

# Witnessing Internment: Captain V.C. Best's Letters to Ottawa

[www.witnesstointernment.wordpress.com](http://www.witnesstointernment.wordpress.com)

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## Introduction to the project

This honours project began with a concern that the research I did would sit unread and inaccessible, collecting dust in the history office. To avoid producing a dusty tome, I decided to create a thesis that would share the knowledge I collected. It may not be widely read, but it would be widely accessible for those interested and with that founding philosophy, I chose to create a publicly available website. In building a website, I wanted to take advantage of the flexibility of the medium to explore alternatives to the predominant historical narrative. The web facilitates new forms of accessibility, multi-media capacity, and dynamic user interaction that encourage alternative approaches to sharing historical information and examining historical questions.

The content of my website is well-suited to this experiment. As you will read, the focus of my research is trying to understand Captain V.C. Best's seemingly complicated and contradictory worldview. Different letters on different topics suggest different versions of Best – an ally, advocate, or apologist, to name a few. My analysis may be only one way to read Best's letters, so by including digital copies of his key letters and facilitating associative, rather than chronological, connections through the material, visitors to the site can use my analysis as a guide to create their own conclusions.

This website was “born digital” and all text was written with the web in mind. For my readers' review, I have created a print copy of the site's text. However, this transcription does not, and cannot, capture everything I did on the website. My honours thesis was created and defended as a website, and can be found at <https://witnessointernment.wordpress.com/> for full review.

## Narrative form on the web

The emergence of new digital media offers new possibilities for narrative form on the web. Though some historians may be resistant to these changes, forms of representation of the past have been evolving throughout history and the historical narrative that most historians use today is a recent form of expression. Historiographer Hayden White examines the evolution of narrative form, advocating for the annals and chronicles as viable alternative representations of reality, while describing the qualities that set the historical narrative apart. Looking beyond the historical narrative, historian Ann Rigney and literary critic Marie-Laure Ryan explore possibilities for narrative in the online age, taking advantage of digital properties.

Understanding the evolution of narrative form allows new approaches to be understood as part of a continuing process, rather than an unprecedented rejection of convention. However, if historical representations are evolving, it raises the question of whether what is being produced online, in this thesis or in general, is a historical narrative or something entirely different.

### **Hayden White & Forms of Historical Representation**

In *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, White outlines the characteristics of the modern historical narrative. Historical narratives must:

1. have narrativizing discourse, namely that events speak for themselves and tell their story without an active narrator<sup>1</sup>
2. be given a structure of meaning that respects the chronological order of events but, more importantly, gives it larger moral conclusions and relevance<sup>2</sup>
3. must have a well-defined beginning, middle and end.<sup>3</sup>

While this form seems self-evident to historians today, White questions if the historical narrative as a form of representation provides any further insight into past reality than the annals and chronicles, forms of history from earlier centuries. United by their own logic, White argues that the annals and chronicles' attempts to represent past reality were as successful as attempts by the historical narrative.<sup>4</sup>

By arguing for the validity of other forms of history, White is prompting historians to question whether

the world really presents itself to perception in the form of well-made stories, with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles, and ends, and a coherence that permits us to see 'the end' in every beginning? Or, does the world present itself in other forms, like the annals or the chronicles?<sup>5</sup>

With his argument that there are many valid ways to represent the past, White allows for speculation on what form narratives of the past may take in future.

### **Ann Rigney & Historical Narrative in the Online Age**

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<sup>1</sup> Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), 3.  
<http://hdl.handle.net.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/2027/heb.04929.0001.001>

<sup>2</sup> White, *The Content of the Form*, 4, 23.

<sup>3</sup> White, *The Content of the Form*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> White, *The Content of the Form*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> White, *The Content of the Form*, 24-25.

Also influenced by the idea that representations of the past evolve, historian Ann Rigney argues that the form of historical narrative itself has been changing. Over time and across topics, understandings of narrative have changed since the 1950s as academics adapt to new stories being told in different ways and environments.<sup>6</sup> Most visibly, narrative form has begun to change with the emergence of digital medias to the point where Rigney argues that “the ‘book’ should no longer provide the exclusive model for theoretical reflection on narrativity and the production of historical knowledge.”<sup>7</sup> Instead, the development of new medias has encouraged authors and filmmakers to experiment with plot and conclusions, making the focus not the narrative but rather its effects for the reader—increased interactivity, a blurred boundary between author and reader, or even multiple versions of the same narrative.<sup>8</sup>

Exploring the potential in websites specifically, Rigney notes the possibilities for creating associative, rather than chronological, connections. Moving away from conventional historical narratives, Rigney argues that associative connections challenge dominant meta-narratives and allow “for all sorts of points of identification or momentary amazement, rather than a narrative pathway that will lead to a clear outcome.”<sup>9</sup> Rigney does acknowledge that the results of this process may not be considered a narrative in the way we understand it today, but she does not seem

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<sup>6</sup> Ann Rigney, “When the Monograph is No Longer the Medium: Historical Narrative in the Online Age,” *History and Theory* 49, no. 4 (2010): 101-104, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41300052>.

<sup>7</sup> Rigney, “When the Monograph is No Longer the Medium,” 108.

<sup>8</sup> Rigney, “When the Monograph is No Longer the Medium,” 108, 111.

<sup>9</sup> Rigney, “When the Monograph is No Longer the Medium,” 116.

concerned. Instead, Rigney emphasizes the possibilities available for historians who are willing to look at new media—new forms of collaboration, multimedia, communication, “intelligibility”, and theoretical models that emphasize thinking about and writing history in different ways.<sup>10</sup>

### **Marie-Laure Ryan’s Multivariant Narratives**

Where Rigney continues to accept textual expressions in the online age, literary critic Marie-Laure Ryan suggests that narrative futures with the most potential in the digital age may be in gaming and other expressions that rely on her idea of multivariant narratives.<sup>11</sup> Ryan argues that even in this digital age, narratives must retain some of the historical narrative’s foundations; they must be linear and vectorial, that is they must move continuously in the same direction. Under this definition of narrative, Ryan discounts electronic poetry and other electronic literature that are too random, that allow the reader to travel along any path without a narrative coherence, or that veer into the realm of “conceptual art.”<sup>12</sup>

However, Ryan does allow for the idea of ‘multivariant narratives.’ Multivariant narratives create structures where a reader is given narrative choices based on previously made decisions. Ryan provides examples of hypertextual narratives,<sup>13</sup> either

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<sup>10</sup> Rigney, “When the Monograph is No Longer the Medium,” 116-117.

<sup>11</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan, “Multivariant Narratives,” in *A Companion to Digital Humanities*, ed. Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens and John Unsworth (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), n.p. <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/>

<sup>12</sup> Ryan, “Multivariant Narratives,” n.p.

<sup>13</sup> Most of us are familiar with the concept of hypertextuality as the, often blue, links that allow us to jump from webpage to webpage. Everything written on the web is connected by these links and it is one of the key features that differentiates it conceptually from the ‘book’ or monograph. For more information on the theoretical

in websites or fictional works, that fit this definition and preserve their narrative coherence. However, Ryan suggests that hypertextuality as a theoretical underpinning for new narrative forms is a relatively arcane concept in the fast-moving evolution of digital medias. In her article, she dismisses narratives that rely on hypertextuality for reader navigation because they are primarily used by theorists creating conceptual literary art that readers can wander at will by clicking links without the purpose and direction she considers integral in narrative form. Ryan's preference is for multivariant narratives in online gaming where players can create personalized narratives with a nearly limitless number of narrative paths dependent on the player's actions, but that always move forwards with narrative coherence.

