Spring 2010

Perimeters of Democracy

Heather Fryer

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unpresssamples

Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons

http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unpresssamples/102

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Nebraska Press at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and Chapters by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.
PERIMETERS OF DEMOCRACY
## Contents

List of Illustrations    vii  
Acknowledgments        ix  
Introduction: Discovering the Inverse-Utopian West    1  

1. Beware of Crafty Bandits: Enmification in the Empire for Liberty    35  


3. Cultivating Dependency: Economics and Education in America’s Inverse Utopias    126  

4. Tragic Ironies: Everyday Life in an Inverse Utopia    171  

5. From Barbed Wire to Bootstraps: Freedom and Community in Cold War America    213  

6. Termination of the Klamath Reservation: From Inverse Utopia to Indian Dystopia    250  

7. No Camps for Commies: The Dual Legacies of Dissonance and Dissidents    276  

Notes    313  
Bibliography    351  
Index    373  

Buy the Book
Illustrations

Following p. 72
Klamath tribal police
Students, Klamath Agency School
Klamath residents
Topaz panorama view
Topaz Community Council
Vanport street scene
Vanport ration counter
Los Alamos aerial view
High security passage, Los Alamos

Following p. 212
Billboard, Klamath Reservation
Klamath Honor Roll
Boys playing football, Topaz
Barrack interior, Topaz
Flood waters, Vanport
African American Vanporters
Vanport flood victims
Efficiency apartment, Los Alamos
“E” Award ceremony, Los Alamos
Putting Los Alamos County on the map

MAP
Inverse Utopias in the
United States, 1943  30
Acknowledgments

This book got its start in a graduate seminar in urban history taught in 1997 by Marilynn Johnson, whose book *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay during World War II* lit up my historical imagination. War mobilization and the complicated social geography of the American West became instant fascinations. So too did the commonalities between Oakland and the lost city of Vanport, Oregon, which resided in a hazy place in the historical memories of Pacific Northwesterners.

This fascination quickly became a dissertation topic under Lynn’s direction. When she gently suggested a comparative study of Vanport and another community (probably meaning one), I proposed comparing five before narrowing it down to four. If my insistence on studying a bunch of places I knew next to nothing about made Lynn doubt my common sense, she never showed it. Always generous with her knowledge, wisdom, and time, she helped me build the foundation for *Perimeters of Democracy* and for my practice as a historian more generally. Cynthia Lynn Lyerly and Kevin Kenny, as members of my dissertation committee, pressed me to bring real precision to this comparative analysis. The History Department at Boston College also lent its support through a dissertation fellowship that funded the greater part of the research for *Perimeters of Democracy*, along with an Albert J. Beveridge Grant from the American Historical Association.

The Creighton University College of Arts and Sciences and my colleagues in the History Department provided everything from release time to reorganize the manuscript to the moral support necessary for seeing a long project through. Julie Fox saved the day before a deadline more than once, helping me get overwhelming piles of paper into the mail on time. I am tremendously grateful to the Reinert Alumni Library staff, which did a thousand favors and worked a few miracles to keep my research going.

Sustained research can be a rough road, so I was fortunate to find so many brilliant librarians and archivists across the country to help smooth
the way. The staff of the Los Alamos Historical Museum and Archives was helpful and hospitable, as were the professionals at the Bancroft Library who went out of their way to help me locate documents and illustrations. Todd Kepple and Lynn Jeche at the Klamath County Museum located Klamath Reservation photographs and made them available to me in Omaha, and the National Archives Pacific Coast branch in Seattle helped me navigate Record Group 75, even in the immediate aftermath of the 6.0 earthquake that brought my first research day to an unsettling halt. The Truman Presidential Library, and Dennis Bilger in particular, took extraordinary time and care in locating valuable material on all four communities. I also relied heavily on the resources of the Multnomah County Public Library in Portland, Oregon, especially the beautiful Sterling Room for Writers, where much of the first draft was written.

The Oregon Historical Society (OHS) deserves special mention, not only for giving me a start as a volunteer researcher from 1992–95 but also for allowing me to use their reading room as my home base for two years. Not only did they act as real partners in my research, bringing to light sources I would never know to look for, they were wonderful people to spend time with.

OHS is also where I met Sieglinde Smith, librarian and treasured friend to many historians, who gave me my first lessons in archival research. I am also indebted to Franklin Brummett and Barbara Alatorre, who after agreeing to sit for just a single interview with me became long-term consultants on Vanport and the Klamath Reservation, respectively. They offered valuable perspectives as independent historians and former residents of both communities.

My interviews with Regina Flowers, Jim and Fumi Onchi, Vern Marshall, Diane Norstrand, Ramona Rank, George Saslow, and June Schumann, while brief, helped me see the connections between the four inverse utopias. Where most people would ignore an inquiry about their lives from a stranger, they were tremendously generous in sharing their time and their recollections.

I am deeply grateful to my editor at the University of Nebraska Press, Heather Lundine, who has seen this project through its transformation from four discrete case studies to its current thematic form (which,
frankly, is so much better). She, Bridget Barry, and Joeth Zucco led the
ing process a truly rewarding experience. Christopher Steinke’s keen and
sightful copyediting brought great clarity to the final version of the text. I
also want to thank the anonymous readers whose comments and critiques
helped immensely in the conceptual and narrative development of the
manuscript. The final product is far richer for your generous input.

I could not have completed this project without the love and support
of my family and friends, who at times probably felt like this project had
taken over their lives as well as mine. Tracy Leavelle, my partner in all
things, was ever ready with an editor’s pencil, a cup of tea, or a minute
to talk through a fuzzy idea. Amy Bográn shared half of a studio apart-
ment when I had just a pocket full of fellowship money and two years
of research ahead of me. My father passed away in 2004, but his love of
history has made its mark on this volume. My mother, who probably
thought she would be done shuttling kids from place to place years ago,
was still dropping her thirty-something daughter off at the library during
my visits to her home in Oregon. Visits home never turned all work and
no play: my sisters, Holly and Stephanie, reminded me to take much-
needed down time, and my nephew and nieces—Patrick, Sophie, and
Olivia—were always right there with the comic relief, reminding their
occasionally frazzled auntie why searching the past to chart new pos-
sibilities for the future is well worth the labor.
PERIMETERS OF DEMOCRACY
INTRODUCTION

Discovering the Inverse-Utopian West

Hard as it is to believe, there is a ghost town in the center of the Portland International Raceway. The foundations are vaguely discernible at the center of the track, and the stories are etched into the collective memory of lifelong Portlanders. For most, the details are vague: Vanport City (later shortened to “Vanport”) was one of the many miracles of war production in 1942, built on 648 acres to house about 40,000 shipyard workers on a twenty-four-hour production schedule. It was rumored among Portlanders during the war that this motley crew of “Americans all” led a wild life in their out-of-the-way enclave on the floodplain: they drank, danced, plotted revolution, and even encouraged whites and blacks to mingle. But just as quickly as the “miracle city” rose to keep the rabble in the shipyards and away from Portland, it vanished under surging floodwaters in 1948. Now, the roar of engines and cheers of racing fans make it hard to envision rows of government-issue apartments clustered around government-run stores, theaters, day-care centers, schools, patrols, bus routes, and all the other small-town amenities. It is even harder to imagine that seven to fifteen people (some say more) drowned in this place while awaiting an evacuation order that never came. Perhaps the hardest thing of all to comprehend, however, is that the federal government could make the extraordinary effort to build such
an elaborate planned community in 1943, only to abandon it—and its thousands of residents—in 1948.

