the large majority of the Japanese-Canadian-owned vessels and created uncertainty about liability for the repair of leased vessels that were partially damaged or had deteriorated.⁴¹ Sale, rather than lease, seemed to recommend itself. Thus, the committee’s dispossession of Japanese Canadians began in a discussion of the minutia of insurance policies in the fishing industry. Evil is indeed, at times, banal.

This lesson must be understood in context. The fishing vessels of Japanese Canadians were not liquidated merely because of technicalities of the insurance industry. More deeply, owners lost their vessels because they were caught in the web of a racist wartime policy and popular sentiment, which itself was part of a much longer history of racism

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 53. These instructions are also available in the official records of the committee. See, for example, Report of the Advisory Committee on Japanese Properties in Greater Vancouver, 30 June 1945, AM199, CVA, file 7, box 513-E-2.

⁴⁰ Letter from A.W. Hamilton, Secretary to Norman McLarty, to C. Norman Senior, Secretary to Ian Mackenzie, 7 January 1943, LAC, MG27-III B5, file “Vancouver Centre Japanese in BC, 1942-1944,” vol. 24; Memorandum, General Policies, 29 March 1943, AM199, CVA, file 6, box 513-E-2.

⁴¹ Kimura, *Memoir*, II. There is no evidence in the memoir that the committee sought to lease larger vessels for which partial loss insurance might have been obtained.

in British Columbia. But Kimura teaches us that the discussions that took place in the execution of the policy did not operate at such depths. The committee that made the final decision to sell the fishing vessels was not discussing loyalty and security, racial essences, or land and labour in British Columbia. Its conversations were about other things. This observation helps us to understand how a Japanese Canadian could serve on the committee. It also illuminates the operation of racist policy. In some policy settings, at least, the people formulating and executing federal policy found ways of discussing and justifying their actions that avoided deeper motivations and aims. This was not necessarily deliberate obfuscation. Officials could mean what they said, even as they failed to say what their actions meant. As Tina Loo suggests in a different, but related, policy context, taking such perspectives seriously enables us to understand the people involved as “more than abstractions.” Listening to what officials said as they enacted policy does not entail a refusal to hold them to account, nor does it absolve historians of the responsibility to uncover “masked” and “murkier” agendas. Nonetheless, as we listen to the viewpoints of Kimura and the officials with whom he worked, we can acknowledge “who they thought they were and what they thought they were doing.”⁴² Kimura’s memoir, perhaps better than any other existing source on property liquidation, allows historians to do this.

An important participant in the forced sale of Japanese-Canadian-owned property, Kimura defies reduction to an abstract agent of racism. His presence on the liquidation committees forces historians to delve more deeply into the motives of direct participants in the execution of policy. According to Kimura, his initial participation in the Fishing Vessel Disposal Committee reflected his concern about the anti-Japanese sentiment in the province in the first days of the war in the Pacific. Prior to accepting a position on the committee he consulted with “interested Nikkei in the city of Vancouver and neighbouring areas” who, in early January 1942 “gathered and kept discussing” the likelihood of “anti-Japanese riots.” In this context, Kimura (and, he suggests, many others) deemed it advisable that Japanese Canadians contribute to the smooth execution of federal policy so as to avoid stoking the flames of local “anxiety, fear, or hatred.” Kimura explains his participation in this light: his was an effort to prevent the eruption of violence on the home front in the early days of the war.⁴³ Once on the committee, Kimura

⁴² Tina Loo, “Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada,” *Acadiensis* 39, 2 (2010): 43.

⁴³ Kimura, *Memoir*, 1. This justification of the wartime policies (i.e., that they were put in place for the protection of Japanese Canadians) has more recently been a controversial dimension of

continued to see his role in this fashion, urging the committee to take a public position against media characterizations of all Japanese Canadians as “enemies” and the fishing vessels as “seized” or as “spoils of war.” Kimura pushed the committee to establish a public counter-narrative, within which it was clear that Canadian citizens of Japanese origins, including veterans of the First World War, had voluntarily entrusted their vessels to the government, in accordance with Canadian law.⁴⁴ Kimura, in this reading, was among the first to recognize the importance of the words with which this story would be told.⁴⁵

