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Laura L. Beadling

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**Imaging Internment: Teaching Miné Okubo's *Citizen 13660*
as a Work of Comics in the Contact Zone**

by Laura L. Beadling

Introduction

Although Miné Okubo is an American citizen and the events she records in *Citizen 13660* took place on American soil, this essay will argue that her work is nevertheless a work of the contact zone. Furthermore, Okubo's record of the internment of 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II can be usefully read and taught as an autoethnography that constructs a counterhistory of World War II. The juxtaposition of Okubo's autobiographical record of her internment experience with a variety of "official" images can help students learn about the construction of knowledge. Such classroom work can help students "decolonize knowledge," to borrow a phrase from Mary Louise Pratt, by demonstrating how knowledge is not neutral but is instead constructed by constituencies with a vested interest in how events are depicted. Due to the power differential inherent in the contact zone, these constituencies typically also have differential access to publishing houses, newspapers, and other venues for cultural meaning-making, which affects which accounts enter "official" history and, subsequently, high school and college classrooms (2002, p.2).

While most camp memoirs were written decades after the fact, Okubo created hers during the experience itself and, because of this, she operated under explicit and implicit restrictions of what she could depict and how she could present her story. Furthermore, her work appeared at a

time when many groups—including artists, internees, government officials, political cartoonists, etc.—were creating images of Japanese and Japanese Americans. For students to become proficient readers of Okubo’s images and text, they must both negotiate her revisions of the autobiographical form and understand the cultural context in which her “unsolicited oppositional discourse” appeared (Pratt 2002, p.5).

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans came under immediate and intense scrutiny. Exacerbated by decades of racial hostility on the West Coast, Pearl Harbor provided an excuse to remove them. In the early months of 1942, the U.S. Army began rounding up Japanese Americans at hastily-constructed “assembly centers” before shipping them to 10 permanent camps scattered throughout the continental interior. Some 120,000 Japanese Americans—over two thirds of them American citizens—were interned during the war. Okubo was first sent to Tanforan, a race track cum detention center, before being sent to Topaz, a camp in central Utah. Although photographic equipment was prohibited, she immediately began creating a visual record of Tanforan and Topaz in sketches, paintings, and other images. After the war, she used some 200 of her sketches in *Citizen 13660*, her autobiographical record of her internment, which was published in 1946.

Although the forced removal of Japanese Americans to internment camps during World War II is not usually thought of as a “contact zone” in Pratt’s sense of the term, I believe the term is apt nonetheless. Pratt notes that a contact zone is an ideological space in which cultures meet and clash over meaning under conditions of unequal power, which describes very well the struggles over image-making between Japanese Americans like Okubo and the dominant culture,

which created and disseminated prolific caricatures, propaganda images, and other representations of Japanese and Japanese Americans through newspapers, posters, government documents, and other powerful and popular venues.

Despite the prolific visual records, Okubo realized early the danger for the internment to be forgotten. She thus stressed the need for education in her statements before the Congressional Reparations Hearings during the 1980s and elsewhere. Okubo's sentiments proved to be prescient, as the majority of my students are entirely unaware of the internment. In informal polls taken before we study *Citizen 13660*, only approximately a quarter of my students knew that Japanese Americans had been interned during World War II and, of those, almost no one knew any specifics. Reading *Citizen 13660*, in which Okubo records her experiences from directly before the war, through her internment, until her final release in 1944 is a window into a history of which my students are largely unaware.

In addition to learning about the internment, it is important that students also learn about the contact zone that surrounded the camps and the Japanese Americans themselves. Pratt noted that contact zones are “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (4). Emphasizing the clash between internees and those who attempted to justify or minimize the camps, often by dehumanizing the Japanese Americans or minimizing or normalizing the camp experience, can help students see that knowledge and history aren't “neutral” or “objective,” as many of them think, but instead constructed by interested parties. Comparative analysis of *Citizen 13660* and other images—by Ansel Adams, various War Relocation Authority (WRA) photographers, propaganda images, and

even other images made by Okubo—can demonstrate how artists resistant to the official narrative bring forward certain elements of the camps (guards, guns, barbed wire, overcrowding, harsh conditions, lack of privacy, dehumanization and depression) while government photographers not only minimize or eliminate those elements but also bring forward other aspects (baseball games, Boy Scout events, nuclear families, well stocked commissaries, etc) that help normalize the camps.

In addition, Okubo's style serves as a counter to caricatures of Japanese and Japanese Americans that appeared in both propaganda and in mainstream publications like *LIFE* and *Time*. The contact zone that surrounded the camps was a site of complex and multifaceted struggles over representation and meaning; a close examination of *Citizen 13660* can help students learn about not only this particular contact zone but also help prepare them to see contact zones in our current moment, particularly those struggles surrounding immigration, a divisive subject in recent years.