Until recently, Vanport lived on in the reminiscences of former residents and their Portland neighbors, who watched the government’s “miracle” from a safe distance. In addition to being Oregon’s second largest city in 1943, Vanport was also home to the state’s largest African American community, making this government outpost an enduring landmark in the local history of regional race relations. Depending on the critic, Vanport was a textbook example of the excesses of the New Deal welfare state, a miraculous technology for labor efficiency, or a measure of how thoroughly the government converted the home front for war. Still others saw the founding of Vanport as a protective measure to prevent Portland from being overrun by a wave of newcomers and “undesirables.” Vanporters kept to themselves until the flood washed them into Portland, expanding the black community several times over. No matter how one tells the story of Vanport, the government’s hand in shaping the social landscape by creating this tightly controlled space is always the driving theme.

In Japanese American communities in Portland, San Francisco, and elsewhere, people tell a different story about life inside remote, government-run wartime communities. In 1942–43, as Vanport materialized on the Columbia River flood plain, the War Relocation Authority (WRA) threw up ten “relocation centers”—or concentration camps—in desolate areas of the West.¹ They, like Vanport, would be fully self-sustaining enclaves whose populations would rival those of the region’s largest cities. Millard County, Utah, for instance, became the temporary home to the state’s fifth largest city, the Central Utah Relocation Center. The Center, better known as “Topaz,” was placed on 640 acres of scrub desert, where roughly 8,100 internees lived in neatly lined barracks poised lightly on the land. In addition to unit after unit of cramped housing, the government equipped Topaz with hospitals, schools, a newspaper office, and mess halls that served as churches, movie houses, and community meeting spaces. While they were built for very different purposes, Topaz and Vanport shared more than their size or amenities. Their built environments both displayed a government-issue uniformity that projected
regimentation rather than the mad chaos of building stemming from the easy money, unfettered optimism, and fervent individualism that generated the great western boomtowns.

The carefully arranged, demountable units at both Vanport and Topaz appeared ever ready to be whisked away upon orders from Washington, along with the people the government brought to live there. The barbed wire and armed guards encircling the all-Japanese desert city signaled that security, surveillance, and social control were the raisons d’être for this self-sustaining town. At first glance, the barbed wire, “yellow-peril” rhetoric, and desolation of the internment camps make any similarity to Vanport seem unlikely. But the government’s decision to solve its wartime problems by building “cities” instead of urban housing projects and prisons was an intriguing common thread. Placing Vanport into this broad but vaguely defined context raised the possibility that, despite its five-year history, the city was part of a larger historical picture that included open spaces, national security, the welfare state, demographic management, and the construction of “American communities” — both concretely and in the abstract. Thin as this thread might appear to be, it is clearly woven into a larger history of people, place, the federal presence, and the widely divergent experiences of being “American” in the wartime West.

Setting the two communities within a collective biography failed to reveal the full range of connections between them. A rigid comparative analysis missed some of the particularities of both places and did not help explain how their idiosyncrasies fit into larger narratives — and counternarratives — of “the American experience.” As strikingly similar as Vanport and Topaz were, there were also significant differences between them. It serves no purpose to warp the historical record by suggesting that the residents’ experiences were fundamentally the same, just as it is not useful to make totalizing statements about “the” social history of the West or advance conspiratorial notions that the federal government hatched a hundred-year plot to suppress minorities on the far side of the Rockies.

Writing two separate histories of Vanport and Topaz is certainly not necessary, as scholars from a range of disciplines have developed a rich
body of literature on the particular communities, ethnic groups affected by them, and local conflicts and their manifestations as individual grievances with Washington. Instead of flattening these political, economic, and social histories to fit a rigid analytical construct, they are set within a single constellation that captures the broad context of this collective history, offers a fuller assessment of the significance of security towns to the West as a whole, and accounts for the uniqueness of each separate place while articulating the commonalities between them. The constellatory scheme, which is gaining renewed currency within the field of cultural studies, has its origins in Theodor Adorno’s assertion that placing objects categorized separately into a single frame “illuminates the specific side of the object, the side which to a classifying procedure is either a matter of indifference or a burden.” Far from presenting an incoherent mash-up of people, plywood, and government agencies, this constellatory comparative approach highlights “the historical dynamic hidden within objects” whose various properties “[exceed] the classifications imposed upon them.” In other words, the constellation lends complexity, not simplicity, to the individual and collective histories of federally run wartime communities.²

Vanport and Topaz were obvious selections for such a constellation with their noted similarities and because of what they might reveal about race, class, geography, and the differential restrictions on civil liberties during World War II. But race was only part of the story. The secret laboratories of the Manhattan Project required fully developed townsites for reasons of both efficiency and security. Its processing plants at Hanford, Washington, and Oak Ridge, Tennessee, resembled Vanport’s labor-efficiency system. Its third facility, hidden in the desert at Los Alamos, was a high-security installation where several hundred world-class scientists disappeared in the race against Germany to develop the world’s first atomic bomb. The government put most residents in housing units that were dead ringers for Vanport apartments. Los Alamos also included a post exchange (px), a community center, a hospital, and space for a school that the scientists’ wives had to run themselves. These amenities were the only ones available because residents were not allowed to enter and leave the community freely. The top-secret town sat upon fifty-four
thousand acres of land as desolate as the alkali desert at Topaz and bound just as tightly by armed guards and barbed wire.

In addition to widening the geographic sweep of federal community building, Los Alamos was one of the few civilian enclaves populated with white elites (though many were émigrés from Axis nations and Jewish Americans). Although the reasons for the secrecy and security surrounding the bomb project were abundantly clear, it is curious that a group of renowned scientists and their families lived within the same stark surroundings as the war workers and internees. Topaz provided evidence enough that racial anxiety was central to federal demographic management—the process by which federal agencies gathered data on individuals, aggregated them into groups, marked them as potentially dangerous, and situated them physically in carefully demarcated spaces in calculated proximity to the general population. The purpose behind such careful management had less to do with known security concerns (individuals who engaged in criminal acts that compromised national security were, like most criminals, identified, arrested, charged, tried, and sentenced) than with creating the illusion that the government had internal dangers under control. It also was part of the larger, more practical picture of demographic management, which sought to move available workers to areas with clear, concrete labor shortages. Reservations, internment camps, and public housing were always near and porous enough that resident labor could be deployed at the pleasure of the supervising government agency.

In most cases, “race” was the marker for “danger,” but the presence of Los Alamos suggested that less obvious concerns, such as the tendency toward eccentricity, pacifism, and radical politics on university campuses, might also be at play. Franklin D. Roosevelt’s expansion of the welfare state as well as his appointment of Jews to numerous prominent federal offices led Americans to rank Jews as the third greatest menace to the nation in February 1942; they were “less menacing” than the Japanese (ranked highest) and Germans, but considerably “more menacing” than blacks. When the townsite was under construction, in 1942, most Americans saw the Jewish population as eternally foreign, with 15 percent favoring their expulsion as a means of curbing their “excessive power”
in the United States.\textsuperscript{3} In the unknown city of Los Alamos, public opinion had little bearing on the surveillance and security structures. Still, Commanding General Leslie Groves and FBI Commissioner J. Edgar Hoover maintained longstanding suspicions of “reds” and “godless longhairs” that made intrusive surveillance structures as natural a part of project planning as laboratory equipment and housing provisions. The degree to which restrictions on personal liberties stemmed from concrete security concerns or reflected other anxieties about the national, ethnic, and political profiles of the most powerful Los Alamosans is not immediately apparent. In light of the histories of the other three communities, however, this question clearly demands answers. This demand gained urgency with the espionage charges against Los Alamos scientist Wen Ho Lee in 1999, which revealed the intersections between racial anxiety, national security, and civil liberties. Although there was some indication that Lee, a naturalized Taiwanese American, mishandled some computer tapes, the evidence of espionage was slim, and the rush to place him in pretrial solitary confinement was tragically swift. Ultimately, the judge in the Lee case apologized for the botched legal proceedings, but the remedy came too late, as it did at Topaz, Vanport, and dozens of communities like them. Yellow-peril rhetoric swirled through the press, along with revelations that the Lee case accelerated the departure of talented scientists of color already angered by the persistence of institutional racism at the Los Alamos National Laboratory. Despite the apology, Lee sustained irreparable damage: he could not regain the lost time with his family and at his job, his reputation, or his full capacity to live and work as he had before his arrest. The continued tension between security, profiling, and fidelity to the principles of American freedom from the mid-twentieth century into the twenty-first makes the history of Los Alamos a critical component of this larger constellation of federally managed wartime communities.\textsuperscript{4}