Overall, whether through acceptable forms of hypertextuality or gaming, Ryan argues that narrative theorists need to "find a territory where narrative form is neither frozen nor ostracized, but recognized as an endlessly productive source of knowledge and aesthetic experiences."<sup>14</sup> Regardless of what medium or which technique, Ryan sees future narratives assuming dynamic forms.

### **What is the future and what is this thesis?**

So what does this mean for this thesis or, more broadly, the future of historical narrative? My thesis starts to push at what a 'history' is and how it is presented, recognizing the benefits of both the historical narrative and future digital medias. As a

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underpinnings of hypertextuality, read Vannevar Bush, "As We May Think," *The Atlantic* (July 1, 1945). <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1945/07/as-we-may-think/303881/>. His idea, like some of the founding discoveries of the internet came out of 20<sup>th</sup> century eras of war.

<sup>14</sup> Ryan, "Multivariant Narratives," n.p.



prototype, this thesis is not radically challenging the historical status quo, but rather envisioning how histories might look as they embrace the features of new media. This thesis still includes many fundamental features of a 'history', including primary source research, original contributions to scholarship, and referencing secondary literature. Overall, it still works towards many of the same aims as a traditional history but in a new form.

More broadly, scholars are making educated guesses and predictions for the future of historical narratives, but only time will tell. While Rigney and Ryan do not agree on its specific shape, they do agree that narrative form has been changing and will continue to evolve. It is unclear whether all the features White outlines as fundamental to historical narratives will continue in digital representations of the past, or even if we can continue to call these digital representations 'narratives'.

What the three authors do agree upon, however, is that change in the form of historical representation is not new, whether over the last millennium or the last decades. More importantly, the authors conclude that other forms of representation, whether in the past, present or future, are as valid as the historical narrative today. Rather than posing a threat to the historical discipline, new narrative forms offer a venue for historians to experiment with new productions of knowledge.

## **Captain V.C. Best's contemporaries**

Captain V.C. Best wrote his first letter in January 1941 to H.L. Keenleyside, Assistant Under-Secretary at External Affairs, to offer his assistance with the registration of Japanese Canadians. Because of unspecified personal experience, Best thought that

he would be a good intermediary between the Salt Spring Island's Japanese-Canadian community and the federal government:<sup>15</sup>

I am genuinely interested in these people, know a great many, have many friends among them – and can get along without any friction or restraint. Furthermore I can command assistance in interpretation or other service if needed. I wish to offer my services for a post with this work, if such a post is available.<sup>16</sup>

Understanding the motivations behind Best's offer is difficult. While his writings suggest a friendliness with local Japanese Canadians, Best offered to support a practice that discriminated against Canadian citizens and foreign nationals with a specific ethnic background. This government discrimination against Japanese Canadian would evolve into internment and dispossession, and this complicates how Best's proposal is understood: did Best support the discriminatory policies of the federal government during this era, or was he trying to make the best of a bad situation by lending his personal expertise? We might never know which, but historical accounts of government officials Hugh Keenleyside and Frederick Mead, and Japanese-Canadian Kishizo Kimura suggest that Best was not alone in his attempt to reconcile personal beliefs with participation in federal government policies.

### **Hugh Keenleyside and Frederick Mead**

In Ann Sunahara's book, *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War*, she commends Keenleyside, Best's main correspondent, and his colleague Frederick J. Mead, RCMP Assistant Commissioner, for

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<sup>15</sup> Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG25, vol. 3037, file 4166-40, letter from Captain V.C. Best to Hugh Keenleyside, 9 January, 1941.

<sup>16</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 9 January, 1941.

using their positions to advocate for Japanese Canadians. In her account, Keenleyside was a sympathetic administrator who advocated strongly against the removal of Japanese Canadians from the BC coast and reminded authorities, though unsuccessfully, of the personal rights of Canadian and naturalized citizens.<sup>17</sup>

The uprooting was, in the words of the Japanese Canadians' chief defender Hugh L. Keenleyside, "a cheap and needless capitulation to popular prejudice fanned by political bigotry or ambition or both."<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, Mead was responsible for implementing many federal policies but he acted where he could. When he was tasked with removing Japanese Canadians from 'defense zones' along BC's coast in 1942, he slowed down the process by following the exact letter of the law, which required a complicated set of permissions, rather than its spirit of quick removal.<sup>19</sup>

By refusing to act without direct authorization from the very busy Minister of National Defence, J.L. Ralston, [Mead and the RCMP] had delayed the removal of any Canadian citizens of Japanese ancestry until the Order-in-Council uprooting all Japanese Canadians prevented any further delays.<sup>20</sup>

Though part of the administration that implemented internment, Keenleyside and Mead's personal beliefs guided their actions in the framework of government policy. It is likely that Best viewed Keenleyside and Mead as ideological allies in his aim to reduce

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<sup>17</sup> Ann Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism*, (Ottawa: Ann Gomer Sunahara, 2000), Chapter 2. <http://www.japanesecanadianhistory.ca/Chapter2.html>

<sup>18</sup> Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism*, Chapter 2, quoting H.L. Keenleyside, "The Canada-United States Permanent Joint Board of Defence, 1940-1945," *International Journal*, vol. 16 (1960-61), p. 63.

<sup>19</sup> Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism*, Chapter 3. <http://www.japanesecanadianhistory.ca/Chapter3.html>

<sup>20</sup> Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism*, Chapter 3. <http://www.japanesecanadianhistory.ca/Chapter3.html>

anti-Japanese sentiment. Writing to Keenleyside in early 1942, Best expressed his concern that strong anti-Japanese rhetoric could influence attitudes towards other foreign nationals and he called the “panic in B.C. over the Japanese...contemptible.”

Closing his letter, Best thanked Keenleyside for his recognition of the grave situation for Japanese Canadians in BC:

May I add that your sympathy and understanding of the Oriental Problem, and your courtesy in finding time to reply to my previous letters, has left me with a desire to assist you in any way I can<sup>21</sup>

That Best supported Keenleyside out of all the government officials he could have written to suggests that Best had a worldview like Keenleysides’ and he similarly attempted to use his position to soften government directives on Salt Spring.

### **Kishizo Kimura**

Comparisons between Best and government officials may be relatively straightforward, but can we compare him to Japanese Canadians who occupied similar roles? Narratives of Japanese-Canadian resistance during this era are emerging, and the history of Kishizo Kimura stands out.<sup>22</sup> Kimura sat on the committees that oversaw the sale of Japanese-Canadian fishing boats and property in 1942-43, acting as an intermediary between the Japanese-Canadian community and the federal

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<sup>21</sup> LAC, RG25, vol. 3037, file 4166-40, letter from V.C. Best to Hugh Keenleyside, 1 January, 1942.

<sup>22</sup> For examples of narratives of resistance, see Roy Miki, *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2004) and Mona Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence: Japanese Canadian Women, Memory, and the Subjects of the Internment* (Toronto ; Buffalo ; London: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

government.<sup>23</sup> In his article, Jordan Stanger-Ross explains Kimura's surviving memoir as an attempt to reconcile his self-perception as an anti-racist with what some might see today as actions that betrayed Kimura's community. Kimura's memoir explained to future generations that his collaboration was the most effective form of resistance during a period when Japanese Canadians were being displaced, dispossessed and deported with few formal channels for recourse.<sup>24</sup>

Kimura explains his participation in this light: his was an effort to prevent the eruption of violence on the home front in the early days of the war. Once on the committee, Kimura continued to see his role in this fashion, urging the committee to take a public position against media characterizations of all Japanese Canadians as 'enemies' and the fishing vessels as 'seized' or 'spoils of war'.<sup>25</sup>

By agreeing to serve on advisory committees, Kimura attempted to use his agency to avoid, or reduce, anti-Japanese racism amongst committee members.