The memoir also explains the most controversial decision in which Kimura participated – the decision by the Vancouver advisory committee to approve the forced sale of Japanese-Canadian-owned property – by reference to rampant racism. Kimura’s role in this decision was important. In subsequent years, Canadian officials emphasized the presence of Japanese-Canadian “representatives” in the liquidation process. Indeed, the Custodian of Enemy Property repeatedly used Kimura’s role (as well as that of Yamaga on the committee that oversaw the liquidation of rural properties) to suggest that the liquidation process took into consideration Japanese-Canadian interests and views. A press release in the spring of 1943, as the liquidations commenced, underscored the inclusion of representatives of “Japanese evacuee interests” on the advisory committees.⁴⁶ A year later, with the process still unfolding, officials in the Vancouver office of the Custodian pushed the roles of Japanese Canadians to the forefront of their reports. Listing the members of each advisory committee for his supervisors in Ottawa, G.W. McPherson advised his readers to “Note,” in case they might otherwise have skipped over their names, that “Mr. Kimura is a person of the Japanese race” and that Yamaga “[is] the former manager of the Maple Ridge Co-Operative Produce Exchange, and a person of the Japanese race.” According to McPherson, “Mr. Kimura stated that in his opinion liquidation of the property was in the best interests of the evacuees ... [and] Mr. Yamaga

the scholarship on this era. Kimura, of course, was writing before that scholarship emerged.

⁴⁴ Kimura, *Memoir*, 3-4, see also 13-14.

⁴⁵ On the importance of terminology in the telling of this history, see: Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence*, chap. 1; Roger Daniels, “Words Do Matter: A Note on Inappropriate Terminology and the Incarceration of the Japanese Americans,” in *Nikkei in the Pacific Northwest: Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Gail M. Nomura and Louis Fiset, Emil and Kathleen Sick Lecture-book Series in Western History and Biography 11, 190-214 (Seattle: Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest in association with University of Washington Press, 2005); Miki, *Redress*, chap. 3.

⁴⁶ Press Release, Spring 1943, AM199, CVA, File 5, box 513-E-2.

... approved the policy of liquidation.⁴⁷ Similarly, in explaining the policy to Canadian diplomats, officials of the Custodian explained that the advisory committees had “unanimously endorsed, with the approval of the Japanese members, a policy of liquidation.”⁴⁸

In his memoir, Kimura stresses that this endorsement was reluctantly given and limited. In contrast to the matter of fishing vessels, Kimura felt he “had no knowledge about property” and so initially declined participation, recommending others, including Yamaga.⁴⁹ When officials in the Office of the Custodian rejected his candidates for the urban advisory committee and again urged Kimura to participate, he felt “isolated” and “depressed” and consulted with Yamaga, who suggested that the two could serve “as if it is going to be [a] funeral.”⁵⁰ Thus, in the spring of 1943, each advisory committee indeed had a Japanese-Canadian member. However, they quickly came under pressure from Japanese-Canadian property owners to resign. In April, letters from owners interned in Kaslo and the Slocan indicated that Kimura’s participation in the advisory committee ran against the “general opinion” of Japanese Canadians and advised him to “resign immediately.”⁵¹ In response, both Kimura and Yamaga cut ties with the Custodian in May and June, when the first properties were advertised for sale.⁵² In sum, their presence on the committees for several months was no ringing endorsement of the policy.

Nonetheless, the memoir does offer a rationalization of the liquidation. This hinges on white racism, the effects of which were already evident in the former neighbourhoods of Japanese Canadians when the committee made its recommendations. Early in their deliberations, the three members of the Vancouver advisory committee (Kimura, Alderman Charles Jones, and Justice Sidney Smith) toured the Powell Street area with a guide from the Office of the Custodian. This practice was, by the spring of 1943, commonplace for federal officials. Tours of the Powell Street area, which highlighted its most dilapidated properties, had been foundational to policy formation over the previous year; such tours encouraged the view, as Ian Mackenzie would put it, that Japanese-

⁴⁷ Dispatched from Ottawa, McPherson headed the Vancouver office until the liquidation began. See Memo to E.H. Coleman from G.W. McPherson, 19 July 1944, LAC, RG117, file 16, vol. 2.

⁴⁸ Memo to Miss Ireland from G.W. McPherson, 28 July 1944, LAC, RG117, file 16, vol. 2. See also, Letter from Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Under-Secretary of State E.H. Coleman, 14 April 1943, LAC, RG117, file 10, vol. 1.

⁴⁹ Kimura, *Memoir*, 50-51.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

⁵² Minutes of the Advisory Committee on Japanese Properties in Greater Vancouver, 7 July and 21 July 1943, AM199, CVA, file 3, box 513-E-2.