The Klamath Indian Reservation in southern Oregon extends this history in the other direction by drawing the chronology to the nineteenth-century origins of federal community building in the West. Tempting as it was to limit this study to World War II, it was impossible to ignore century-old federal settlements from the “Indian wars” that sit alongside

6 | Introduction

Buy the Book
their twentieth-century counterparts. (Los Alamos and some of the WRA relocation centers bordered or were built within the boundaries of Indian reservations.) Until Pearl Harbor, the “Indian wars” had been the last time Americans feared a military invasion of “their” West. Clashes between settlers pursuing America’s “manifest destiny” and southern Oregon tribes defending their homelands from white invaders brought escalating bloodshed in the 1840s and 1850s. While it was well understood in Washington that American settlers provoked most of these incidents, federal officials received compelling pleas from U.S. citizens for protection. A settler named “Rogue River Citizen” complained in 1855 that “we must tamely endure the presence and almost daily visits of the most cold-blooded murderers and midnight assassins that our country has ever been cursed with,” and that the government appeared to be more interested in protecting the Indians than fulfilling its constitutional obligation to provide for the common defense of its own citizens.⁵

Like many Oregon settlers, Rogue River Citizen called for the government to use the newly established reservations to incarcerate the Native populations and worry less about their protection than their neutralization. Laying down the gauntlet, Rogue River concluded cynically, “Perhaps it is wrong to expect Uncle Sam’s men to fight, for it would be a loss to government should they get killed.”⁶ In less than a decade, nearly all the southern Oregon tribes were confined to reservations where, as an alternative to extinction, they would be trained to live as American citizens. If all went according to plan, the U.S. government would transform Indian “hostiles” into docile, loyal Americans.⁷

Despite its common origin in the wartime West, it is important to note that the Klamath Indian Reservation has a remarkably different history than Topaz, Vanport, and Los Alamos. First and foremost, the Office of Indian Affairs (known colloquially as the Indian Bureau) established the reservation as a permanent homeland for the Klamaths, Modocs, and Yahooskin Snake Paiutes in a treaty ratified by Congress in 1866. In exchange for ceding approximately twenty million acres of their ancestral lands and “acknowledg[ing] their dependence upon the Government of the United States,” the three tribes would share 2.2 million acres and an array of government goods and services, from food, clothing, and tools
to saw mills, schools, and medical care—all administered by the Indian Bureau. Army units stationed at nearby Fort Klamath would keep whites from encroaching on Klamath lands and prevent Indians from crossing the reservation boundary.

Within this stable, segregatory perimeter, however, the Klamath reservation looks remarkably similar to its twentieth-century counterparts. Officials from the Indian bureau believed they created a replica of an American small town, where democratic institutions, structured work routines, controlled development of tribal assets, and the habits of Christian living would transform tribal members from “hostile Indians” into “good Americans.” It was a great show of faith in the power of America’s institutions to instill the values of individual freedom, democracy, free enterprise, and Christian morality in even the most resistant subjects, Americanizing the frontier one person at a time.

The most significant event in postwar Klamath history, however, came in 1954, when the reservation was dissolved under the Klamath Termination Act. Termination, which sought to accelerate the process of assimilation through rapid detribalization, had been on the agendas of the War Relocation Authority, the Federal Public Housing Authority, and the Atomic Energy Commission for several years. Although the federal government built the four communities at different times and with different purposes in mind, it sought to rid itself of all four at the conclusion of World War II. The War Relocation Authority resolved to close Topaz and the other nine camps as soon as possible, starting in 1943. Vanport’s future had been hotly debated since its dedication day, and the issues remained unresolved when the flood hit in 1948. For many, the disaster settled the question of how to encourage residents to reestablish their lives outside the project. Only Los Alamos was slated to remain, but the Atomic Energy Commission insisted upon a slow but steady conversion from a “communistic” colony to a more open society of independent individuals. This constellation measures the significance of both Topaz, Vanport, and Los Alamos’s common starting point and the government’s near-simultaneous termination of all four communities between 1943 and 1953, when even the Klamath Reservation was erased from the map.
After assembling this four-community constellation, situated within a 120-year span in the history of the American West, I spent two years traveling the West, poring over archival material, visiting whatever remained of the four communities, and interviewing former residents along the way. From the multitude of facts, figures, anecdotes, rumors, reminiscences, and questions come a set of persistent, if disparate themes: fear, suspicion, and stereotyping; displacement, protective custody, and isolation; thin walls, lost privacy, cold nights, and bad food; regimentation, surveillance, ritualized citizenship, and limited economic horizons; powerlessness, anger, dependency, and stigmatization. It was evident that relationships of some sort existed between the four communities, but the nature and substance of these relationships, their meaning, and their larger significance was far less apparent.

The unique histories of Klamath, Topaz, Vanport, and Los Alamos are central to the story of the changing social landscape of the mid-century West, and while the order in which they were founded is somewhat telling, a straight chronology does not reach the most penetrating historical questions. Instead of recounting four histories and connecting them in the conclusion, this study is organized thematically, according to the phases of a consistent, if occasionally imperfect, pattern that shaped the histories of these government-run, high-security enclaves. In keeping with Adorno’s concept of constellatory analysis, the chapters focus on the creation of these controlled spaces as security structures, the chasm between the American values the government promoted in these reformative communities and the authoritarian measures it practiced, the shrill dissonances of living as government wards in a region characterized by its independent spirit, and the long-term consequences of inverse-utopian lives on residents’ experiences as American citizens. In addition to revealing numerous points of comparison, this constellation illuminates a consistent (if occasionally imperfect) pattern within the life spans of all four communities.

The pattern connecting these four places began in the anxious aftermath of an attack on the home front, with citizens feeling powerless against an intangible enemy and the government feeling pressure to make a visible defensive act. In response to public pressure and well-founded concerns
about the handful of likely saboteurs on the home front, the executive branch hastily constructed a profile of the “internal enemy.” Instead of singling out dangerous individuals, it cast a wide net over Americans with perceived ethnic or ideological ties to foreign threats, thus creating thousands of “enemies” with faces, bodies, and profiles that enabled officials to watch, detain, discipline, or reform them. Government agencies rationalized subsequent measures to criminalize, isolate, and detain “enemies” and deny them fundamental rights as a preventative security measure, in which the government invades privacy, restricts movement, or confines individuals first and asks questions later. In the great American tradition of self-correction, questions of ethics and constitutional law were revisited when the danger had passed and such self-reflection became “safe” again. But the correction did not come before long-term damage was done to affected individuals, and Americans, coming to their senses, were faced with a shameful blot on the historical record. Yet Americans have been quick to forget these historical lessons in the face of renewed threats from “barbarians,” in the form of vaguely identified tyrants, savages, hostiles, saboteurs, Communists, terrorists, or, to use President George W. Bush’s early-twenty-first-century terminology, “evildoers.” Psychologists Robert Reber and Robert Kelley, in their cross-cultural study of enmification (the psychological term for developing a profile of “the enemy”), contend that the creation of an identifiable, visible, and manageable enemy is not confined to aggressor nations. They argue instead that “the dangerous reality is that enmification can and does get loose in human affairs and, once it does, it impinges on the peace-loving no less than on the warlike.”