Best could have similarly seen himself as an intermediary that could mitigate anti-Japanese sentiment during the registration process, but this may not be a fair comparison to draw. Kimura was a member of the community affected by the policies he was working against and his participation brought him closer to the decision-making process than Best likely ever was. While Keenleyside often replied to Best, there is no indication that Best's letters influenced any action besides providing a private citizen's opinion. However, both individuals importantly demonstrate, as Stanger-Ross suggests for Kimura's memoir, "the ways in which individuals have grappled with and

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<sup>23</sup> Jordan Stanger-Ross, "Telling a Difficult Past: Kishizo Kimura's Memoir of Entanglement in Racist Policy," *BC Studies* 181 (2014): 39-62.

<sup>24</sup> Stanger-Ross, "Telling a Difficult Past," 46-48.

<sup>25</sup> Stanger-Ross, "Telling a Difficult Past," 53.

communicated their own experiences of some of Canada's most difficult history."<sup>26</sup>

Best's role and motivations may have been different from Kimura's, but Best's letters, like Kimura's memoir, show that internment and dispossession was a process that many struggled to understand and respond to.

### **Conclusion**

Without knowing more about Best's personal history, we cannot know what his initial intentions were in offering his help with Japanese-Canadian registration. It could have been because of a belief in the need to register Japanese-born residents, or because he thought his knowledge could make an inevitable process less painful. Comparisons to civil servants and, perhaps, members of the Japanese-Canadian community suggest that a larger community of Canadians existed who were concerned with what was happening to Japanese Canadians during World War II. To what extent Best belonged to that community is debatable and it depends how we consider his intentions in the context of his letters.

### **The shape of history**

As a concept, history is often thought of as the past itself with little relation to the present, despite efforts by some historians to show their connection. Historical narratives often emphasize chronologies where the past is completed rather than embracing a spatial organization where the past and present overlap. This focus on history solely in the past obscures its on-going impacts in the present. Scholars of

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<sup>26</sup> Stanger-Ross, "Telling a Difficult Past," 59.

memory and oral history, Pamela Sugiman and Mona Oikawa, are acutely aware of how present conditions influence understandings of the past in their work with Japanese-Canadian communities. However, connections between the past and present are not limited to oral traditions. Exploring how the past and present can co-exist in other spheres, work by Kirsten Emiko McAllister on physical sites of remembrance and Ann Rigney's scholarship on digital narrative suggests there are other mediums of historical expression that can create non-linear histories.

### **Memory & the Impact of the Past on the Present**

In Sugiman's article, "A Million Hearts from Here': Japanese Canadian Mothers and Daughters and the Lessons of War," she explores how her mother, herself, and her daughter remember the history of internment and how it is incorporated into their personal histories.<sup>27</sup> Her daughter, who grew up listening to her grandmother's stories and exposed to Sugiman's academic work, understands internment in a larger framework of social justice that surrounds her in the present. She actively combines her past with present values by writing fictional stories that incorporate her current historical consciousness alongside specific moments from the 'official' redress and communal history of Japanese Canadians.<sup>28</sup>

Building on her personal experiences with memories of internment, Sugiman has also written about how Japanese-Canadian survivors remember internment in oral

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<sup>27</sup> Pamela Sugiman, "A Million Hearts from Here': Japanese Canadian Mothers and Daughters and the Lessons of War," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 26, no. 4 (2007): 50-68, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/stable/40543199>.

<sup>28</sup> Sugiman, "A Million Hearts from Here'," 60-65.

interviews.<sup>29</sup> Sugiman suggests that storytellers reflect on their present to decide what memories to tell, often deliberately choosing a message that they want to share.<sup>30</sup> She explores this idea directly when attempting to understand why the ‘blessing-in-disguise’ narrative, an idea that says the internment had a positive effect on the Japanese-Canadian community, continues to circulate. Sugiman writes that

the blessing-in-disguise metaphor is voiced by the very same individuals who passionately and critically describe the cruelty of the war years. It does not, then, reflect forgiveness and forgetting. Rather it constitutes an attempt to bridge the past and present in a way that conveys recovery and survival rather than victimization and defeat.<sup>31</sup>

In both of Sugiman’s examples, narratives about internment are as much a product of the present as they are of the past as their storytellers move on with their lives.

In Oikawa’s book, *Cartographies of Violence: Japanese Canadian Women, Memory and the Subjects of the Internment*, she challenges the forgetting of internment by also exploring how Japanese Canadians remember their experiences.<sup>32</sup> While most of her book focuses on naming the processes and experiences of internment, her last two chapters specifically address how internment continues to have an impact decades later. Her interviewees speak in depth about the lack of institutional education on internment and they understand school as a site of racism where they continued to be

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<sup>29</sup> Pamela Sugiman, “‘Life is Sweet’: Vulnerability and Composure in the Wartime Narratives of Japanese Canadians,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2009): 186-218.

<sup>30</sup> Sugiman, “‘Life is Sweet’,” 191.

<sup>31</sup> Sugiman, “‘Life is Sweet’,” 201.

<sup>32</sup> Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence*.



'othered' and ostracized as often the only racialized, working-class children in the classroom.<sup>33</sup>

The interviewees also connected the on-going, gendered racism they experience in the present directly to the past racism of internment. While the form of racism has changed, it continues to build on positioning the women as outside of Canada.<sup>34</sup> Oikawa concludes that though redress has officially brought closure to the legacy of internment, the events and racism of the 1940s continues to exist today as part of making a Canadian multicultural, national narrative.<sup>35</sup>

Re-remembering the places of the Internment and the people who were forced into them can be used to contest a forgetting of the colonial, racial, and national violence used to map Canada, and to re-remember it as a place where there are many people who have been and are in constant struggle against domination and who daily live its effects<sup>36</sup>

Oikawa's conclusions give immediacy to why understanding the past as part of the present is crucial. In her opinion, remembering is a powerful counter-balance to the forgetting that Oikawa outlines as necessary for creating a Canadian national narrative.<sup>37</sup>

### **Combining the Past and Present**

In addition to memories and oral histories, physical sites and digital narratives are also places of interaction between the past and present. McAllister's book, *Terrain of Memory: A Japanese Canadian Memorial Project*, explores how the past and present are

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<sup>33</sup> Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence*, 267-284.

<sup>34</sup> Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence*, 287-295.

<sup>35</sup> Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence*, 308-315.

<sup>36</sup> Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence*, 319.

<sup>37</sup> Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence*, 39-42.

combined in the Nikkei Internment Memorial Centre (NIMC) in New Denver.<sup>38</sup> The NIMC serves as a historical museum and a tourist site, but also as an important cultural venue for the local Japanese-Canadian community. McAllister explores the 'time' of the NIMC, the temporal dimension of space, and concludes that it attempts to preserve a 'chronotope of the immemorial.' The chronotope of the immemorial is an empty time that relegates the past to the past, presenting it as a static moment in time that never changes. However, to maintain this specific vision of the past, resources are needed in the present to preserve the space and ensure that it does not wear down. This tension between the chronotope of the immemorial and the actual "material and social dynamics" of the memorial means that the present is needed to keep the past alive in its static form.<sup>39</sup> The historical collection at the NIMC could not exist without investment in the present and the dual use of the site as a modern cultural centre and museum ensures the survival of the history.