Contact Zones in the Classroom

Pratt's description of the contact zone as a place of struggle can also be used to partially describe my pedagogy when teaching ethnic studies courses. I don't merely point out contact zones in the literature my students read or at past junctures of American history, but actively create contact zones in my classroom by challenging my students' views of history, democracy, and race; as John Gaughan asserts in *Teaching in the Contact Zone*, "opening minds to difference" and recognizing that often fear comes before empathy are pedagogies of the contact

zone (9). One of the courses I've recently been responsible for teaching is Minority Women Writers, a class offered by the University of Wisconsin Platteville to students who are 95% white and from the immediate area of rural southwestern Wisconsin. As a STEM-oriented school, UWP has an unusual gender mix: in a world where colleges and universities are typically enrolling more women than men, roughly 67% of UWP students are male. UWP requires all students to take a minimum of 3 credit hours in a course designated as meeting an ethnic studies requirement. What this means in practice is that I, a white woman, typically teach Minority Women Writers to a group of largely white and male students who are in the room because they need to fulfill a requirement.

Because of these dynamics, I find that my students tend to be interested in the past and open to learning about U.S. history and literature from the margins, while the more difficult discussions tend to be those situated in or near our present time. One of my goals, however, is to assist my students in connecting those past clashes to those happening around us now, in which we are always inextricably involved, at least indirectly. Typically, my students have been open to learning about issues that they feel are safely in the past and/or were not, in their view, relevant to Wisconsin. I've had very lively yet polite discussions, for instance, about slave narratives and the Cherokee Trail of Tears. When we move on to discussions of *In Whose Honor*, a documentary about using Native American mascots, or June Jordan's poem "Jim Crow: The Sequel," which discusses, among other things, Affirmative Action, the students are much more vocal and discussions tend to be divisive.

One goal I have as an instructor is helping students begin to see that education is partly the process of recognizing knowledge as dynamic and constructed rather than something that is passively passed from an instructor to a student. This view, which I share with my students, also foregrounds another contact zone that is often created by using Okubo's text in the classroom: the difference in values and beliefs about education, knowledge, and history between my students and I. Okubo's counterhistory is a critical intervention for most of my students who tend to be aware of WWII only or primarily as a "just war" in which America was a liberator; this "knowledge" largely comes from popular culture images, according to student response papers. This gap in knowledge that is filled in by popular culture representations like *Pearl Harbor* (2001), *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *Band of Brothers* (2001), and other shows and films, is part of the contact zone that still exists in terms of the internment.

The switch from more or less disconnected interest when the subject are issues safely in the past to passionate disagreements when we reach current events is a productive one that leads us to discuss why the more recent debates are so much more charged and divisive. In addition to recognizing contact zones in the past, such as that between the internees and the WRA, I want students to be able to recognize current conflicts as contact zones, in which there are differing viewpoints with differing stakes in the debates. By using contact zone theory, students are more able to see how current debates, like past debates, are often at least partially a matter of differing groups with unequal power and access to institutional authority struggling over how groups, conflicts, and issues will be framed, debated, and, ultimately, remembered in the national discourse. This is one way I attempt to achieve my goal of having students recognize the

constructedness of knowledge and the implications that has not only on considerations of the past but also on our contemporary world. I assign *Citizen 13660* relatively early in the semester because it gives me a chance to introduce contact zone theory, which will be one way that I ask students to approach more contemporary, and more volatile, subjects later in the semester.

***CITIZEN 13660* as Autobiographical Comics**

Citizen 13660 is most often categorized as an autobiography, which is typically thought of not only as a “highly western form,” as Jennifer Browdy de Hernandez puts it, but as alien to Japanese or Japanese American writers in particular (1996, p.41). Sidonie Smith takes a more nuanced view and notes that, while she recognizes that there are “histories of personal referentiality elsewhere than in the West,” including women’s life writing in Heian Japan, the autobiography “is certainly a much deployed genre” in the West (2000, p.4). Despite these difficulties, Okubo nevertheless chose the autobiography as one of her methods of representing the camps. As Ann Rayson points out in her work on Japanese and Japanese American women’s autobiographies, such a writer must express “an independent voice through a genre incompatible with Japanese behavioral codes and traditions” (1987, p.44).

By engaging with and simultaneously revising the autobiographical genre, Okubo is not only creating an autobiography but also creating an autoethnography. Autoethnographies, according to Pratt, are “instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s own terms” in order to represent themselves to the dominant culture (2001, p.7). In *Citizen 13660*, Okubo appropriates narrative forms and

strategies of the dominant culture—namely, the autobiographical form—in an attempt to render the internees visible to the dominant culture. At the same time, Okubo revises the genre in order to make her critique of the camps. As the first Japanese American writer of an inside-the-camp autobiography, Okubo both engages with the dominant culture’s own terms for this genre by focusing on herself yet also revises the autobiography through her neutral tone, avoidance of emotion in favor of communal and documentary impulses, and her use of image and text.