The Historical Backdrop

This historical pattern of attack, enmification, confinement, Americanization, disposal, and discontent emerges against the backdrop of the history of westward expansion and Thomas Jefferson’s call to build an “Empire for Liberty” that would be a beacon to the world, fulfilling America’s historic destiny as the agent of individual liberty. The open spaces along the western frontier became the postrevolutionary proving grounds.
ground for the nation’s claims as the leading agent of global progress and human freedom. Jefferson inspired the new nation to build “such an empire for liberty as [the earth] has never surveyed since the creation” by transforming the “empty” region into the terrain of the independent, wholly self-sufficient yeoman farmer. Journalist John O’Sullivan’s admonition to go “onward to the fulfillment of our mission — to the entire development of the principle of our organization — freedom of conscience, freedom of person, freedom of trade and business pursuits, universality of freedom and equality” was, and still is, readily accepted as America’s “high destiny,” “future history,” and “blessed mission to the nations of the world.”

The confluence of American nationalism, the demands of growing capital markets, and the rise of physical anthropology and racial pseudo-science provided the conceptual pieces for an intricate logic of national unity and racial difference that put white supremacy in the service of shared prosperity and human liberty. One of the most influential tracts on race and human capability was Samuel Morton’s *Crania Americana* (1839), a work of physical anthropology that forwarded a racialized social hierarchy based on the relative size of white, black, Native, and Asian skulls. As president of the Academy of Natural Sciences and professor of medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, Morton influenced a generation of social scientists who believed in the evolutionary potential of the “darker races” to become more like — if not fully equal — to whites. To scientists and the general public, the numbers described more than brain size; they indicated the potential for various non-white peoples to become fully self-determining individuals and contributing members of society. The most significant measure, however, was the degree of “fitness for self-government” attainable for each race. Caucasians, with “large and oval” skulls boasting “full and elevated” anterior portions, had heads outfitted to “attain the highest intellectual endowments.” In addition to giving humanity its “fairest inhabitants,” Caucasians had the ingenuity to settle across the earth, bringing the benefits of their highly evolved intelligence to the smaller-headed, darker races. Physical anthropologists debated the finer points of taxonomy and the evolutionary process, but Caucasians’ place at the top of the racial hierarchy was
considered an incontrovertible scientific fact. This understanding of “race” permeated public discourse as well, remaining in the popular imagination long after scientists questioned the validity of craniology’s pseudoscientific methods.

Morton’s measurements placed Asians next on the hierarchy as “olive-skinned” people whose intellect was “ingenious, imitative, and highly susceptible to cultivation.” In the evolutionist terms of the day, this meant that Asians could learn to be “civilized” by imitating their white superiors, whose influence would spur their evolution. Morton noted, however, that when compared to the “monkey race,” Asians were similarly unable to pay attention to any one thing long enough to carry it through effectively—like industrial innovation or democratic self-governance. Although the “less civilized” races could unleash amoral bloodlust without provocation, Asian ingenuity and susceptibility to cultivation posed a threat of a different kind. Unlike people of African or indigenous American ancestry, Asians were savage and intelligent enough to imitate American technologies to use against them. This anxiety became a common trope in turn-of-the-century popular fiction and a persistent stereotype of the Japanese in the wake of their stunning naval victory in the Russo-Japanese War.

Native Americans differed from Asians in more than their “brown” hue. Their smaller skulls made them “averse to cultivation” and placed them in a “continued childhood” from infancy to old age. These child-like people were, on the flipside, “restless, revengeful, and fond of war,” with a “demonic love of slaughter.” Like Asians, Indians were “crafty,” but they were “incapable of a continued process of reasoning on abstract subjects” and ate foods that were “disgusting” and “unclean.” These “eternal children” needed protection and discipline, lest their violent tendencies get out of control, or lower-order whites lead them toward corruption instead of civilization. Africans, the smallest-skulled population and at the lowest tier of Morton’s racial hierarchy, were also “fond of warlike enterprises,” and their social institutions tended toward “superstition and cruelty.” They were intellectually unsuited to invention, but good at imitating “the mechanic arts.” This, combined with their ease in adapting to different circumstances and “yield[ing] to their destiny,”
made them well suited for slave labor. Despite being cast as childlike, they were only conditionally “innocent”; they were also uncontrollably violent and without moral restraint, threatening social chaos and a tyranny of savagery and bloodshed.

This social order, combined with the notion of divine providence, made American colonization of Native lands, exploitation and social rejection of immigrants, and forcible expansion into Asian markets consonant with the liberating mission of civilization, Christianization, and expanding “free trade.” Those who took their proper place in society and complied with the tenets of American civilization would be included in the American body politic to the extent they were considered capable. Those who were incapable of self-government remained eternal children, of sorts, who were reasonably placed under the restrictive protection of their “civilized betters” so they were not crushed under the wheels of progress and, more importantly, did not impede its course. This elevated level of civilization, from which peace, prosperity, and God’s continued favor would follow, lay at the heart of the utopian vision of westward expansion.

Even after the reservation system put Indians at a safe distance from white settlements, westerners and Washington insiders remained anxious about real and imagined threats to the newly established social order along the American frontier. For all the utopian rhetoric of the West as the providentially bestowed “magnificent domain of space and time,” where the “noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of . . . the Sacred and the True” would bring the nation of nations under the rule of “God’s natural and moral law of equality” and the “law of brotherhood,” white Americans held nightmarish visions of racial disorder that brought an end to liberty and civilization. In them, the “uncivilized races” used their powers of imitation to fashion American weapons and unleash their warlike characteristics against white Americans. In these scenarios, the Empire for Liberty was overrun by barbarian tyranny. Americans perceived this open, distant, freshly civilized region to be vulnerable to “Japanification” through trans-Pacific migration, enemy infiltration through Mexico, and domination by such “foreign” political movements as the American Communist Party.
Popular fiction about Asian fifth columnists destroying western civilization appeared as early as 1879, and more would follow in the 1890s with the closing of the western frontier and the acquisition of Hawaii and the Philippines.\textsuperscript{25} Japan’s real attack on the Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor hit close to home, unleashing well-developed images of a Japanese apocalypse into American public life. As the facts of the attack melded with images from paperback novels of Japanese with super-weapons laying waste to California, Idaho, and Montana, the exotic charm of Japantowns gave way to perceptions of busy swarms of “Japanese spies and saboteurs, firmly entrenched through their Black Dragon Leagues and other Tokyo-controlled organizations in Japanese American communities on the West Coast.” The FBI found no evidence to support claims of Japanese disloyalty, but that fact did little to alter the public’s impression that Japanese immigrants and their citizen children had paved the way for an invasion of the California coast. So while the American West has been synonymous with power and freedom in the popular imagination, the military was regularly concerned that the region could be lost and that America’s manifest destiny, in which American civilization marched west, would remain unfulfilled. Yielding to domination from the East was as unthinkable as surrendering Oregon Territory to the Indians.\textsuperscript{26}

President Franklin D. Roosevelt responded to Japan’s infamous attack by declaring war on December 8, 1941. With Executive Order 9066, issued on February 19, 1942, the government barred all persons of Japanese descent from the Western Defense Command, which encompassed much of Arizona, California, Oregon, and Washington. As with the Indians, all “known hostiles” on the FBI’s Custodial Detention Index (the secret listing of individuals slated for immediate arrest in the event of a national emergency) were summarily detained, while the remaining 120,000 members of the Japanese American community, having committed neither crimes nor acts of disloyalty, were removed to isolated reservations operated by the Department of the Interior—the agency in charge of the Office of Indian Affairs.