Building on similar connections between the past and present, Rigney's work on digital narrative form suggests that the medium offers unprecedented possibilities for the past and present to exist simultaneously and cohesively in text. In her article, "When the Monograph is No Longer the Medium: Historical Narrative in the Online Age," she argues that narrative form is continually shifting with new developments in the mediums of display and the methods of historical production.<sup>40</sup> She argues that the

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<sup>38</sup> Kirsten Emiko McAllister, *Terrain of Memory: A Japanese Canadian Memorial Project* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

<sup>39</sup> McAllister, *Terrain of Memory*, 97-102.

<sup>40</sup> Rigney, "When the Monograph is No Longer the Medium."

ability of texts on the Internet to be cut up, copied, reworked, and reproduced creates a narrative fluidity similar to Sugiman and Oikawa's oral histories.<sup>41</sup>

This narrative fluidity also offers flexibility in conceptions of time. Rigney conducted a brief survey of websites on Iwo Jima and found that their use of hypertext let viewers explore associative, rather than strictly chronological, connections. Instead of having to read things from past to present, readers can side step into different topics or time periods in a process that "work[s] against the idea that all events are part of the same ongoing narrative." This creates what Rigney calls an "eternal present tense" where materials from across the ages end up side-by-side.<sup>42</sup> Instead of a fixed chronological path and narrative outcome, readers visit an "imaginary museum" that allows for a multitude of points of comparison and identification:

With material from different genres, different eras, and different provenances placed side by side without the authorial voice of a central narrative, the user enters an 'imaginary museum,' to recall André Malraux's phrase, allowing for all sorts of points of identification or momentary amazement, rather than a narrative pathway that will lead to a clear outcome.<sup>43</sup>

Rigney's eternal present tense allows for a structure where events across time occupy the same place in the chronological hierarchy and narrative structure. Though the narrative produced is not directly influenced by the present to the same extent that oral histories are, the concept allows the past and present to exist simultaneously.

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>41</sup> Rigney, "When the Monograph is No Longer the Medium," 111.

<sup>42</sup> Rigney, "When the Monograph is No Longer the Medium," 115.

<sup>43</sup> Rigney, "When the Monograph is No Longer the Medium," 116.

As Sugiman, Oikawa, and McAllister argue, the past actively plays a role in our present and our present is required to understand and maintain the past. Rigney's suggestion of an eternal present on the web is a possible manifestation of those concepts in a textual, rather than oral or physical, environment. By experimenting with forms that blur the line between the past and present, we can work to overcome the forgetting that allows, as Oikawa suggests, for the creation of meta-narratives that reduce certain crucial events, like the internment of Japanese Canadians, to footnotes in history.

## Responding to the media

Along with the numerous letters Captain V.C. Best sent to Hugh Keenleyside, Best also included various newspaper clippings and cards after the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941. Best wanted to illustrate the dangerous anti-Japanese sentiment in BC and to highlight which politicians he considered at fault for cultivating hate rhetoric. However, not all the news clippings Best sent were strongly anti-Japanese. Best provided contrast by sending letters to the editor written by other BC residents who shared Best's dislike of anti-Japanese rhetoric.

### **Captain V.C. Best's views – propaganda and politicians**

In January 1942, Best anxiously sent large volumes of news clippings and propaganda cards to Keenleyside in the hopes of alerting him to the feelings of both Anglo- and Japanese-Canadian BC residents. In Patricia Roy's book, *The Triumph of Citizenship: The Japanese and Chinese in Canada, 1941-67*, she argues that the province

was at the brink of rioting against Japanese Canadians, and Best tended to agree.<sup>44</sup>

However, instead of understanding the situation as a result of broad-based anti-

Japanese sentiment, Best believed it was caused by politicians in general and Vancouver

City Council Alderman Wilson in particular:

The panic in B.C. over the Japanese is contemptible – but since that the wind was sown by politicians without let or hindrance, it is only to be expected that B.C. will, and is, reaping the whirlwind<sup>45</sup>

Before focusing on Wilson as the source of anti-Japanese propaganda, in January 1942, Best first sent Keenleyside a set of propaganda cards that had been anonymously delivered to his house immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbour.<sup>46</sup> The cards advocated for the removal of Japanese Canadians from the BC coast. Because they were anonymous, the cards could have reflected anyone's views. However, in subsequent letters, Best began to blame politicians for inciting this type of public agitation.

On January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1942, Best wrote to Keenleyside calling for "the resignation of leaders of the political program of recent date [since it] would be no loss to B.C."<sup>47</sup> The following week, Best sent Keenleyside a pair of letters focusing specifically on the potential for rioting and the organization of mass anti-Japanese meetings because of Alderman Wilson's fear-mongering rhetoric:

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<sup>44</sup> Patricia Roy, *The Triumph of Citizenship: The Japanese and Chinese in Canada, 1941-67* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), <http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/lib/uvic/detail.action?docID=10203109>, 54-55.

<sup>45</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 1 January, 1942.

<sup>46</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 1 January, 1942.

<sup>47</sup> LAC, RG25, vol. 3037, file 4166-40, letter from Captain V.C. Best to Hugh Keenleyside, 5 January, 1942.

I would submit that there is a probability that a riot will ensue shortly...there is in my estimation very grave danger – and these mass meetings should be prevented<sup>48</sup>

You will see at once the remarkable similarity to the initial stages of the Hitler pogrom. The next stage will probably be riots. [Wilson] disclaims having made a suggestion that if the gov't did not get rid of the Japanese, a riot would.<sup>49</sup>

The news clippings in these letters bore titles such as “Ald. Wilson Seeks Council Support for Jap Removal” and “Wilson Speaks: Asks Public to Tell Ottawa About Japs” and their content matched the calls for internment and anti-Japanese prejudice in the propaganda cards Best had sent Keenleyside earlier.<sup>50</sup> While it is possible that Wilson was responding as a politician to public sentiment rather than inciting it, Best strongly concluded that Wilson was the driving force behind anti-Japanese agitation:

I am afraid of Wilson in Vancouver lest he be the spark to ignite the magazine. He is out for mischief and he is a very dangerous man<sup>51</sup>

Alderman Wilson will hold mass meetings if the Japanese are not all [original underline] out of B.C....watch him!<sup>52</sup>

### **Balancing out the hysteria**

Among the news clippings Best sent to Keenleyside in early 1942, he also included several examples to “demonstrate[e] the confusion of thought upon the Japanese problem in BC.”<sup>53</sup> These examples were of seemingly regular BC residents that shared

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<sup>48</sup> LAC, RG25, vol. 3037, file 4166-40, letter from Captain V.C. Best to Hugh Keenleyside, 12 January, 1942.

<sup>49</sup> LAC, RG25, vol. 3037, file 4166-40, letter from Captain V.C. Best to Hugh Keenleyside, 13 January, 1942.

<sup>50</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 13 January, 1942.

<sup>51</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 13 January, 1942.

<sup>52</sup> LAC, RG25, vol. 3037, file 4166-40, letter from Captain V.C. Best to Hugh Keenleyside, 20 January, 1942.

<sup>53</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 5 January, 1942.