Canadian-owned properties were “very much in the nature of definite slums,” a perspective that, for the Custodian, recommended liquidation.⁵³ Kimura was unique among the participants of such tours in having lived in the Powell Street area. Like others, he noted rampant vandalism.⁵⁴ Indeed, to Kimura (as to federal officials) “it seemed hopeless to protect” Japanese-Canadian-owned property from ongoing raids. However, his explanation of this predicament differed notably from those circulating among policy-makers. Where they saw a district long compromised by the calibre (and racial origins) of its inhabitants, Kimura saw the effects of wartime antipathy towards Japanese Canadians. “Ordinary citizens” he observed, “would pretend not to see destruction of vacant houses due to the influence of the war.” As a result, vandals “were intoxicated by the illusion that everyone approved their act.” Given an atmosphere of widespread complicity and extremism, “it was easy to project that damages would multiply.”⁵⁵ Six days later, and on this basis, Kimura joined Smith and Jones in approving the “fundamental principle” of property liquidation.⁵⁶

The memoir further contextualizes wartime extremism and complicity within the larger history of the “anti-Japanese movement” in British Columbia. In a lengthy series of “recollections” Kimura reminds his readers that, from the time that the first “Japanese [migrants] left their footprints in BC,” they suffered persistent “exclusionary practices” and “discriminatory conditions.”⁵⁷ Long before the outbreak of war, racist “campaigns” had sought to restrict Japanese immigration (even encouraging deportation), to limit the economic activity of Japanese Canadians, and to prevent their ownership of land.⁵⁸ In the war, “Japanophobes” merely recognized an “excellent reason” to press their claims more forcefully, broadly, and effectively. The “destructive actions and robberies” of the wartime era, Kimura explains, could only be understood within this larger context.⁵⁹

⁵³ Letter to Norman McLarty from Ian Mackenzie, 23 December 1942, LAC, MG27-III B5, file 20-250: “Liquidating Lands in the Fraser Valley That Are Jap Owned,” vol. 25.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Letter from McPherson to Coleman, 9 December 1942, LAC, MG27-III B5, file 20-250: “Liquidating Lands in the Fraser Valley That Are Jap Owned,” vol. 25.

⁵⁵ Kimura, *Memoir*, 54. For an example of a view situating vandalism within a racialized explanation of the degeneration of the neighbourhood, see Memo to G.W. McPherson from K.W. Wright, 16 October 1942, LAC, MG27-III B5, file 67-25(4): “Vancouver Centre Japanese in BC, 1942-1944,” vol. 24.

⁵⁶ Kimura, *Memoir*, 56.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 65-75. Quotes on 65, 46.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 65-75.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

In sum, prevalent racism was an essential context for Kimura's retrospective explanation of his decisions in this era. The wider context of racism served as his justification for his participation in the Fishing Vessel Disposal Committee, provided him with a reason for the liquidation of Japanese-Canadian-owned real estate and chattels, and formed the crux of his message to younger Japanese Canadians. Kimura's memoir argues that actions such as his, which subsequent generations could take for compliance or even complicity, instead constituted a form of resistance. His generation, he argued, was "never ignorant, idle or resourceless." However, opportunities for resistance varied "according to the times, the situation, the environment, the position."⁶⁰ Resistance, on this view, is historical. It takes form in relation to structures of power.

And it is within this context that Kimura offers his "prayer" for the Nisei and Sansei; he hopes that their assessments of his actions, and those of his generation, will take into account this larger history.⁶¹ "From the perspective of an era when contemporary protests and demonstrations are common," he writes, "some people may mock [us] and say that [we] lived decades idly and in nothing but silent submission."⁶² Such condescension of posterity, he argues, underestimates the extent of direct resistance – prior to the war Japanese Canadians did press legal claims for the franchise and unrestricted access to fishing licences – and misreads the historical terrain. "I would like [you] to research, face up to, and consider the times," he writes. The first generation "were not inferior"; rather, they achieved remarkable success despite the difficulties of migration and the "vicious exclusion" that they encountered.⁶³

Given this historical setting, Kimura suggests that compliance served to undermine discriminatory norms. The civility of Japanese Canadians, "their diligence, good personality, the spirit to follow the law, and patience toward discriminatory treatments," eventually contributed to the undermining of racism.⁶⁴ Japanese Canadians "were rewarded for their struggle and finally reached the dawn after the war," when "ordinary" Canadians "realized that discrimination against [the] Nikkei was unjust ... they came to realize the real value of [the] Nikkei ... and the public opinion which had been distorted by anti-Japanese campaigns was corrected."⁶⁵ What a younger generation might mistake for mere docility,

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶¹ "Nisei" refers to second-generation Japanese Canadians; "Sansei" refers to third-generation Japanese Canadians.