My students are often put off by Okubo’s reconfigurations of the autobiography, especially her emotional reticence, which goes against what they expect from autobiographies. This is a common thread among Japanese American women writers of autobiography; Nisei, or second generation, women autobiography writers tend to downplay emotion generally. Traise Yamamoto observes that “Nisei women’s autobiographies are frustratingly *unautobiographical*, not given to personal disclosure or passages of intimate self-reflection” (1999, p.103; emphasis in original). Vivian Fumiko Chin agrees with this sentiment and notes that *Citizen 13660* “complies with this observation by maintaining an emotional distance from its subject. Okubo declines to state how she feels and upholds an even, unemotional tone in the writing throughout the book” (2008, p.69-70). Student response papers often reflect students’ frustration with this aspect of the work; most often, this is articulated as a difficulty of “connecting with” or “relating to” Okubo because of her overt stance of neutrality, at least in the text of the work. Many of my students express a desire for Okubo to speak explicitly about her feelings and her own day to day activities, as do other creators of autobiographical texts with whom they are more familiar (Frank McCourt, Maya Angelou, Anne Frank, and Frederick Douglass have all been mentioned by my

students as autobiographical writers with whom they are familiar; many of my students also cite vlogs, blogs, and the “video diary” segments featured on many reality television shows as autobiographical texts with which they are familiar).

One way to address these difficulties is to help students become more careful and adept readers of Okubo’s images because much of Okubo’s feelings towards and critique of the internment can be found in the space between the image and the text. Autoethnography aims to represent the other to the dominant culture in terms that are both familiar to the dominant culture but which also renders the viewpoint of the other legible. Okubo makes the fact that she is writing to a wide audience that includes both internees and non-internees clear when she notes in the preface to the 1983 edition that she made the drawings both to send to her non-interned friends to keep them updated on her situation and to be exhibited eventually. This larger audience can also be seen in how Okubo addresses her readers both in the text and in the prefatory materials she added later. This can be seen in the text, for instance, when she describes Japanese games such as Goh and shogi as “somewhat similar to our chess and checkers” (p.105) which again marks her attempts to connect with an audience that is not exclusively Japanese American. Furthermore, her use of the word *our* to describe chess and checkers is a clear if subtle insistence on her own inclusion in the larger community of America.

Although *Citizen 13660* is not typically thought of as a work of comics due mostly to its lack of a multi-panel page and the absence of balloons, I believe that comics can serve as a useful frame because it highlights Okubo’s reliance on the reader to participate in the making of meaning by interpreting this space between the image and text. Like comics, *Citizen 13660*

consists of images and words that interact in complex ways that the reader must interpret.

Okubo's technique aligns well with Scott McCloud's theory of 'the gutter' which notes that that the reader must participate in the making of meaning in the space between individual panels.

McCloud contends that the gutter, the empty space between the panels, is where the reader is drawn into the making of meaning. In his *Understanding Comics*, McCloud uses as an example of the gutter two hypothetical sequential panels: one of an axe-toting maniac chasing a fleeing victim and a second panel of a "scream" drawn over a cityscape. McCloud asserts "I may have drawn an axe being raised in this example, but I'm not the one who let it drop or decided how hard the blow, or who screamed, or why. That, dear reader, was your special crime, each of you committing it in your own style" (1994, p.68).

This is how the space between Okubo's images and text work; readers must collaborate with the artist to create meaning. For instance, when the packing is done and Okubo and her brother place the tags with the family number on their bags and themselves, the text simply reads "We tagged our baggage with the family number, 13660, and pinned the personal tags on ourselves; we were ready at last" (p.22). Although this moment, like most of the rest of the book, is told in a neutral tone, the reader must pay careful attention to *both* the image and the text in order to see what Kristine Kuramitsu terms Okubo's "deep sharp social commentary" (p.626). Unlike every other illustration in the book, this image has no setting, no background, nothing except the representation of her brother, herself, and their bags. There are only a few small lines meant to represent the ground beneath them. The profoundly alienating experience of being reduced to equivalency with your baggage, both marked by the same number, is rendered by this

image's unique lack of context and background; Okubo and her brother have been dislocated from inclusion in the human community and instead are seen by the government as baggage to be identified and stored. This dislocation is not clear from the text or the image alone; the reader must collaborate with Okubo by interpreting the space between the image and the text.

Another theorist of comics, Julia Round, asserts that, in the gutter, "the reader works alongside the creators as a kind of contributory author, both by interpreting the panel content, and by filling in the gaps" (1994, p.317). In *Citizen 13660*, the text does not merely explain what the image shows, nor does the image simply reinforce what the text describes. Instead, Okubo plays the image and text off each other in order to implicate the reader in interpreting her critique of the racially-motivated internment. As comic artist and theorist Megan Kelso notes, "[U]nlike straight illustrated text, Okubo creates complex relationships between word and image. By casting the text as the straight man and letting the drawings show emotions and contradictions hidden behind the dry facts, Okubo employs that strange magic of comics—the interaction between words and images that don't neatly fit. New meaning arises from the discord" (para. 3). Although Okubo's gutter isn't the typical gutter between the panels of comics, the purpose is the same: to draw the reader into the process of interpretation and meaning-making in order to implicate the reader in the story.