Best's highly critical view of local politicians. On January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1942, an unknown newspaper published a letter to the editor from Mayne Island resident, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Flick, that advocated for a more level-headed approach to any issues resulting from Canada's declaration of war on Japan. Flick pointed out that there had been no reports of espionage or sabotage by Japanese Canadians.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, even if there was a threat from those of Japanese-descent, Flick argued that the call for internment should apply to enemy aliens of all nationalities, including Germans, Austrians and even Vichy French. On the topic of politicians, Flick echoed Best's dislike:

Some of our politicians have endeavored to whip up animosity against all Japanese in order to secure a measure of permanency in our Legislative Assemblies or in our Federal Parliament...such men have time and again deviated from the truth concerning Canadian Japanese, such men will go on with untrue utterings so long as those ill-informed as to Canadian-Japanese will listen to them<sup>55</sup>

As January 1942 progressed, Best increasingly sent news clippings that conveyed the equivocality of British Columbians on this topic. Some of these articles and letters to the editor still expressed suspicion towards Japanese Canadians, but advocated their enlistment in the military as proof of their loyalty to Canada.<sup>56</sup> Most clippings, however, were entirely critical of the "malicious and slanderous attacks against the Japanese population of B.C."<sup>57</sup> Letter writers drew attention to similarities between anti-Japanese actions in BC with Hitler's programs in Europe, writing that "most anti-Japanese protagonists adopt Hitler's Jew-baiting tricks" and calling into question what Canada

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<sup>54</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, news clipping "Fairness to B.C. Japanese," 13 January, 1942.

<sup>55</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, news clipping "Fairness to B.C. Japanese," 13 January, 1942.

<sup>56</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, news clipping "Time to Close Door," 20 January, 1942.

<sup>57</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, news clipping "Malicious, Slanderous," 20 January, 1942.

was fighting for against what was being practiced at home.<sup>58</sup> Others still drew comparisons with the situation in the United States, writing against internment by arguing that “our good neighbors have not removed their 160,000 [Japanese Americans] from Hawaii. Instead Secretary of the Navy Knox praised them.”<sup>59</sup>

By including voices supportive of Japanese Canadians in the face of strong anti-Japanese rhetoric, Best showed Keenleyside that public opinion was divided. Wilson’s anti-Japanese rhetoric had failed to convince everyone and many residents expressed their dissent publicly.

### **Conclusion**

While Best did not specify to Keenleyside his place within the ideological battles waging in BC, his strong dislike of Wilson’s overtly racist public position suggests that Best likely identified with Flick and others. Reading Best’s letters, it is unclear whether he was firmly pro-Japanese Canadian but this this set of news clippings demonstrates that Best was at least aware of multiple viewpoints on the issue and open to understanding, critically examining, and arguing against them depending how they fit within his internal world view. Rather than simply accepting Wilson’s fear mongering, Best critically engaged with media coverage of Japanese Canadians in BC.

### **Japanese-Canadian community on Salt Spring Island**

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<sup>58</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, news clipping “No Alarm Cause,” 20 January, 1942.

<sup>59</sup> LAC, letter Best to Keenleyside, news clipping “Canadian Selfishness,” 20 January, 1942. Japanese Americans in continental US were also interned starting in February 1942, but Japanese Americans in Hawaii remained free for the duration of the war. See Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence*, 43-45 for suggestions as to why.



Throughout his letters, Captain V.C. Best wrote broadly about Japanese Canadians in BC, often referencing the Japanese-Canadian community on Salt Spring Island where Best lived. The Japanese-Canadian community on Salt Spring has a long history on the island, spanning over a century.

### **Pre-war community on Salt Spring Island**

The Japanese-Canadian community on Salt Spring Island traces its roots to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1895, 10 Japanese Canadians were listed in a promotional booklet for the island and by a 1901 census, 59 Japanese Canadians lived on Salt Spring.<sup>60</sup> When Canada declared war on Japan in 1941, the community had grown to 11 families, including a total of approximately 77 adults and children.<sup>61</sup> From memories of life on the island, the community was successful and hardworking. By 1941, Japanese Canadians collectively owned 1,000 acres of land and most families were well off:

Many also owned current model vehicles that they used to deliver goods to Mouats or to the creamery. They were always dressed and clean and modern clothes often sewn by creative women who made time to do so. Most homes had the luxury of a Japanese bath.<sup>62</sup>

They were also actively involved in the larger Salt Spring Island community. As the island's economy and population grew, the Japanese-Canadian community contributed time and money to the construction of an Anglican church and the Salt Spring Island

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<sup>60</sup> Charles Kahn, *Salt Spring: The Story of an Island* (Maderia Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 1998), 250-251.

<sup>61</sup> Rose Murakami, *Ganbaru: The Murakami Family of Salt Spring Island* (Salt Spring Island, BC: Japanese Garden Society of Salt Spring Island, 2005), 7. Keiko Mary Kitagawa, Presentation, Salt Spring Island Japanese Garden Society, 15 April, 2006.

<sup>62</sup> Kitagawa, Presentation.

Consolidated School.<sup>63</sup> Two prominent Japanese-Canadian families, the Okanos and Murakamis, lived on Sharp Road near Ganges, close to Best and his wife, Winnifred, who also settled by Ganges after moving from Galiano Island in 1920.<sup>64</sup>

## **World War II**

With the outbreak of World War II, politicians' views of the Japanese-Canadian community turned negative. Even before the war, Macgregor Macintosh, the Member of Parliament for Nanaimo and the Gulf Islands, was strongly anti-Japanese. When he visited Ganges in 1938, a local resident, Dr. Raymond Bush, tried to convince Macintosh to visit the Okano's home in an attempt to change his views, but Macintosh refused.<sup>65</sup> Best was aware of Macintosh's strongly anti-Japanese stance and he wrote to Keenleyside in October 1941, worrying that Macintosh was using a committee he served on as "a hidden club to be used upon the Japanese and Canadian Japanese without discrimination."<sup>66</sup>

Beyond the opinions of individual politicians, Salt Spring Island was not isolated from federal government policies towards Japanese Canadians. In her book about the Murakami family on Salt Spring Island, Rose Murakami recalls that on May 25, 1941, all Japanese Canadians over the age of 16 were registered and made to carry identity cards.<sup>67</sup> Best may have been part of this process; when he first wrote to Keenleyside in

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<sup>63</sup> Kahn, *Salt Spring*, 254. Kitagawa, Presentation.

<sup>64</sup> Kahn, *Salt Spring*, 234, 254.

<sup>65</sup> Murakami, *Ganbaru*, 13-15.

<sup>66</sup> LAC, RG25, vol. 3037, file 4166-40, letter from Captain V.C. Best to Hugh Keenleyside, 10 October, 1941.

<sup>67</sup> Murakami, *Ganbaru*, 15.

January 1941, Best offered his services for a rumored registration of Japanese Canadians.<sup>68</sup> While Best's letters do not specify whether he eventually contributed, that was his initial intention in writing to Keenleyside.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbour, anti-Japanese rhetoric increased and in 1942, like most other Japanese Canadians in BC, Salt Spring Island Japanese Canadians were expelled from their homes and concentrated in Vancouver, and then dispatched from there to internment camps and farms across the country. Rose Murakami remembers that when the boat to Vancouver stopped at Mayne Island to pick up more passengers, one man, Mr. Torazo Iwasaki, got off the boat and refused to get back on. He was eventually coaxed into returning to the boat, but he did not want to leave his home:

At Mayne Island, Mr. Torazo Iwasaki got off the boat and refused to get back on. He declared that his home and property were on Salt Spring and that he was not going to leave them. He was coaxed back on to the boat. Mr. Iwasaki's land includes all of what is now called Sunset Drive, three-and-a-half miles of waterfront the way the crow flies...<sup>69</sup>

#### **Post-1949**

Of the 11 families that lived on Salt Spring prior to 1942, only two returned to the island. Victor and Evelyn Okano moved back in 1948, having received special permission to return to the coast before the War Measures Act restrictions were lifted. They were joined by Victor's sister, Kimiko Murakami, and her family in 1954.<sup>70</sup> The Murakamis lost their property through forced sale like all other Japanese Canadians, but were

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<sup>68</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 9 January, 1941.