These actions repeated the pattern within the federal government of palliating wartime anxieties by fashioning profiles of the “enemy” based on shared, immutable characteristics. Frequently, the characteristic
was “race,” a biological and cultural fiction that whites rewrote and represented to accord with every new threat. Religion, political affiliation, and being a social outlier of some sort were less visible, malleable, and highly charged than “race,” but they still figured prominently in drawing “visible” profiles of “the enemy.” Attaching threatening connotations to the outward appearance of a “dangerous” group allowed a panicky nation to “see” its attackers and take comfort as the military and law enforcement agencies collected them in a wide net, took them a safe distance away, and even isolated them in confined spaces for supervision at all times. This supposedly dangerous population was subject to discipline and punishment if they attempted to inflict any harm on America. For the majority whose containment was purely preventative, government-run communities would aid their evolution toward true Americanism. Placed within a tableau vivant of middle-class Americanism, and through the temporal elaboration of the act(s) of “civilized” Anglo-American life (to borrow Michel Foucault’s description of modern disciplinary ritual), Indians could evolve to the point of assimilation, softening into the melting pot where they would no longer pose a threat. In any case, the government’s Japanese reservations demonstrated to the American public that the West was again secure, the status quo restored, and the nation’s powers of self-mastery fully intact.

As World War II progressed, however, different threats — imminent and imagined — emerged before wary westerners. Bloody race riots swept through urban defense centers during World War I, and they would break out again in Detroit, New York, and Beaumont, Texas, in 1943. In cities crowded with newly arrived war workers, the riots brought forth Reconstruction-era nightmares of African Americans seizing a vulnerable America to overturn the racial order. This fear was especially acute in Pacific states like Oregon, where black populations had historically been very small. Early security concerns that settlers of African descent, enslaved or free, might ally with disaffected Northwestern tribes against American settlers prompted the passage of exclusion laws that prohibited blacks from settling in Oregon Territory. These laws were folded into the first state constitution, and fear of a black apocalypse was woven into the local culture. As far as Oregon was from the South, Portland...
audiences “applauded . . . cheered . . . and stood up in the intensity of their emotions as they saw the great mounted army of the Ku Klux Klan sweeping down the road” at the crowded premiere of D. W. Griffith’s Birth of a Nation in 1915. Even when the exclusion laws were lifted, black peril mythologies permeated the local culture, making it an inhospitable place for African Americans to live.

When Portlanders stood firm against a plan to build public housing within the city limits, the Federal Public Housing Authority approved the construction of Vanport as a separate city. Residents moved to Vanport voluntarily and indeed quite happily in the wake of the Great Depression. They were not held in preventative detention, but their reservation was nonetheless bounded by its geographic and social isolation from Portland proper. FBI agents and internal police officers patrolled Vanport continuously, watching the black section of town and monitoring the activities of African American residents and their white friends who fit the profile of dangerous labor radicals. Vanport not only made it easy for shipyard workers to remain productive; it also made it easy to spot any “hostiles” — fascist sympathizers, Communists, or race rioters — before they could do any damage.

The government’s concerns about Communist infiltration were not confined to the “usual suspects” among ethnic minorities and the working class. When scientists sounded the alarm in Washington that the Germans might be developing an atomic bomb, Roosevelt approved the Manhattan Project, a top-secret military-civilian collaboration to develop this weapon of mass destruction before Hitler could use one on the United States. The impressive assemblage of foreign and American scientists at the research facility at Los Alamos was enough to assure even the most nervous insiders that the Allies would have a fighting chance. What disconcerted them, however, was the number of great lights whose “political tendencies” matched those of the FBI’s two enemy profiles: foreign fascists and homegrown Communists. Both groups were well represented on the Bureau’s Custodial Detention Index, which, along with Japanese American community leaders, included high-profile Axis nationals like Enrico Fermi and Emilio Segrè as well as American-born activists and intellectuals like J. Robert Oppenheimer.
The longstanding conflation of Jewish immigration with revolutionary activity in the United States influenced the planning of the Manhattan Project. Classified by Samuel Morton as Caucasians, Jews were considered civilized, though they fell between the northern Europeans at the top of the Caucasian hierarchy and the Aryan “Hindoos” at the bottom. To most Americans, it was not cranial size, skin tone, or religion that made Jews suspect Americans, but the perpetual myth of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy to put the rest of the world under their economic and political control. One of the most visible watchdogs of the “international super-capitalist government” held together across the Jewish diaspora by a bond of “blood, faith, and suffering” was Henry Ford, whose articles for the Dearborn Independent in 1920 were in the mainstream of American political discourse. He warned that Jews, like Asians, segregated themselves in ghettos to consolidate their power within the United States and refused to assimilate because they were a communal people, financed with old money from Europe to gain power for the race “wherever there is power to get or use.” Ford described the world’s Jews as “the world’s enigma”: they were small in numbers and rejected by much of the world, yet in the United States alone they were members of the most powerful circles, from the Supreme Court and the inner circle of the White House to the center of international finance. Holding themselves out as a “superior race,” Jews had no reason to assimilate, having amassed an “undue and unsafe degree of power” by maintaining “the adhesiveness of an intense raciality.” Ford’s final warning admonished Americans to be alert to the number of Jews involved in the Russian Revolution and to note that “[Jewish] Students of that Red School are coming back to the United States” having refined revolutionary activity to “a science.” Their ultimate vision was a United States inhabited only by “‘slavs, Negroes, and Jews, wherein the Jews will occupy a position of economic leadership.’”

Ford enumerated several characteristics of Jews that put them at odds with the independent yeoman farmer. Jews were communal and connected to powers apart from and outside the United States. They were clannish and tyrannical in their determination to “[fasten] a yoke on society.” They excelled in every enterprise but farming, because they were “not men of the land” like the American frontiersman. Like hostile
Indians, Japanese Americans, and multiethnic labor radicals, Jews were conspiratorial and deceptive; Ford cited the practice of using Gentile banks and trust companies to create a “front” that allowed them to hide Jewish influence. Worst of all, the presumed conspiracy to control the world’s people and resources could thwart the American project for individual liberty.  

The many foreign and domestic Jewish scientists—and their close associates—were perceived as having dangerous, disloyal tendencies that, like those pinned to Indians, Japanese Americans, and multiethnic laborers, threatened the future of freedom and the progress of manifest destiny with Jewish conspiracy or Communist revolution. Jewish scientists like Leo Szilard, who persuaded the Roosevelt administration to initiate the bomb project, came under additional scrutiny by agents who noted how often they ate lunch in a deli, had their hair cut by Jewish barbers, or spent time with Jewish friends. Ultimately, Szilard was considered too great a risk to be housed at Los Alamos. Although there is no record of overt anti-Semitism on the Manhattan Project, one scholar of the period identified centuries-old “Jewish peril” fantasies in which Jews across the diaspora used their wealth, talent, or intellectual abilities to enter the halls of power and stealthily create a Jewish-dominated world. His wartime polling data led him to conclude that “Jews were considered nonconforming strangers with a self-centered morality [that] permitted them to undercut the patriotism of the larger society.”

After screening out active Communists and determining that the net “brain gain” from Hitler’s Europe was worth the risk of sheltering scientists from the Axis nations, the American government placed the remaining scientists, worrisome political tendencies and all, behind barbed wire and armed guards to work for the duration of the project—and hopefully for the American cause. To ensure the loyalty of the scientists, censors read their mail, military intelligence listened to their conversations, guards prevented anyone from entering or leaving, and the bodyguards hired to “protect” them did double-duty as informants. If all went according to plan, the fortified community at Los Alamos would protect America from both the terrifying threat of Hitler’s nuclear ambitions and the slightly less worrying danger of enemy infiltration.
After the government identified the enemy within—or the people who looked or thought like them—its next step was to create a space to contain and neutralize these enemy bodies. By 1943 nearly 674,000 Americans and resident aliens were removed from the mainstream and placed in government-run political, social welfare, and national security structures. The government’s bounded communities included 1,500 people at the Klamath Indian Reservation, 8,100 at Topaz, and 40,000 at Vanport. Los Alamos jumped from about 300 to nearly 1,500 residents between the first scientists’ arrival in 1943 and the day of Japan’s surrender in 1945. Preventative detention, from its starkest form at Topaz to the softer variation at Vanport City, may have quelled mainstream America’s wartime anxieties, but it posed an ideological, if not an ethical dilemma. The true strength of the “land of the free” lies in its ideals, not its exercise of overwhelming state power. The very freedom the United States worked to cultivate in the West and to restore to victims of fascist tyranny required a commitment to due process for all, creating the conditions for social equality and economic opportunity. With these ideals in mind, the government sought to nurture and strengthen residents’ patriotic feelings by providing them with scaled-down, highly mediated “American small towns” to replace the home communities from which they were removed.