Although my students claim that Okubo's work lacks emotion or a sense of outrage with which they can connect, the text is filled with critique of the internment; it is in the gutter and, thus, a reader must look carefully at both the text and the images to understand Okubo's meaning. Chin notes that, in contrast to the neutrality of the text, "the illustrations show the

emotions the text elides” (2008, p.70). As an example, Chin discusses the moment early in the text when Okubo and her brother leave their home to report to the Tanforan Assembly Center; the text remains neutral, merely noting that they took a last look before leaving, but the accompanying illustration reveals several tears on Okubo’s cheek. This aspect of Okubo’s work—the need to read both image and text carefully in order to participate in meaning-making—seems to give students difficulty; I have noticed in discussing the work with students that they tend to skip over the interpretive act and only read the words and glance at the drawings.

Because of this difficulty, I have begun giving my students reading assignments to work on as they read the text, one of which is asking them to note at least three places where the image and text are not simple reflections of each other but instead comment upon one another or say something entirely different. By focusing on Okubo’s gutter—on the spaces between image and text—they learn to read Okubo’s work more carefully. As an example, I show my students the illustration Chin references as well as several examples noted by Brada-Williams in which Okubo’s expression in the images breaks with her ethos of neutrality in the text (such as on pages 38, 59, and 142), but then ask them to find other instances of this. This gap between text and image is one of Okubo’s most obvious revisions of the autobiography but it is also one that gives students the most trouble; by giving them specific instructions on what to look for, students become careful readers of both image and text.

One of the things my students notice when doing this reading assignment is the ironic use throughout the book of national symbols, including the flag; the prominent inclusion of these symbols is where Okubo embeds much of her critique of the internment. For instance, the

illustration on page 61 shows the camp's post office from the outside while long lines of people wait to get in the front door or wait to be served at one of the windows. Featured prominently in almost the very center of the frame is an American flag which, at the top of the flag pole, is the tallest object within the frame. The text accompanying this image indicates that the Tanforan post office was always quite busy, particularly since internees had to order all clothing and other goods by catalogue. The text ends by noting that the infrequent letters she received from her father were also postmarked from a different camp each time; Okubo's family was splintered during the internment and her father was sent first to Missoula, Montana and later to Louisiana while Okubo and her younger brother were sent to Tanforan and Topaz, her sister was sent to Heart Mountain, Wyoming and one of her brothers was drafted (Creff 2008, p. 7). Okubo notes that "our family was all split up by the Evacuation and it was a long time before we knew the whereabouts of the rest of the family" (Sun 1972, p. 19).

Finally, the text accompanying the drawing of the Post Office notes, without commentary, that "letters from my European friends told me how lucky I was to be free and safe at home" (Okubo 1983, p.61). Again, the irony here is made quite apparent in the juxtaposition of the visuals, especially the American flag, and the text, which notes without emotion the letters from her friends. Not only has Okubo herself been interned, but her family was broken up and interned separately; her home was destroyed in every sense, despite her status as an American citizen.

A few pages later, there is an illustration of Okubo in bed trying to get comfortable under a blanket clearly marked with "U.S." Again, the national symbol is framed almost in the center

of the image while the rest of the picture tells a different story: on the extreme left hand side of the frame Okubo, irritated, gazes on while, on the extreme right hand side of the frame, two mice look cheekily back at her from the bottom of her bed. The text briefly notes that the internees had to “make friends with the wild creatures in the camp, especially the spiders, mice, and rats, because we were outnumbered” (p.68). The image clearly depicts these facts of life by including, most obviously, the mice but also dirt, spiders, and cobwebs. Okubo, as usual, does not explicitly comment on the irony of a U.S. citizen having to share quarters with mice and spiders after being evicted by the same U.S. government from a law-abiding home for purely racial reasons.

Finally, towards the end of the book, Okubo includes an illustration of the first mass gathering in the Topaz camp, which was to honor a fallen Japanese American soldier. Okubo also notes that many religious faiths were represented at the memorial and that “former members of the American Legion also participated” (p.168). The illustration shows a large crowd of internees gathered around a small dais that holds several men in uniforms or suits. Off to the side, an American flag flies. Again, like the image of the post office, the flag is the tallest object within the frame and is quite prominent. As with the other examples, Okubo includes this national symbol to point out the irony of the situation without explicitly remarking on it. In this case, the internees have gathered to honor a Japanese American soldier who was killed in the line of duty defending his country which had interned him, his family, and his entire community. Once students have learned to read both image and text carefully, they can see that it isn’t that

Okubo doesn't have an opinion on the internment or was unemotional about it, but that she had to tread carefully and encode her critique.

In *Citizen 13660*, Okubo's less overtly expressive visual style matches the neutral-sounding text and observing these choices leads my students and I into a discussion of how Okubo's positionality affects the manner in which she represents the camps and the internees. As an artist, it not only makes sense for her to tell the story of internment at least partially through images, but it also can be seen as a response to the proliferating images of Japanese Americans in the dominant culture. As Jasmine Alinder asserts, "[I]mages were integral to the incarceration process from its beginning and shaped the historical events that they purported to disclose" (2009, p.16). Okubo had difficulty in finding a publisher for her book, which, regardless of how neutral it may seem to contemporary readers, reminded the American public at the time of events that many would rather not acknowledge. As Okubo noted, "It was still too early. Everything that was Japanese was still rat poison so the book became a souvenir for [former inmates]" (qtd. in Robinson 2008, p.171). In a conversation about teaching ethnic autobiography, Yamamoto notes that Asian American autobiographies typically include a "certain amount of coding" simply because "an Asian American could hardly expect his/her book to be published if it were an overt diatribe against white racism," which is certainly true of Okubo (p.15). This is another indication of the differential power dynamics in the contact zone that affect who gets to record their version of history; this point can often serve as a jumping off point for students to discuss their own educational histories and compare the books and perspectives that are included in high school classrooms.