<sup>69</sup> Murakami, *Ganbaru*, 22.

<sup>70</sup> Kahn, *Salt Spring*, 259.

eventually able to purchase a new one.<sup>71</sup> Some Japanese Canadians from Salt Spring attempted to fight the government for their loss of property. Torazo Iwasaki, the same man who refused to get back on the boat to Vancouver, unsuccessfully sued the government for the loss of his waterfront property.<sup>72</sup>

For those who returned to Salt Spring, life was not easy. Rose Murakami remembers the on-going racism and discrimination that persisted well into the 1990s. She recalls vandalism and theft on her family's farm, the harassment of her brother by local banks when he attempted to open a business, and, even in the 1990s, a survey that ensured no residents objected to the planting of a Japanese-Canadian memorial tree.<sup>73</sup>

We were not welcomed. We heard there had been a meeting of 'concerned citizens of Salt Spring Island' and 85 percent had voted not to let those 'Japs' return.<sup>74</sup>

### **Present community**

Reflecting on the history of the Japanese-Canadian community on Salt Spring, Mary Kitagawa sees a lost opportunity: the "blind hate and racism, denied a group of hard working, generous, productive, loyal citizens of Canada from contributing during the war years to the positive growth of Salt Spring Island, BC, and Canada."<sup>75</sup>

### **Question of military service**

Dear Sir, the time appears to be ripe when the question of enlistment of Canadian-Japanese should be taken into account. I wish to offer my services to

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<sup>71</sup> Murakami, *Ganbaru*, 33.

<sup>72</sup> Kahn, *Salt Spring*, 260.

<sup>73</sup> Murakami, *Ganbaru*, 33-39.

<sup>74</sup> Murakami, *Ganbaru*, 33.

<sup>75</sup> Kitagawa, Presentation.

organise the enlistment of Canadian-Japanese in BC – these men to be trained in some other province than BC – and sent overseas.<sup>76</sup>

In October 1941, Captain V.C. Best wrote to Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King offering his services in the military enlistment of Japanese Canadians.<sup>77</sup> Best argued that Japanese Canadians should be given the same opportunities as other Canadians and be allowed to prove their loyalty to the state. However, Best's aims in advocating for Japanese-Canadian service seem to have changed after the attack on Pearl Harbour as he framed military service as a required test. Despite Best's rhetorical shift, his letters on the right of Japanese Canadians to serve built on a World War I legacy and was an important part of Nisei, second-generation Japanese Canadians, lobbying during World War II.

### **Best's views on enlistment**

Best's personal history as a World War I veteran and his sons' service in World War II may explain his belief in military service as an appropriate path, but Best initially also wanted Japanese Canadians to serve so they could prove their loyalty to Canada.<sup>78</sup> In his early letters, prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbour in 1941, Best emphasized enlistment as something that the Japanese-Canadian community on Salt Spring Island wanted, reporting that "the Japanese parents were anxious that their sons should serve

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<sup>76</sup> LAC, RG25, vol. 3037, file 4166-40, letter from Captain V.C. Best to Rt Hon. Mackenzie King, 26 October, 1941.

<sup>77</sup> LAC, Best to Mackenzie King, 26 October, 1941.

<sup>78</sup> LAC, RG25, vol. 3037, file 4166-40, "Captain V.C. Best (R.O.)," date unknown. LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 10 October, 1941.

in the army for Canada – and advocated their doing so....Unfortunately, political agitation dealt them blow after blow to their loyalty.”<sup>79</sup>

According to Best, parents wanted their sons to serve so they could show their allegiance to the war effort and the Japanese-Canadian community was willing to give up their fight for the franchise if they were offered that opportunity; Best cited the slogan “do your duty—and build up for the next generation” to explain the community’s focus on enlistment.<sup>80</sup>

However, after December 1941, Best’s argument for Japanese-Canadian military shifted. Instead of framing the cause as something that the community wanted, Best’s rhetorical strategy focused on military service as a mandatory test. It is difficult to discern whether this shift was Best attempting to reframe his previous beliefs in response to the unexpected attack on Pearl Harbour, or Best drastically changing his core understanding of Japanese-Canadian military service. Writing in January 1942, Best thought that

the closer the problem is scrutinized, the more apparent it becomes that enlistment is the sieve through which all Japanese, naturalized and Canadian-born should pass. Those who do not pass this [?] process can and should, be accommodated in Internment camps. This also applies to all other nationalities with whom the ABCD are at war<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> LAC, RG25, vol. 3037, file 4166-40, letter from Colonel Desrosiers to unknown (enclosing a letter from Captain V.C. Best), 24 February, 1941.

<sup>80</sup> LAC, Desrosiers to unknown, 24 February, 1941.

<sup>81</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 5 January, 1942.

In following letters, Best continued to push for enlistment and elaborated on his ideas of military service as a test for Japanese Canadians.<sup>82</sup> On January 20, 1942 he shared with Keenleyside his opinion that overall, the public and the troops would accept Japanese Canadians in uniform.<sup>83</sup> A few days later, Best reported that he had questioned some “troops” and found that they also thought that “all Canadian-born of alien parentage should share in the vicissitudes of the front lines,” however with the caveat that they should serve in separate units.<sup>84</sup>

In the letters that followed, Best continued to repeat the idea that all Canadian-born Japanese Canadians should share in the dangers of war and be forced to prove their loyalty. Though his last letter to Keenleyside in February 1943 focused on the terrible state of education in the internment camps, Best still thought it was unfair that Japanese Canadians were spared personal risk by being refused by the military:

[i]t is manifestly unfair that our sons should take the risk.....and that Canadian-Japanese should be granted the privilege of absolute personal safety, when rightly they should share the common danger<sup>85</sup>

Regardless of Best’s motivations in arguing for Japanese-Canadian service, his support for the cause was unusual even before the attack on Pearl Harbour. After December 1941, anti-Japanese rhetoric increased dramatically, making Best’s argument in favour of military service increasingly difficult to argue. The motivations behind his

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<sup>82</sup> LAC, RG25, vol. 3037, file 4166-40, letter from Captain V.C. Best to Hugh Keenleyside, 27 January, 1942.

<sup>83</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 20 January, 1942.

<sup>84</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 26 January, 1942.

<sup>85</sup> LAC, RG25, vol. 3037, file 4166-40, letter from Captain V.C. Best to Hugh Keenleyside, 7 February, 1943.

argument might have changed after Pearl Harbour, but Best's support for Japanese-Canadian enlistment spanned his letters.

