

# APPENDIX

## HISTORIANS AND THEIR CRAFT

History is both what happened in the past and the renditions by historians about what happened in the past. Students must not confuse the writings of the past with the past. Without getting into the philosophical questions about “reality” and the “knowing of reality,” we offer this brief exposition on historians and the craft of writing history.

Historians represent the past from their present, including their time and place. In that sense, historians create a past based, in part, upon the perspectives and concerns of their times, cultures, and identities. Histories are thus oftentimes constrained by the times and traditions from which they arise. And yet, some historians strive for “objectivity,” universality, and timelessness to free themselves and their writings from the biases and limitations of their place and time. Others accept their subjectivity and determinants, and see “good” history as writings that speak to and for their time and place.

Because of those varieties of historians and their ideas about their craft, there are contrasting interpretations of history. Generally, historians deploy historical evidence to sustain their explanations for human behavior in the past. The nature of that historical evidence includes first-person accounts, such as diaries, letters, and oral interviews, and secondary materials, such as historical accounts and ethnographies written by those outside the culture they describe. The assembled evidence, along with the assumptions and theories that helped to determine the nature of the research and the selection of what constitutes the body of evidence, informs the writing of history.

We provide an example of that process from writings on the forced removal and detention of Japanese Americans during World War II. This account is quoted from Gary Y. Okihiro, *The Columbia Guide to Asian American History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 100-01.

“There were three major research undertakings during the war. First, a group of social scientists, mainly anthropologists, studied the camps for the War Relocation Authority, the camp administrators. Then, under the joint sponsorship of the Navy, Office of Indian Affairs, and War Relocation Authority, Alexander H. Leighton directed a research project on the camp in Poston, Arizona. Like the first project, Leighton’s research was used to advise the camp administrators on governing the confined peoples. Finally, the Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study (JERS), headed by Dorothy Swaine Thomas of the University of California, Berkeley, began with social scientists studying the unfolding Japanese evacuation and relocation program in early 1942. They saw the project as a sociological study of the effects of forced mass migration and dislocation, as a social anthropological study concerning cultural contact and change; as a political science study of camp governance and the interplay of local, state, and national policies; as a social psychological study of collective adjustments to confinement; and as an economic study of the consequences of the program for detainees.

“Those purposes have invited reactions from critics of the camps and from those concerned with Japanese Americans as historical subjects. All three wartime research projects saw the camps as social laboratories in which to study the behavior of human beings in confinement. The results of the first two studies were directly translated into camp governance, although Leighton believed that his study bore broad, general application to situations of stress and rehabilitation. The JERS researchers state that they took special care to remain aloof from the camp administrators and to protect the confidentiality of their human subjects, though subsequent accounts have raised doubts about the thoroughness of the researchers’ efforts in that regard. And, in the pages of books intent on unraveling the camps’ meanings for all Americans, students of Japanese American history find missing the central figures of that story—not those who perpetrated the forced removals and detentions, but their victims, Japanese Americans.”

The works emanating from those three research projects bear the stamp of the purposes and assumptions of those researchers, along with their times. Thus, the social scientists working for the War Relocation Authority (WRA) earned their keep as “community analysts” who observed and reported on Japanese American culture, morale, attitudes toward the U.S. and Japan, and generational conflicts, among other matters. Alexander H. Leighton’s book, *The Governing of Men* (1945) describes community planning at Poston, self-government, social organization, and social disorganization and conflicts, and from those lessons he delineates principles and makes recommendations for the governing of captive populations. And the several books that were published by the JERS researchers stress the local, regional, and national politics and pressures that led to the mass removal and detention of Japanese Americans, along with the interactions between administrators and detainees in the camps and the solidarities and splits experienced in that relationship. Finally, historians critical of those contemporary studies of the concentration camps of World War II attempt to recover the voices of Japanese Americans mainly through oral histories but also through re-readings of community analysts’ reports and the materials generated by the research projects by Leighton and JERS.

For more detailed descriptions and analyses of research and writings on America’s concentration camps, see Rosalie H. Wax, *Doing Fieldwork: Warnings and Advice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Yuji Ichioka (ed.), *Views From Within: The Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1989; and Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, *The Politics of Fieldwork: Research in an American Concentration Camp* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999).