Placing 13660 Within a Context of Images

In the contact zone between Japanese Americans, always a marginalized group, especially on the West Coast, and the dominant culture, *Citizen 13660* struggles over the representations of the internees and Japanese Americans that will become a part of the official discourse. Linda Gordon notes that “the construction of Japanese Americans as an internal enemy was itself partially a visual process. A demeaning caricature of the Japanese face was imprinted on the public through posters, graffiti, atrocity films, cartoons, and caricatures” (2008, p.37) and therefore, to understand the contact zone in which Okubo was working, her images must be positioned within this complicated matrix of competing images and narratives. Furthermore, in terms of pedagogy, as Noelle Brada-Williams suggests, “A classroom analysis of *Citizen 13660* will benefit greatly from bringing in additional visual images of internment” (2004, p.63). For an event so forgotten in the mainstream educational culture, the Japanese American internment was extensively recorded by a diverse collection of constituencies and in several media. By making students aware of the image matrix that provides the context for Okubo’s work, they can begin to see how her book was not produced in a vacuum but as a response and addition to the continuing struggle over who would represent the camps and how. Therefore, a comparative analysis of various images—propaganda posters, War Relocation Authority (WRA) photographs, and Ansel Adams’ photographs—reveals the complicated power struggles of the contact zone. Analyzing these struggles can help students begin to understand the constructedness of knowledge. Once the past is over, our only access to it is through documents which are inevitably created by people with stakes in how the past is represented.

Once students have learned to read the gutter, we then discuss the images in more detail because they also need help in interpreting the drawings.

Many of my students are unimpressed with Okubo as an artist and they often interpret the drawings as very simple and “unartistic.” Many express surprise when they learn that she was a professional artist well before internment. To counter this, I begin our discussion by showing some of her other artwork, including her charcoal images “Evacuee Woman” and “Neighbors” (Kuramitsu’s detailed reading of several of Okubo’s charcoal images can be of use here), the pastel work “Moving In,” the gouache works “Dust Storm,” and her *Trek* covers (all of these images are in the book *Miné Okubo: An American Experience*) which helps highlight her artistic choices in *Citizen 13660* as both *an artist* and as a *commentator* because of the radically different styles and emotional valences in her other works. While the style and tone within *Citizen 13660* are consistent, her other works that I show demonstrate Okubo’s wide range of style and her comfort with emotionally vibrant images. The drawings in *Citizen 13660* are simple line drawings for a reason, not because that is the only style available to her. Furthermore, by showing these other works, all of which can be read in terms of emotion and tone, I can demonstrate to students that she is capable of creating emotionally powerful images. She chooses not to—or at least does so in a different way—in *Citizen 13660* for specific reasons which can be discussed.

Because autoethnographic texts are “those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations,” it is crucial for students to understand what Okubo was responding to with her images (Pratt 2001, p. 7). Such cultural context is vital to

understanding the clash of cultures in the contact zone as meaning is struggled for and actively created. Okubo's images create a counterhistory and counterknowledge of the internment, as Pratt notes that texts created in the contact zone often do. In order to help students understand not only content, but also context and constructedness, I stage a series of comparative analyses between the images of *Citizen 13660* and a variety of other images. Each set of comparisons is meant to highlight certain aspects of the struggle in the contact zone over meanings of the camps and the Japanese Americans.

Okubo and Propoganda Posters

After looking at Okubo's other images of the camps to better see *Citizen 13660* as part of her overall body of work, I bring in other images to compare with *Citizen 13660* in order to help students further understand the dynamic creation of knowledge through context, especially in the contact zone. A side-by-side viewing of an image from *Citizen 13660* and one or two propaganda images can help students appreciate how Okubo's art counters racist stereotypes present in American culture. In particular, I show several "This is the Enemy" images (several of which can be found by entering "this is the enemy" into google), which highlight the supposed danger to white American women posed by Japanese men. These images also utilize color and light/shadow to emphasize the alleged monstrosity of Japanese men; the Japanese figures are always distinctly "yellow" in contrast the white women they are menacing and, in addition, many of the images use shadows to foreground the purported menacing and sneaky nature of the Japanese. By combining the autobiographical form with what Zhou describes as "the precision

of Japanese line art,” (2007, p.55) Okubo can focus on recording individual variation, detailed faces and expressions, and various temperaments and personalities that contrast with the hysterical and monolithic image presented through the various kinds of propaganda images. I have often found that students don't recognize Okubo's commitment to showing the diversity of the internees until they compare her drawings to more stereotypical images.