### **Japanese Canadians in the military**

Though his rhetorical strategy changed over the course of the war, Best's support for Japanese-Canadian enlistment spoke to a cause many Japanese Canadians believed in. During World War I, the Japanese-Canadian community in Vancouver worked tirelessly to raise a battalion to serve overseas. Japanese Canadians, like other non-white minorities, believed that military service would lead to franchise. While the Japanese-Canadian battalion was rejected by the Canadian army in 1916, within a few months individual volunteers were invited to enlist and by the end of the war, 185 Japanese Canadians had served overseas.<sup>86</sup>

However, when World War II broke out in 1939, Japanese Canadians had even more difficulties enlisting. Thomas Shoyama, editor of the Nisei newspaper *The New Canadian*, and others were turned away when they tried to volunteer for the armed forces early in the war.<sup>87</sup> By 1941, only a handful of Nisei in BC had enlisted, often after stories of being rejected several times, and approximately 30 had been accepted east of the Rockies.<sup>88</sup> Many Japanese Canadians understood military service as a test for full citizenship and acceptance into dominant Canadian society, an understanding Patricia

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<sup>86</sup> James W. St.G. Walker, "Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," *Canadian Historical Review* 70, no. 1 (1989): 1–26, <http://www.utpjournals.press/doi/pdf/10.3138/CHR-070-01-01>, 6-8, 12.

<sup>87</sup> Roy Ito, *We Went to War: The Story of the Japanese Canadians Who Served During the First and Second World Wars* (Stittsville, Ontario: Canada's Wings, Inc., 1984), 107.

<sup>88</sup> Ito, *We Went to War*, 125-126, 153-156.



Roy explores in her article, “The Soldiers Canada Didn’t Want: Her Chinese and Japanese Citizens:”

Military service is the ultimate test of citizenship. By allowing Chinese and Japanese Canadians to serve in the armed forces, Canada would concede them a claim for equality and for all privileges of citizenship including the franchise.<sup>89</sup>

Many Nisei were disappointed as their attempts to serve were blocked by BC politicians. Though key military leaders were willing to accept Japanese Canadians, provincial politicians cited Japanese expansion in Asia, and by extension potential Japanese-Canadian aggression and subversion, as a threat to Canada.<sup>90</sup> Despite the rejection, some Nisei continued to press their cause throughout the war. Shoyama met with military officials in 1941 to argue the Nisei cause and, in February 1941, the Japanese Canadian Citizens League published a report that claimed their loyalty to Canada and pushed for equal treatment in all regards, including the right to serve. As a result of their activism, by December 1941, the Pacific military command was prepared to suggest that Canada follow the American example and allow Nisei to enlist. On December 17, 1941, representatives from the National Defense, National Defense for Air, National War Services, Royal Canadian Mounted Police and External Affairs met to discuss the service of Asian Canadians, and a memorandum was published listing their recommendations:

3. The following general principles were recognized:

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<sup>89</sup> Patricia E. Roy, “The Soldiers Canada Didn’t Want: Her Chinese and Japanese Citizens,” *Canadian Historical Review* 59, no. 3 (1978): 341–58, <http://www.utpjournals.press/doi/pdf/10.3138/CHR-059-03-03>, 341.

<sup>90</sup> Roy, “The Soldiers Canada Didn’t Want,” 342.

a) No service nor branch of a service nor rank in a service should in principle be closed to any Canadian on the race or colour alone.

b) The practical difficulties of mixing races should receive full recognition; and neither fighting efficiency nor civilian morale should be scarified to the principle of racial equality....

5. Consistently with the general principles set out in paragraph 3 two recommendations were made:

a) Canadians of Chinese, East Indian, and Japanese race should be called on for military training and service at the same time as other Canadians in the same age groups.

b) No unit should be obliged to accept a volunteer of any of these races if it is felt that this would not conduce to the efficiency of the service.<sup>91</sup>

However, within days of the decision, and in the wake of increased anti-Japanese rhetoric following the attack on Pearl Harbour, the military administration changed its mind and decided it could not require officers to enlist Japanese Canadians.<sup>92</sup> All hopes of Japanese-Canadian service were on hold until the end of the war.

As the war was ending, the Canadian government finally began recruiting Japanese Canadians to meet demands from Allied troops stationed in east Asia for translators and interrogators. Nisei responses varied; some, like Shoyama, immediately signed-up with the intent of proving their loyalty. Others, however, were rightly reluctant to leave their interned families and property without knowing their fate.<sup>93</sup> In the end, 119 Nisei enlisted in the Canadian military as linguists, 61 of whom eventually served overseas.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> LAC, RG2 A-5-b, Reel C-4874, "Memorandum: Concerning Military Service for Canadians of Oriental Race," 19 December, 1941.

<sup>92</sup> Roy, "The Soldiers Canada Didn't Want," 344-349.

<sup>93</sup> Roy, "The Soldiers Canada Didn't Want," 354.

<sup>94</sup> Ito, *We Went to War*, 232.

## **Conclusion**

If Japanese Canadians understood military service as an opportunity for full citizenship, this was a view Best certainly shared in his early letters. After the attack on Pearl Harbour, however, Best's letters underwent a shift. It is unclear whether this change was because Best modified his rhetorical strategy to reflect the new realities of Canada's war against Japan or that his opinions on Japanese-Canadian military service did dramatically alter. In part, it depends how we understand Best's worldview: did he reshape his initial convictions, or did his underlying opinions on Japanese-Canadian enlistment change after December 1941? His letters could be read either way, and may be influenced by how we imagine ourselves responding in a similar situation.

## **Origin Stories**

Though the Internet can facilitate new forms of historical representation and information sharing, the medium also has biases that can restrict certain forms of expression. The Internet has immense possibilities for open, democratic knowledge sharing, but its history as a military invention designed in a closed-world network continues to influence the platform today. As historians begin to move our work on to the web, we need to consider this history and move towards open-access digital history.

## **The Web's History**

In his article “Wizards, Bureaucrats, Warriors, and Hackers,” Roy Rosenzweig traces four different founding narratives of the Internet.<sup>95</sup>

1. In the ‘wizards’ narrative, historians tend to focus on the history of the Internet as a group of young, male geniuses who came together to build ARPANET, the first iteration of what would become the Internet.<sup>96</sup> This story, however, downplays the social and political context of ARPANET’s development.

2. In the ‘bureaucrats’ narrative, the emphasis is on ARPANET’s development in the 1960s by US Department of Defense funding contracts that wanted a decentralized communication system in case of nuclear warfare.<sup>97</sup>

3. Building on this, the ‘warrior’ trope more heavily emphasizes the Cold War context from which ARPANET and other communication technologies emerged. As Rosenzweig puts it,

It becomes clear that computer systems were invented for the Cold War, which provided the justification for massive government spending, and were pushed in particular technological directions. But these same computer systems, in turn, helped to support the discourse of the Cold War; they sustained the fantasy of a closed world that was subject to technological control<sup>98</sup>

4. The final narrative explores the social context of the 1960s. Focusing on hackers and “netizens,” a populist account of the history of the internet focuses on bearded grad students influenced by the counter-culture and anti-war

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<sup>95</sup> Roy Rosenzweig, “Wizards, Bureaucrats, Warriors, and Hackers: Writing the History of the Internet,” *The American Historical Review* 103, no. 5 (1998): 1530–52, doi:10.2307/2649970, 1531.

<sup>96</sup> Rosenzweig, “Wizards, Bureaucrats, Warriors, and Hackers,” 1533.

<sup>97</sup> Rosenzweig, “Wizards, Bureaucrats, Warriors, and Hackers,” 1535.