⁶² Kimura, *Memoir*, 47.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 47 and 75.

he argues, instead laid the ground upon which subsequent and more forceful protest might be staged.

More recently, historians have arrived at similar readings of early civil rights struggles. In a provocative attempt to explain the subtle politics of resistance in the Jim Crow-era South, American historian Robin Kelley turns to Richard Wright, whose photographic essay, *Twelve Million Black Voices*, warns readers that African Americans “are not what we seem.” Kelley elaborates: “the appearance of silence and accommodation was not only deceiving but frequently intended to deceive.”⁶⁶ Closer to the history told here, Lisa Rose Mar finds that, in the 1920s, Chinese-Canadian leaders carefully guided social science researchers in British Columbia, suppressing the complexity and transnationalism of Chinese migrants’ lives and encouraging scholars to “discover” the potential of the Chinese in Canada to become an “educated, assimilated, deferential, and model minority”; this research finding, it was hoped, would help to “undercut the biological premises of more pessimistic ‘sciences’” and encourage a more progressive policy.⁶⁷ On this reading, the Chinese-Canadian “model minority” was a deliberate creation, a political claim.

Likewise, Kimura argues that the members of his generation were not what they seemed. Their civility also disguised deeper manoeuvring and subtle argumentation. Kimura counted this strategy a success. Coupled with careful strategic challenges to a racist legal and political order, accommodation begot revolution.

Kimura hoped to extend this logic to his own wartime actions. If civility and apparent compliance could disguise effective resistance, then perhaps his readers would understand that he could work within structures that were racist and with individuals who were prejudiced, all the while seeking to undermine them. In several pages devoted to the liquidation in Yasutaro Yamaga’s history of the Japanese-Canadian farmers’ association in Haney, which he wrote in Japanese in 1963, the author offers a somewhat similar explanation of his role on the advisory committee that oversaw the liquidation of Japanese-Canadian-owned farms. Acknowledging that he served despite the objections, and even threats, of other Japanese Canadians, Yamaga insists: “[I] felt it was a duty that was thrust onto me to witness the final liquidation of the

⁶⁶ Robin D.G. Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *Journal of American History* 80, 1 (1993): 76, doi:10.2307/2079698; Richard Wright, *Twelve Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States of America* (London: L. Drummond, 1947). On Wright, I am also indebted to Jeff Allred, *American Modernism and Depression Documentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), chap. 4.

⁶⁷ Mar, *Brokering Belonging*, 11, 108. See also, Yu, *Thinking Orientals*.

Nikkei farms ... and to act later as a living witness at some future court of justice.⁶⁸ Kimura was not alone in suggesting that resistance could take subtle and misleading forms.

Nonetheless, students of this era will likely be divided on the credibility of Kimura's characterization of his own actions. Some may argue that he was complicit in racist policy; others will accept the view that cooperation was a strategic response to conditions outside of his control. His participation in the committees surely aided the process of liquidation and bolstered misleading official claims that Japanese Canadians had consented to the sale of their property. However, a refusal to participate surely would not have changed the policy and perhaps some benefit could have been derived from the presence of Japanese Canadians in the process. From a theoretical perspective, such debates may encourage engagement with the very meaning of resistance. Stanley's exploration of racism and anti-racism in BC history urges a flexible understanding of both:

Even people actively promoting particular racisms can have their anti-racist moments, and anti-racists have their racist ones ... If racisms racialize, anti-racisms trouble racializations. If racisms organize racialized exclusions, anti-racisms promote deracialized inclusions. If racisms have negative consequences, anti-racisms try to mitigate these consequences.⁶⁹

Perhaps Kimura's actions fit this final description. His presence on the liquidation committee opened the possibility of mitigating harms, if only by witnessing and later explaining the policy.