In this vein, another useful comparison can also be made between Okubo and Theodor Geisel, more commonly known as Dr. Seuss, who drew political cartoons as well as his more famous children's tales. Although Geisel was critical of anti-Semitism and racism in America, he was a proponent of the internment of Japanese Americans. Typically, I show the image “Waiting for the Signal from Home” and “Wipe that Sneer off his Face” (both available in *Dr. Seuss Goes to War* and on line). Both of Geisel's images rely on stereotypical features to convey the idea of “Japaneseness”; in the crowd scene of “Waiting for,” all the people have basically the same features, expressions, posture, etc. while the close up in “Wipe that Sneer” simply renders these stereotypical features in more detail. By contrast, even in the crowd scene on page 38, Okubo takes pains to make each figure unique by including different heights and postures, different clothes and hairstyles, different expressions, and other details. Likewise, even on page 153, where Okubo is explicitly pointing out how similar the women look because of the reliance on catalogue shopping, she makes each figure distinct: although each of the three women are wearing an identical shirt, each has a unique face, expression, hairstyle, and set of features. As Creff puts it, Okubo's many close ups on faces “reflect the physical diversity of the Japanese American community. Her internees are never homogenized or reduced to recognizable

Orientalist stereotypes” (*Imaging* p. 83). Okubo’s drawings are of the contact zone as she, and other interned and non-interned artists, struggled against the representations made by the government and other mainstream entities that attempted to control the meanings of the Japanese Americans in the public mind.

Okubo and War Photographs

While the propaganda posters and Okubo’s works are drawn or painted, and thus imaginatively created images, I also compare Okubo’s work to the art of photography. Because there is a tendency to believe that photography is a relatively “objective” art form that simply records what is in front of the camera, this comparison requires some preparatory discussion with students. Comparative analysis of images that students are often tempted to read as “objective” help them see the constructedness of visual rhetoric by interested parties, which is an important skill for students to develop as visual rhetoric continues to proliferate. Dismantling a belief in the possibility for images to be “objective” is a necessary precursor to learning to interpret not only works like Okubo’s but a variety of images, including those created and disseminated by government agencies, news sources, and a wide variety of institutions and individuals.

Okubo’s text and pictures are a perfect vehicle for discussing these complicated issues with visual rhetoric. Once the task of the removal of the Japanese Americans was transferred from the Army to the WRA, a civilian agency, “the task of the camera,” according to Jasmine Alinder, “was to portray the incarceration process as efficient and humane, and ‘internees’ themselves as orderly” (2009, p. 25); *Citizen 13660* presents a counter-history that contests the

WRA's perspective as encoded in the extensive WRA photographic archive, which have recently been made available online (see, for instance, the War Relocation Authority Photographs of Japanese-American Evacuation and Resettlement, 1942-1945 collection in the Online Archive of California). Not only were Okubo's drawings struggling generally against the propaganda images ubiquitous during the war, but also against the sanitized images of the internment camps that appeared in newspapers and other public venues specifically. While the photographs of both Ansel Adams and Dorothea Lange were suppressed during and even after the war due to their critique of the internment, the WRA hired numerous photographers to take copious photographs. Many of these photographs show sanitized images of the camps: portraits of single subjects or nuclear families, often smiling, are shown in clean, spacious, well-stocked "relocation centers" that (the WRA took pains to note in their brochure "Relocation of Japanese-Americans") were "NOT and never were intended to be internment camps or places of confinement" (WRA para. 6).

Accordingly, the images of the camps made by WRA photographers overwhelmingly tend to avoid showing the guards, fences, watchtowers, or other penal aspects of the camps; indeed, there were official prohibitions against photographing such objects. For instance, the archive of photographs from Topaz, the camp where Okubo and her brother were interned, include photographs with captions like "This former California tournament runner-up keeps his golf form by first preparing a short course and then spending all his spare time with his irons and putting clubs," "A warm, sunny afternoon at the TRC [Topaz Relocation Center] finds footballs in the air everywhere as young Americans of Japanese ancestry practice their favorite outdoor

game,” and “Bennie Nobori, former animator at a Hollywood film studio, is now a cartoonist on the Topaz Times” (Online Archive of California). These photographs show smiling people engaging in normal activities; no guards or guns are visible. Not all the photographs are completely sanitized: there are images of the funeral service for James Wakasa, an elderly internee shot by guards, included in the archive. Nevertheless, the overwhelming tone of the WRA photographs is positive; as Alinder notes, “In the thousands of photographs made of the incarceration process by government photographers, independent documentarians, and prisoners themselves, it is much more difficult to find photographs that portray suffering than it is to find images of smiling faces” (p.12).

After showing several of these WRA images to my students, we discuss the differing stakes for Okubo and the WRA photographers of their photographs. Because the WRA was a civilian agency created to build the internment camps, move the internees from the hastily-constructed assembly centers into the new camps, and hold them there until the war was over, photographers were commissioned with creating a photographic record of the process in order to guard against accusations of brutality. As Alinder points out, “the WRA used photography primarily to publicize and record the work of the government agency and the conformity of those incarcerated to the government’s orders” (2009, p.25). As employees of the government, the WRA photographers would be endangering their jobs by creating images that were contrary to the government’s wishes or positions. Dorothea Lange, for instance, was hired by the WRA but her images were suppressed during the entirety of the war because they were deemed too damaging to the government and the narrative it was trying to construct.