Guarded little communities seemed like the way to address everyone’s wartime concerns. Rehabilitative spaces had, after all, been part of the American social landscape for generations, ranging from religious communes, asylums, and company towns to the Farm Security Administration’s subsistence homestead projects for displaced workers. In the wartime communities, the enmified were taken a safe distance from the western home fronts so they could build temporary lives or even improve them through supervised work routines and the daily rituals of American small town life.

It was no coincidence, then, that the federal government transferred several members of its staff from the Office of Indian Affairs to the War Relocation Authority when the time came to design the relocation centers. Nor was it a coincidence that Indians in defense industries, Japanese American internees being relocated to Portland at the end of the war,
and the occasional Hanford worker were placed at Vanport, where they would still be in undoubtedly very familiar, government-supervised surroundings. The federal government’s system of highly controlled communities was far from a random collection of odd little enclaves. It promoted them as utopian settlements where, for instance, internees would “reclaim the desert” and scientists would find their “ideal city.” As individuals who had committed no crimes or acts of disloyalty, the residents were not cast as “detainees” but as pioneers of a sort, whose plywood settlements contained the stuff of which their own American dreams would be made.

The pattern continued as federal officials crafted quasi-democratic institutions to suit their “all-American” authoritarian communities. Community councils, modeled loosely on the nation’s legislative bodies, were considered de rigueur among Washington planners, if not the residents themselves. The composition and procedures differed somewhat in each of the four communities, but they all afforded the residents the opportunity to pass resolutions that government project directors could veto (or simply disregard) at their discretion. One War Relocation Authority employee, observing the community affairs at another relocation center, described the internees’ project of supervised self-government as the creation of a “cultural structure of realistic democracy.”

Awkward as it is, the phrase captures the dissonance between the WRA’s desire to promote democratic practices and its regime of confinement and social control. In cases where elected officials proved “disruptive,” WRA project directors could appoint “appropriate” representatives in their place. A certain amount of disagreement was tolerable, but antigovernment protests were taken as a sign of greater subversive intentions. In a true democracy, every participant exercised an equal measure of power. In the government’s small towns, every resident, from elected officials to children, was equally powerless against the rule of the federal government. Residents at Topaz and Los Alamos recalled their near-identical experience of serving on the student councils in high school with a bit of irritation. If the government failed to persuade its charges, it took advantage of the residents’ isolation and dependency to encourage conformity. Agents leveraged access to resources, placed troublemakers under surveillance,
and used intimidation, threats, and incarceration in ways that would be suspect constitutionally in the more visible corners of society.

Although free enterprise and economic self-sufficiency were the cornerstones of American citizenship (at least ideally), free market capitalism was a world away from America’s bounded communities. Government agencies controlled supply and demand, set wages in many communities, and provided little opportunity for free enterprise, for managing assets to build wealth, or for receiving the benefits of full banking services. Hard work was viewed as an indicator of loyalty and cooperativeness, not personal ambition, wage-worthiness, and the all-American drive to “do better” for oneself and one’s children. With the exceptions of Vanport, where people earned and saved (though many lost their savings in the flood), and the Tech Area at Los Alamos (where scientific careers flourished), federal agencies created low-paying jobs to keep people busy, to supplement depleted labor pools outside the community, and to offset the cost to the government of running total communities.

Despite the challenges of living in federally run towns, residents worked cooperatively to build truly functional American societies. Klamath Indians created public parks, Topazians played baseball, Vanporters formed religious congregations, and Los Alamosans ran their own little theater—not because they were trying to “look American,” but because they were Americans who strived to live according to the values of community, independence, participation, and freedom from excessive government control. The isolated enclaves were staging areas for America’s tragic ironies in which innocent individuals were denied the promises of American life and the ideals that supported the promise were undermined.

The irony deepened to hypocrisy in 1945 when the political landscape shifted from beating back fascism to stamping out the Red menace. Hitler had no bomb, and the fear of race riots (and certainly Indian raids) paled in comparison to the specter of global Communism. As the hot war turned cold, government enclaves were cast as collectivist dystopias, and Washington called for all of them—including the Indian reservations—to be dismantled. Finding themselves suspect yet again, Topazians and Vanporters faced being uprooted from the places that had sustained
them (however marginally) and thrown back into the mainstream to sink or swim. Los Alamos, too critical to the Cold War to be discarded, could not continue to exist as a government-run collective. Its transition to a “real American town” involved reconfiguring openness and security into a scientific fortress for the postwar age.

This final part of the pattern emerged fully when the rush to dismantle all things collective led Congress back to the reservation system, which produced the original federally run communities. Termination bills abounded, voiding most treaty obligations and dissolving tribal land bases. The vast majority of these bills terminated the tribal status of small bands on fairly small land bases, which proved devastating to the individuals in these communities. Klamath was one of three targeted reservations with a sizable population and land base, making its termination a milestone in Congress’s push for radical individualism and free market democracy. The Klamath Termination Act of 1954 liquidated the reservation and re-categorized detribalized Klamaths as “legal non-Indians,” suggesting that even after the reservation era they would be both insiders and outsiders in America. Removing the geographic borders did little to bridge the wide gap between those who lived inside and outside the government’s bounded communities, and many Klamaths fell into the breach. Generations of powerless politics, gainless economics, and education for second-class citizenship left most Klamaths unprepared for the postwar consumer age. One tribal member lamented in the 1980s that after termination, “we were just a bunch of people with nothing.”

In isolating and confining people to federally controlled towns, the government pursued the incompatible goals of protective custody and preemptive incarceration. In other words, the government awkwardly attempted to protect its enmified populations while curbing their rights and freedoms without cause. Government agents’ initial optimism about its Americanization programs gave way as a “detention psychology” took hold among the residents, manifesting itself in a loss of initiative, a sense of alienation, and increased dependency. The prescribed rituals of self-governance, the work routines, and the opportunities to demonstrate one’s Americanness were undermined by the isolation and forced dependency of people who had previously been socially engaged.
and economically self-sufficient. The government’s conclusion that life in the internment camps “loomed only as a blank interlude in what had been up to then a purposeful life” held true at other government communities as well. “Federal officials’ claims to having provided arenas of self-empowerment were soon met with the reality that government-run communities made dependents of formerly independent people, making the benefits of full citizenship elusive in the years and even decades after the communities had disappeared.