Almost three-quarters of a century later, caution is required in any judgment of the character of individuals placed in difficult, and indeed often impossible, situations by the racist policies of mid-twentieth-century states. Recalling his role in the trials of accused Nazi collaborators in postwar Israel, Supreme Court Justice Haim Cohn comments: "I could not rid myself of the feeling that we are altogether unable to judge these people ... to put ourselves in their place at all ... as one must

⁶⁸ Yasutaro Yamaga, *History of Haney Nokai (Farmers' Association)* (North York, ON: 4 Print Division of Musson Copy Centres Inc., 2006), 67. In 1958, Yamaga also wrote a Japanese-language manuscript devoted to the "Forced Disposition of Japanese Property Due to Wartime Decree" (see Yasutaro Yamaga Fonds, UBC Special Collections). The translation of that manuscript is not within the scope of this article but will be part of the larger project of which this is a part. Yamaga, like Kimura, should be incorporated into a fuller history of this period and policy.

⁶⁹ Stanley, *Contesting White Supremacy*, 14.

in order to judge a person.”⁷⁰ Without suggesting equivalence between the liquidation of property in Canada and mass murder in Europe, I would nonetheless urge a similar perspective as we approach figures like Kimura who became entangled in Canada’s experiment with mass, race-based incarceration, deportation, and property liquidation. The historical challenge is to understand, as best we can, the wartime era, the enduring damages caused by racist policy, and the ways in which individuals have grappled with and communicated their own experiences of some of Canada’s most difficult history.

When Kimura sought to explain his role in the wartime era, his audience was a younger generation of Japanese Canadians, in whom he saw little understanding of his experience. Kimura had five children in the generation he was explicitly addressing, but the memoir was not intended exclusively for their eyes. It was written in a language that they could not read, and his diction suggests a less intimate audience. Important word choices – for example, in his description of his concern for younger generations (*rōbashi*, which evokes the advice of a more distant, and female, relation) and his final plea for careful consideration of his view (*itadakitai*, which translates to a humble request) – are not suggestive of fatherly authority.⁷¹ Still, upon his death, the memoir passed to his children, and today it has found its way back into their hands, in translated form. The memoir has thus become a vehicle for the communication of the internment within his family, even as it also aims to communicate on a larger scale. It is thus a complex and unusual instance in the larger effort of interned Japanese Canadians to explain this history to subsequent generations.

Although historians continue to debate the extent of change in the practice of racism in mid-century Canada, for Kimura the matter was clear: his effort to communicate across generations was also a communication across vastly different historical contexts. The younger generation, accustomed as it was to “protests and demonstrations,” could

⁷⁰ Avihu Ronen, Hadas Agmon, and Asaf Danziger, “Collaborator or Would-Be Rescuer? The Barenblat Trial and the Image of a Judenrat Member in 1960s Israel,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 39, 1 (2011): 147. Examining the “last great trial” of this kind, Ronen et al. herald the emergence of a historical perspective that “is neither accusatory nor apologetic and, instead, is mindful of the paradoxical complexity that envelopes these institutions and individuals” (“Collaborator,” 167.) See also Francis R. Nicosia, *Zionism and Anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For a related perspective that focuses on how Jews lived their everyday lives in the context of Nazi rule rather than on political collaboration, see Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, *Studies in Jewish History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁷¹ Kimura, *Memoir*, 47–48. My thanks to Daniel Lachapelle Lemire for this analysis of diction in the memoir, and to Midge Ayukawa for helping to refine my understanding of these terms.

scarcely understand submission to second-class citizenship, much less how an individual might find himself in a position of cooperating with authorities to “smooth” the administration of racist policy. Historical change, a transformation in Canadian race relations, opened a gulf within his family and community.

Japanese-Canadian men, whose roles in the telling of the internment have received relatively little attention, may have felt the difficulty of bridging this gulf with particular acuity. Oikawa has brought important scrutiny to the trope of the “silent survivor,” recognizing its racialized and gendered dimensions and its suppression of powerful women’s voices. Yet if the “silent survivor” is a misreading of women’s experiences, it nonetheless offers a culturally viable female posture. What of men? Oikawa notes that the “usages of silent women” in historical accounts of internment “variously affect the visibility of Japanese Canadian men.”⁷² Kimura’s memoir suggests that we might push such claims further. At least in some instances, the dominant motif of silent submission could impede male communication of the internment. In their efforts to convey their experiences to a generation accustomed to directly confronting inequality, men like Kimura, indeed especially Kimura, faced particular and gendered barriers. Kimura makes repeated mention of a younger generation that he imagines “laughing” at his silence and obedience.⁷³ The sense conveyed is one of humiliation, not in relation to the events of the 1940s but, rather, in relation to the mocking jeers of younger Japanese Canadians who fail to comprehend the racism of the pre-war and wartime eras.