While Okubo has different stakes in the depiction of the camps, they are not entirely dissimilar. Because Okubo was writing at a time when Japanese Americans were leaving the camps to resettle in the Midwestern and eastern parts of the country, she needed to present the internees as not only deserving of freedom and equality, but also as non-threatening and as good potential neighbors. As Greg Robinson points out in “Birth of a Citizen,” contemporary scholars tend to read *Citizen 13660* as work of resistance and don’t pay enough attention to the “specific political context of the wartime period,” especially during the time when Japanese Americans were beginning to leave the camps and settle elsewhere (2008, p.160). Robinson asserts that Okubo and various liberal allies outside the camps were particularly desirous that no images might damage the chances for successful resettlement and “thus it was of central importance to Okubo to humanize herself and other Nisei in order to underline their acceptability as new neighbors to a largely Caucasian audience” (p.168). These concerns, Robinson surmises, must have had an effect on Okubo’s work, even if it was not officially censored. Unlike the WRA photographers, however, Okubo was less concerned about portraying the government or the camps themselves in a positive light.

Okubo and Ansel Adams

In particular, photographs made by Ansel Adams, a Caucasian photographer invited to make a photographic record of the Manzanar War Relocation Center, make for interesting contrasts to Okubo’s illustrations. I ask my students to compare images like Adams’s “Mr. and Mrs. Dennis Shimizu” and “Mr. and Mrs. Henry J. Tsurutani and Baby Bruce” (all of Adams’s

images are available on line or in the book *Manzanar* by Peter Wright, John Armor, and Ansel Adams) with Okubo's illustrations of barracks life on pages 66, 67, and 68. While Adams creates images that emphasize the Spartan cleanliness of the rooms, in which the families appear to be happily pursuing their own interests in surroundings that enable private family life and structure, Okubo's images show the crowding, discomfort, and lack of privacy in the camp as well as the difficulties of maintaining family life in a camp environment. While Adams's pictures show a single unit, Okubo uses a split frame to show how the spaces actually aren't separate but bleed into each other; her images on pages 66 and 67 to show how noise leaks through the incomplete walls and knotholes and how shared, inadequate electrical wires affect the whole barracks. By comparing concrete images that differ in their approach and relationship to camp life, students are able to articulate how Okubo's record differs from Adams's and, thus, how her images counter the images and narrative of the camps that were offered to the public at the time.

Zhou accuses Adams of "aestheticizing" the camps and some photographs can indeed be read this way, although many of my students don't understand at first how this might be seen as problematic. In particular, I ask students to look at Okubo's depiction and description of the dust and dust storms in Topaz with Adam's photograph of one over Manzanar in "Southwest View: Dust Storm Over Manzanar." In Adams's photograph, the dust storm is part of a stunning landscape of the sort for which Adams became justifiably famous. The dust itself is a pale band situated between the flat land and the soaring mountains and cloudscape that dominate the frame. With the emphasis on the clouds and mountains, the photograph is extremely beautiful.

However, Adams does not include in the shot any hint of the camp itself or the people who are expected to live there in the dust; while the presence of the people can be inferred from the title, which does include the camp name, there are no people in the photograph itself. Adams included in his book of photographs on Manzanar a statement of his belief that “the arid splendor of the desert, ringed with towering mountains, has strengthened the spirit of the people of Manzanar” consciously or unconsciously, which can be read as minimizing the wrongs done to the Japanese Americans since, because of their internment, they were exposed to the beneficial landscape (qtd. in Armor and Wright xvii).

On the other hand, Okubo always makes sure that the dust is always shown in the context of the people it affects. The first glimpse the busload of internees get of Topaz is on page 122; the text notes “suddenly, the Central Utah Relocation Project was stretched out before us in a cloud of dust. It was a desolate scene.” The accompanying illustration prominently includes large piles of dirt (which no doubt contributed to the dust, as did the “rough, newly constructed dirt roads” Okubo also describes in the text for that page), two armed soldiers patrolling, and a graphic depiction of the wind and dust using curving lines that cut through the center of the illustration. These elements are not shown isolated from the people to be incarcerated there as the bottom left part of the frame is dominated by five internees gazing out of the bus at the camp.

Likewise, the dust is emphasized on the next page as well. The text notes that the people already interned at Topaz tried to make the newcomers feel welcome with a band and cheering, but it “was impossible to see anything through the dust” (123). The image shows both the already interned and the newly arrived alike hunched over, with hands or clothing attempting to

shield eyes and mouths. Like the previous drawing, Okubo depicts the dust and wind with curved lines that sweep through and around the people as a physical presence (p.123). A few pages later, on page 127, Okubo again returns to the assault of the dust on the people of Topaz. This image includes lines representing the physical force of the wind and the dust against which the five people picture hunch and cover their mouths and eyes; every figure is reacting to the dust as if in pain. The text merely says that “The wind was playing havoc with the fine dust particles,” but the expressions and physical postures of the people in the illustration give emotional resonance to the words and express the extremity of the constant wind and dust (p.127). While Adams’s photograph is a beautiful landscape shot from a distance, Okubo’s drawings and text insist on showing the effects of the wind and dust on the people interned in Topaz.