Each part of this pattern is elaborated in the chapters that follow. Chapter one examines the process by which Indians, Japanese Americans, a multi-racial labor force, and atomic scientists were cast as having dangerously disloyal tendencies based on race, ethnicity, and political affiliation. Chapter two centers on the communities themselves and the government’s attempt to build structures to restrict freedom and promote democracy simultaneously. Chapter three considers the economic impact of the artificial economies of federally run enclaves, and how this frustrated residents’ pursuit of the American ideal of the self-made individual. Chapter four focuses on how the slippages between democratic rhetoric and life as government wards affected residents’ experiences as loyal Americans. Chapters five and six trace the process behind the rapid disposal of the four enclaves and its surprisingly traumatic impacts, particularly on the Klamath Tribes, whose extensive, years-long termination process requires a chapter of its own to fully recount this complicated history. The final chapter assesses the long-term effects of these communities on the residents, the surrounding communities, and the American nation. Although the individual stories vary considerably, they all underscore the failure of these communities to project the American values they purported to enshrine. The fact that they made more skeptics than believers of their residents make them not American’s utopias but its inverse utopias.
Inverse Utopias in the West: Americanism in Reverse

The idea of the federal government building utopian communities at all is an odd one because spiritual seekers and political dissidents have been the main architects of America’s utopian experiments. From New Harmony to Onieda to the Hog Farm, Americans voluntarily opted out of the mainstream to escape the moral corruption of Washington, Wall Street, and popular culture in the hope of recapturing lost values and reestablishing them in American life. Utopia is, generally speaking, a longed-for place to which one either journeys or hopes to return. The government’s utopian communities, by contrast, were built for conformity to the status quo and to reform individuals, not society as a whole. Federal agencies populated their utopias with suspects to manage, not seekers following their hearts.

There is a hidden logic to the government’s invocation of “utopia,” but it ties these four communities to the utopian vision of the West, not to the tradition of smaller utopian communities. Jefferson’s vision of westward expansion rests on the literal definition of “utopia” given in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: the “imaginary, indefinitely-remote region” and a “place, state, or condition ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs, and conditions.” His Empire for Liberty populated by independent yeoman farmers formed what historian Henry Nash Smith describes as “an agrarian utopia in the West” where land, liberty, and freedom were linked symbiotically.45

America’s utopia is not an isolated place like Thomas More’s fictional island that emblazoned the idea of “the best place” (which was also “no place”) in the western imagination. All the world is America’s utopia, subject to transformation by independent Americans bringing liberty, individual freedom, and the capacity for self-government to the uncivilized reaches of the continent, leading all humanity toward the full enjoyment of their natural rights. Morton’s racial hierarchy coupled with the Jeffersonian ideal of educating for democracy served as an organizing structure that harmonized white supremacy and social equality in a single ideological frame. Utopia, then, would produce self-governing, self-determining, self-made individuals, starting with white European-
American settlers, and bringing Natives, immigrants, blacks, and other “inferior” races up the evolutionary scale toward greater civilization, if not fitness for full citizenship. Monarchy, Communism, barbarism and other forms of tyranny would find no fertile soil in the West, and, in time, the American beacon would shine into the dark corners of the world, lighting the way to freedom of all.

In all eras, America’s expansive Empire for Liberty has been held out as a “high example” to the world that would “smite unto death the tyranny of kings, hierarchs, and oligarchs.” Successfully defending the West from foreign invaders, hostile Indians, predatory Japanese, and Communist traitors was not a mere matter of national security; it was proof that the American experiment had succeeded, and that the United States would continue to fill its manifest destiny as “the great nation of futurity” under whose direction civilization would evolve to its highest levels. Although the built environment in the utopian Empire for Liberty is less prominent than in other utopian experiments, its social and political architecture served much the same function as its more materially based urban counterparts.46

The federal government’s reservations and security towns were built with certain utopian ideals in mind. To the outside world, they were structures that contained potential dangers at a moment when the promise of American freedom was vulnerable. With a mixed population of the mostly innocent and a handful of true hostiles, they gave assurances that those who were disloyal to the cause of American freedom were contained and under watch. The loyal people who were caught in the government’s dragnet, either by virtue of having been swept up and moved or having moved voluntarily into a zone of heavy surveillance and control, would have the opportunity to become better Americans by developing those abilities in scaled-down political, economic, and social institutions that were ultimately controlled by federal agencies. Government agents and security structures created perfect little Americas where, theoretically, nothing bad could happen. No one would be without food and shelter, and everyone would have something productive to do. The wheels of democracy would never turn too fast to make sweeping changes, and dissent would never reach disruptive levels. The schools would teach
children to value freedom and social equality in the classroom, without making too much of their own segregation from the rest of the nation. Scaled small and tightly enclosed, these enclaves offered a refuge from the complexities of real life in America, in favor of life stripped to its fundamentals. It was, in a sense, Americanism with training wheels for people who needed them as well as those who did not.

Ordinarily, these time-honored institutions ensured that every citizen participated in self-governance and enhanced prosperity through self-directed economic activity. In Topaz, Vanport, Los Alamos, and Klamath, however, these scaled-down institutions actually worked in inverse fashion. Political participation was an exercise in powerlessness, the government-controlled economies forged bonds of dependency in otherwise self-sufficient people, and the public schools left many students behind their mainstream peers in the postwar era. The political limitations, government-controlled economies, and confusing educational programs bred isolation and dependency, not participation and self-sufficiency. While far from utopias, the four communities were not quite dystopian; they were, after all, free of the extreme repressive violence and exterminationist mission of concentration camps in Europe. Rather, they were inverse utopias, built to both limit and promote freedom. They removed people from the even playing field of American opportunity and instilled skepticism and dissent in otherwise cooperative individuals who, in large part, were doing what the government asked of them to help realize the future of American freedom.

But these controlled, miniaturized Americas did not capture every spy or saboteur; in fact, the illusion of containment drew attention away from individuals who ultimately harmed the nation because they did not fit the government’s profile of the enmified. And instead of nurturing freedom, inverse utopian life cut people off from the political process, ended lives of economic independence, and made thousands of patriotic individuals question the sincerity of America’s fundamental beliefs. These would-be utopias were bound in space and closed off by geographic or social distance, secrecy and silence, or barbed wire and armed guards. The utopian ideals of freedom remained the lingua franca of these enclosed spaces, defending democracy was their central concern, and the spirit
of reform for racial and political outsiders stayed firmly in place. But instead of freedom flourishing, invasive government agencies fell into tyrannical practices. Far from shining a beacon for the world, the inverse utopias became fodder for Axis propagandists, who beamed stories about them to “prove” that American freedom was a fantasy spun from empty rhetoric. Instead of uniting America’s diverse peoples in a structure of ever-evolving freedom, the inverse utopia drove wedges along lines of race, class, region, privilege, and politics. Intended as neither havens nor prisons, Klamath, Topaz, Vanport, and Los Alamos were inverse utopias that “proceed[ed] in the reverse direction” (part of the OED’s definition of “inverse”) — not rejecting American ideals, but turning them inside out to make them formless and hollow.

What began as a history of weird American places became a history of how the government has arrayed people, space, power, and conceptions of American identity in wartime, and the hazards of mistaking the government’s inversion of American ideals for its protection of them. Americans’ deep faith in their supposedly divinely ordained mission has always been accompanied by an equally strong apocalyptic fear that foreign interlopers, evil savages, or greedy tyrants would destroy the nation’s experiment as a free and open society, twisting freedom of speech into weapons of propaganda and using freedom of assembly to unleash violent internal chaos. It appeared to some that the great American melting pot could become a boiling cauldron of subversion. Fearful citizens turned to the state to control suspect peoples, guarantee security at any cost, and preserve American dreams of progress and perfection.

The government’s small inverse utopias were intended to protect the utopian Empire for Liberty envisioned for postrevolutionary America by Jefferson and enacted through westward expansion. Pitting ideals of freedom against realities of profiling and social control brought the opposite of what the government had intended. They may have calmed the uncertainty of a nation under attack, but in the long term these communities undermined the bedrock principles of independence, fidelity to due process, and a brotherhood of self-determining individuals under the banner of freedom and civilization in the Empire for Liberty.