Perhaps to push back against such views, the memoir positions Kimura as a protective patriarch within his own family. It was because of this role that Kimura could not accept the exemption of his family from the uprooting order. “I could not,” Kimura writes, “have my wife and especially little children reside in inconvenient Vancouver, where children could not even go to school.”⁷⁴ The wider reflections that follow establish that Kimura saw Vancouver – despite his own freedom of movement within it – as a deeply, indeed violently, racist environment. As a father and a husband, he shielded his family to the best of his ability.

Further, Kimura’s emphasis on historical context can be read as an effort to create space within which his actions can be understood as manly. Had he lived in a later generation, he, too, would have expressed himself

⁷² Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence*, 57.

⁷³ Kimura, *Memoir*, 47.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

with greater force; had his young readers lived through his times, they would have tempered their actions. Kimura provides an anecdote to reinforce this point. When Japanese-Canadian property owners organized a legal challenge to the liquidation, he purports to have suggested what he believed was a viable strategy for legal argumentation: namely, that property sales were made under duress.⁷⁵ This line of argumentation was not taken up by the legal team representing this case, but it demonstrates for his audience that Kimura was able to turn information that he gained, while occupying a position of privilege, against the authorities with whom he had worked. What strong men do, we learn, is navigate fields of opportunity and constraint to the benefit of their families and communities. When this requires the smooth operation of policy, a man steps into a difficult position; when it requires legal battle, he argues; when it demands protest, he takes to the street.

If this was Kimura's core message, it would seem that he harboured doubts about its resonance. The section that forcefully presents his claims about historical context also includes self-defeating gestures. To conclude a paragraph in which he emphasizes the challenges and accomplishments of his generation, Kimura laments: "I do not mind if I get laughed at for this excessive solicitude, but I hope that you will not develop a subconscious, racial self-loathing without ever realizing it."⁷⁶ In the end, despite whatever justice he saw in his own actions, Kimura continued to feel mocked and even, at least potentially, hated.

Somewhat surprisingly, given this tone, there is little evidence to suggest that Kimura suffered publicly as a result of his actions during the war. For a decade and a half after the war, Kimura and his family stayed in Christina Lake, where he worked as a bookkeeper for a mill. After his retirement, he returned to Vancouver to spend the final decade of his life within the larger Japanese-Canadian community there.⁷⁷ To my knowledge, the lone written comment on Kimura's postwar experience suggests that he remained well placed among Japanese Canadians. Community historian Katsuyoshi Morita, writing in 1988, reflects that it was "nice to see" the accomplishments of Kimura's five children as the two boys succeeded professionally and his "three daughters ... all married into prominent Nikkei families."⁷⁸ Thus, rather than documenting any difficulty that Kimura experienced in living among Japanese Canadians

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷⁷ Kishizo Kimura Fonds, NNMCC, http://nikkeimuseum.org/www/collections_detail.php?col_id=F46i.

⁷⁸ Katsuyoshi Morita, *Powell Street Monogatari* (Burnaby, BC: Live Canada Pub, 1990), 56.



Figure 3. This photograph [1950] shows Kimura (aged 51) outside his home at the south end of Christina Lake, where the Kimuras settled along with a small number of other Japanese-Canadian families after the war. Photograph used by permission of Edmund T. Kimura.

after the war, the ambivalence and defensiveness of the memoir seem to emerge specifically in relation to the telling of the past. Kimura struggled as he sought to have his story understood.

Kimura's memoir offers a unique glimpse into an important moment in the history of race in twentieth-century Canada. A memoir of a person in a key position within the liquidation process, it opens a rare window onto the operation of Canadian policy. A document of the participation of a Japanese Canadian in the liquidation process, it illuminates the complex political history of racist law. An ambivalent and uneasy document, it illuminates the difficulty of communicating political violence, especially across historical change.

The liquidation of the property of Japanese Canadians has been told, by and large, in black and white. And rightly so. It is a story of profound harms, in which there are unmistakable perpetrators and definite victims. Kimura's memoir, far from absolving guilt, instead intersects with other sources in conveying the profound and enduring human impacts of such historical eras. The internment forced itself on Kimura, as it did upon other Japanese Canadians. But when his life was interrupted by Canadian officials, they made a troubling proposition. Kimura accepted. His memoir challenges historians to understand such choices, to grapple with their implications, and to join in their difficult telling.