Conclusion

If one judges by the knowledge my students have of World War II, it is clear that the intervention by Okubo and her allies was insufficient. According to an informal survey I take every semester before teaching *Citizen 13660*, the majority of my students are entirely unaware of the internment of the Japanese Americans and, of those who are aware of it, almost none know any details. There is a new contact zone that arises each time I teach this book in that I must teach students about this part of our history that all too often goes entirely untaught. Students are sometimes reluctant to revise their reductive view of the U.S. as a “good guy,” as many phrase it, in the war, which often results in a new contact zone that must be addressed through education.

Furthermore, our extended discussion of Okubo, the internment, and the contact zone prepares my students to discuss more recent works and events, which often occasions even more pointed and engaged discussion. By explicitly using the frame of the contact zone, however, students are able to move beyond their already-entrenched views in order to see the competing groups and discourses more clearly. While discussion remains lively, I find that, by focusing on the contact zone, students are able to engage in productive discussion rather than simple recitation of pre-framed positions.

I have successfully used Okubo and our discussion of the contact zone as a bridge to a number of different texts and topics. For instance, I have assigned *Citizen 13660* immediately before viewing *My America . . . or Honk If You Love Buddha*, Renee Tajima-Peña's 1997 documentary in which she interviews a variety of Asian Americans, including a young Korean American political activist, a Cambodian telemarketer, a Laotian refugee, Chinese American debutantes, eight generation Filipino sisters, among others, in order to explore the breadth of Asian American experience. The contact zone can illuminate several episodes in the documentary, especially one in which long-time activist Yuri Kochiyama travels to the site of Jerome, the camp where she and her family were interned during World War II, only to find it gone. As Kochiyama and her husband stand gazing at the empty landscape, a white farmer, John Earnest Arlington, drives up in his truck and engages the couple in conversation. He reveals that he was in fact the one in charge of bulldozing the camp. While the three struggle to connect in front of Tajima-Peña's camera, the conversation ends positively as Arlington reveals the empathy he developed for the internees during and after the war. Rather than a picture of the

camp, Kochiyama takes a picture of the farmer who, despite his role in destroying the remains of the camp, “ironically signifies historical memory” (Creef, *Imaging*, 5). Viewing this scene through the lens of contact zone theory allows students to discuss the differing stakes Arlington and Kochiyama have in the memory of the camps and the possibilities for connection.

In another pedagogical experiment, I followed *Citizen 13660* with Hannah Weyer’s 2000 documentary *La Boda/The Wedding*. *La Boda* follows the Luises, a Mexican American family of migrant farm workers, through their preparations for their daughter’s wedding. During her wedding preparations, Elizabeth Luis and various relatives move back and forth across the U.S./Mexico border, meeting with family members on both sides, seeking bargains, and planning her reception. Our discussion of migration, both forced and voluntary, in Okubo’s work prepares us to examine Weyer’s film through contact zone theory and thus move beyond the already determined frames of the issue. We discuss the differences between Okubo, who records her own impressions and experiences, versus the Luises, whose story is told by a filmmaker who is not part of their community. Like our discussions of the matrix of images that Okubo’s work responds to, we bring in examples of contemporary media images of Mexican Americas in order to see what groups are struggling for control of the images and meaning of immigration and migrants, and we discuss how their discourses differ.

Finally, last spring, I used our discussions of Okubo and the contact zone to begin an unplanned discussion of the *New York Post* cartoons that made a connection between President Obama and the chimpanzee that mauled a woman in Hartford Connecticut. Again, rather than remaining within preset terms for debate (was the cartoon racist or were those who saw racism in

it “too sensitive,” for instance), our discussion of the World War II internment and the surrounding legacy of images prepared us to excavate a similar history of disturbing imagery linked with African Americans. Like the internment, my students were largely unaware of the longstanding racially-motivated convention in America that links African Americans with gorillas, chimpanzees, and other apes. I show several images from various points in American history that make this connection. I began the discussion with an illustration from *Types of Mankind* (1854) that contrasted the Greek statue of Apollo, a drawing of an African man, and a chimpanzee in order to “prove” the inferiority of Africans and then I bring the discussion up to the 2008 *Vogue* cover of LeBron James and Gisele Bündchen uncomfortably reminiscent of advertising images for the 1933 film *King Kong*. Again, this matrix of images can be viewed through the contact zone and I discuss with my students the clashes over representation and meaning that have surrounded African Americans in the U.S.

Okubo’s *Citizen 13660* offers plenty of material for close reading as well as a provocative introduction to contact zone theory, which gives students new lenses to view contemporary clashes over meaning. This new way of looking and thinking about contemporary issues can aid in “opening minds to difference,” which, as John Gaughan points out, should be a crucial component of contemporary pedagogy (2001, p.9).

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