As the dystopian vision of losing the West to savagery and tyranny
took hold, and as enmification and profiling eclipsed fidelity to the Constitution, Klamaths, Topazians, Vanporters, and Los Alamosans—and thousands of others who lived in communities like theirs—came to question the government’s dedication to the values it proclaimed to protect. John O’Sullivan’s utopian brotherhood under equality gave way to a Mortonian world of categorization and control in which Americans less capable of democratic self-government had to be contained, cultivated, and deemed loyal and capable of taking part in society. These tensions have contributed to the complicated history of American freedom and how its ideals evolved in the “untrodden lands” of the American West and fed back into the national discourses of peacetime inclusiveness and wartime segregation.

This history fills in a portion of the long and tumultuous story of the federal presence in the West and addresses the significance of western developments to the nation as a whole. Historians of the West, like westerners themselves, have grappled with the complicated relationship between freedom and restriction in the West and the significance of this dynamic to the American experiment as a whole. Frederick Jackson Turner, in addition to affirming Jefferson’s vision and O’Sullivan’s call, argued that the region’s function as America’s safety valve was essential to the nation’s political stability. Ultimately, Turner’s westerners became exemplary Americans, showing easterners the true meaning of independence, non-whites a model of civilization, and Americans everywhere a clear sense of identity. While historians like Earl Pomeroy challenged Turner’s “frontier” construct by shifting focus to urban centers and institutions, the Turnerian West remained historical orthodoxy until the 1980s. All at once, a “gang” of four New Western historians rode onto the scene for a showdown with Turner’s adherents and, to a lesser extent, with one another. Patricia Nelson Limerick and Richard White rejected Turner’s safety-valve image, but their descriptions of the West’s relationship to the nation differed dramatically. Where Limerick described the region as the nation’s “potential dumping ground, a remote place to which to transplant people whose presence annoyed, angered, or obstructed the majority,” White cast it as the “kindergarten of the state” from which
newly formed social ideas flow back to the nation as innovations, rather than refuse.\textsuperscript{47}

In the West’s inverse utopias, Turner’s, Limerick’s, and White’s assertions hold true (which is perhaps a good measure of just how strange these communities were). Their inhabitants, branded “undesirables” by the federal government, were removed to remote locales, where neither their presence nor their problems would disturb national unity. Each project was, in its way, an experiment in social engineering and demographic distribution situated precariously within the American democratic tradition. Klamath, Topaz, Vanport, and to a lesser degree Los Alamos served as kindergartens of a sort, where residents received training in the fundamentals of Americanism. The region, in turn, became the government’s laboratory for an experimental synthesis of authoritarianism and democracy that would defend the nation from unknown internal enemies in times of war. The federal government thus built its western empire, but whether it served the cause of liberty for all, as Jefferson imagined, remains an open question.

For instance, generations of freedom-seekers have piled into wagons, train cars, and Volkswagen vans and headed west to escape the many constraints of the East, from the rigid dictates of civilized society to the overbearing institutions of a federal government that is too near. While the myth of radical freedom remains embedded in America’s vision of the West, residents and scholars of the region know well that the thousands of miles between Washington and its western frontier did little to ameliorate government influence. Historians remind us that the federal government distributed the land that drew settlers west, secured the terrain with forts and military bases, invested in massive infrastructure projects from dams to nuclear power plants, and continues to manage its 760-million-acre holdings across eleven western states.\textsuperscript{48}

Yet the sheer concentration of inverse utopias in the West made them a powerful influence on the region’s political and social landscape. While southerners struggled with Jim Crow, westerners grappled with the consequences of the federal government’s wartime demographic management scheme (or, as President Roosevelt put it in 1942, “having the right numbers of the right people in the right places at the right time”).\textsuperscript{49}
This new manifestation of the federal presence went beyond pitting newcomers against established western communities to hardening the government’s grip on western land and regional policy, fueling the hostility of many westerners toward their leaders in Washington. Contrary to the individualism and egalitarianism that characterized American freedom, the federal government categorized, marked, and segregated specific populations and restricted rights that were inalienable to all the other loyal, law-abiding people in America. The tensions never fully eased, and westerners continue to struggle over power, place, and who among the old-timers and newcomers, Natives and scientists, European Jews and Japanese immigrants, African Americans and staunch political
progressives truly belongs in the region. Federal demographic management contributed significantly to the course of race relations in the West, and it is an element that distinguishes this history from the trajectories of slavery and European immigration that shape the national narratives of race, citizenship, and American nationhood.

Finally, all four cases underscore the fact that inverse utopias deprived loyal Americans of fundamental freedoms based on grave miscalculations about the treacherous tendencies of ethnic minorities, industrial workers, and perceived radicals. Their histories serve as reminders that the balance between maintaining a sense of national security and preserving the integrity of the principles of American freedom is a delicate matter, requiring thoughtful policy instead of impulsive initiatives. It should come as no surprise, then, that Americans who spent time in inverse utopias gave a great deal of thought to questions of civil liberties and national security. In the decades that followed the war, they marched at civil rights demonstrations, presented testimony to Congress, led campaigns for redress, ran for office, and served as the conscience of the nation by committing their views to print. This activist engagement took its most visible form when Japanese American civil rights organizations mobilized in defense of Arab and Muslim Americans who were subject to preventative detention following the al-Qaeda attacks on New York City and Washington D.C. in 2001. In a completely unintended way, the inverse utopias did make their residents into exemplary American citizens; as self-appointed guardians of civil liberties, it is they who keep watch on the government and resist every sign of tyranny, the ultimate un-American activity.

This is some of the history that lies beneath the bleachers at the Portland International Raceway and within the eroded foundations that form the last trace of Topaz. It is a history that ties the bustling science town of Los Alamos, in which Colonel Sanders looks out upon one of the few cities in America where the federal government owns more property than corporate America, to the tranquil paths of the Winema National Forest, which was part of the Klamath Reservation until termination acts wrested it from the Indians in the 1950s. In the Klamath Basin, it brings together
Oregon’s Nikkei and Native communities on the Japanese American Day of Remembrance. Gordon Bettles, steward of the Klamath Longhouse, was taught by his parents to view the abandoned site of the Tule Lake Relocation Center as part of his own social geography. Bettles recounted his parents’ history lesson in an interview in 2006. They began with the story of the internment itself, adding that the Japanese Americans were “treated like animals; they said this is exactly what happened to the Modoc tribe when they were forced off their cultural property and placed on the Klamath reservation. If you think about it, the reservation they kept us in was like internment. We couldn’t leave unless we had passes, we couldn’t communicate with other tribes.” The article features another community member, Hiroto Zakoji, a former internee at Tule Lake who was hired by the Klamath Tribes to serve as general manager and director of the Klamath Adult Indian Education and Training Program.

These ties are becoming more widely recognized and memorialized; the Confederated Tribes of the Grande Ronde, for instance, are major donors to the Japanese American Art Memorial in Eugene, Oregon, in recognition of their shared histories of “hardship, government betrayal, denial of civil liberties and racism, but also (and some would say more importantly) of community, cultural preservation, and perseverance.”

There have been great erasures in these histories, making the connections between them all but invisible until now. This is due in part to the longstanding perception that each community’s “unusual history” made residents’ struggles solely their own. The cloak of wartime secrecy that surrounded every inverse utopia dampened voices very early, and the federal government has had little reason to say much about places that, in its view, no longer exist (or no longer exist in federal-utopian form). Former residents have understandably engaged in a great deal of self-censorship for decades. Some chose to focus on the future, while others tried to de-emphasize the strangeness of their wartime experiences. Still others avoided discussing the poorly understood circumstances of their lives in inverse utopias for fear of re-stigmatizing their experiences.

Although there were vast differences between the experiences of the four populations, they all shared the marginalization, repression, displacement, and disillusionment with federal government that flourished
within the confined spaces of America’s inverse utopias. Most importantly, their experiences are not theirs alone; they are part of a patterned, national wartime dynamic that makes certain citizens of the Empire for Liberty into enemies while the government fights to extend the blessings of American freedom to every corner of the globe.