<sup>98</sup> Rosenzweig, “Wizards, Bureaucrats, Warriors, and Hackers,” 1541.

movements of the era. This narrative shows how the internet also belongs in an “open world” discourse that ideologically emphasizes bottom-up development and free speech opportunities. Rosenzweig, however, offers a cautionary note to this tale – “some of them may have had beards, but most were also willing to take Defense Department funding.” Furthermore, most commentary on the early ARPANET were focused on technological questions rather than ideological discussions. By the 1990s, the focus on liberation and free speech evolved into emphasis on libertarianism and free markets.<sup>99</sup>

The narratives all have a few attributes in common – early Internet prototypes were built in male-dominated settings, and military funding drove development. Despite their differences, the narratives also all have implications for understanding the Internet as either an open or closed medium. Though the ‘hacker’ narrative focuses on the democratic, open-access ideals of the Internet, the military aspect and “closed world” discourse of its development still permeate the medium. While no one ‘owns’ the Internet today, it is highly controlled by an oligopoly of Internet service providers, search engines, and for-profit content creators that restrict access.

### **New opportunities**

Though Rosenzweig offers a cautionary note on the history of the Internet, he is also optimistic about its use for open, democratic knowledge sharing. In his article “Can History be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past,” he explores how

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<sup>99</sup> Rosenzweig, “Wizards, Bureaucrats, Warriors, and Hackers,” 1547, 1550.

Wikipedia challenges the deeply individualistic nature of historical scholarship.<sup>100</sup>

Wikipedia operates substantially differently from most historians; it relies on series of unknown authors and is both free to access and free to use. The four main rules for participating enshrine these principles:

1. Wikipedia is only an encyclopedia which means no original research.

Instead, participants summarize conventional opinions.

2. Contributors must respect “NPOV” – no point of view. Even if neutrality is a myth, it is Wikipedia’s founding myth, which Rosenzweig compares to objectivity as the ultimate aim in history.

3. Visitors must not infringe copyright. This means that anyone can freely use the information on Wikipedia as long they do not add any further conditions to the original open access, open use license. Rosenzweig notes that sometimes it is better to have free, imperfect data than restricted, perfect sources.

4. The final rule is simple and preserves a collegial attitude – respect other contributors.<sup>101</sup>

Wikipedia has its own biases, namely that the largest contributor base is men in English-speaking countries resulting in articles disproportionately about Western culture and in English.<sup>102</sup> However, Rosenzweig argues that historians have an obligation share their knowledge in Wikipedia’s open distribution and open production model – “shouldn’t

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<sup>100</sup> Roy Rosenzweig, “Can History Be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past,” *Journal of American History* 93, no. 1 (2006): 117–46, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/stable/4486062>, 117.

<sup>101</sup> Rosenzweig, “Can History Be Open Source,” 121-124.

<sup>102</sup> Rosenzweig, “Can History Be Open Source,” 128.

professional historians join in the massive democratization of access to knowledge reflected by Wikipedia and the Web in general?"<sup>103</sup>

## Conclusion

Historians must actively decide whether their role on the Internet will work towards open-access principles or fall back on the closed-world methodologies of the Internet's founding principles. The Internet has great potential for bringing academics' work to public audiences, but when historians move their research on to the web, they need to make sure they avoid defaulting to paywalled networks that dominate the Internet, and instead choose options that emphasize free and open access to information.

## Contradictions at home and abroad

Though Captain V.C. Best's opinions seem contradictory on topics like Japanese-Canadian military service, loyalty, and internment, Best himself was aware of potential contradictions between Canada's participation in World War II and the treatment Japanese Canadians at home. Though Canada was fighting against Nazi Germany, Best noted that the Canadian government was beginning to implement ideologically similar policies towards Japanese Canadians. Best framed his concerns about this hypocrisy through his belief in British values of justice and fair play against anti-democratic Nazism. Best had four sons fighting Adolf Hitler which might help to explain his unhappiness with proposals that threatened the legitimacy of their cause.<sup>104</sup> More

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<sup>103</sup> Rosenzweig, "Can History Be Open Source," 138.

<sup>104</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 10 October, 1941.

broadly, both prior to and following the internment of Japanese Canadians, Best was highly critical of political actions that did not reflect his conception of true British values.

### **Criticizing anti-Japanese sentiment prior to internment**

Prior to the start of internment in 1942, Best was concerned about un-British sentiments in local politicians. Writing on October 10, 1941 to Hugh Keenleyside, Best worried about the misuse of an unspecified ‘commission,’ perhaps the “Special Committee on Orientals in British Columbia” created earlier that year.<sup>105</sup> He thought it was being used negatively against Japanese Canadians, and he argued that “this is not just – neither is it fair – and neither is it British.” Best was also concerned that a reported plan to deport Japanese Canadians was similar to Hitler’s “high-handed methods.”<sup>106</sup>

As anti-Japanese sentiment increased in the press after the bombing of Pearl Harbour, so did Best’s criticisms of the similarities between Canada and Nazi Germany. With Vancouver Alderman Wilson’s increasing anti-Japanese rhetoric, Best compared the situation in BC to “the initial stages of the Hitler pogrom” and sent Keenleyside several news clippings highlighting similar critical commentary in the press, including the following from unknown newspapers:<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ken Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 190-91. LAC, RG2, vol. 1701, file 2247G, P.C. 117.

<sup>106</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 10 October, 1941.

<sup>107</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 13 January, 1942.



1. An article that quoted the mayor of Vancouver saying that the anti-Japanese ‘rabble-rousing’ was unfortunate, especially since the British have always prided themselves on fair play.<sup>108</sup>

2. A letter to the editor by Malcolm Fukami that analyzed attacks on Japanese Canadians, noting that the attacks were especially bad since they targeted Japanese born in Canada. Building on the idea of British values, Fukami questioned the denial of Japanese Canadians in the armed forces, asking “[i]s this democracy? Is this an example of British justice and fair play?”<sup>109</sup>

3. A letter to the editor by a W.H.H. Norman that noted that “most anti-Japanese protagonists adopt Hitler’s Jew-baiting tricks.” Norman recognized that there might be need for certain restrictions on Japanese Canadians, but concluded his letter with firm support for justice and fair play above all – “[i]f we fight for democracy, liberty and justice, our steps must be based on these ideals even as we take all military precautions.”<sup>110</sup>

These letters shared Best’s disappointment with the lack of British values, suggesting that other British Columbians recognized the contradictions between Canadian actions at home and abroad during the war. The focus here is on analyzing Best’s own worldview, but his opinions on this matter tapped into a larger community of thought on the internment and dispossession of Japanese Canadians.

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<sup>108</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, news clipping “Rabble-rouser is denounced: urges city council not to aggravate situation here,” 13 January, 1942.

<sup>109</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, news clipping, “Malicious, Slanderous,” 20 January, 1942.

<sup>110</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, news clipping, “No Alarm Cause,” 20 January, 1942.

### British values in the era of internment

As anti-Japanese rhetoric increased, Best continued to advocate for adherence to British values, but the context of his opinions changed. Best continued to think that British fair play and justice were paramount, but instead of advocating for the treatment of Japanese Canadians, Best argued for the use of his values in the process of internment. While he had not argued against internment earlier, he had firmly criticized those who were suggesting it.<sup>111</sup> Now writing in favour of internment in mid-January 1942, Best argued that “as to the c.c. camps for Canadian-born – it all hangs on the personnel in [?] as to whether the scheme succeeds or fails, according to British traditions.”<sup>112</sup> Though Best supported internment as the best option for Japanese Canadians, he urged officials to practice British values and traditions even in this context, rather than German ones.<sup>113</sup>

Best did not blindly believe that Canadian governments at all levels would implement internment fairly. In February 1943, Best recommenced his correspondence with Keenleyside after a year’s absence to protest against conditions in the internment camps. After learning that the BC Minister of Education had denied Japanese-Canadian children in camps the right to education, Best argued that if the parents could not pay for it, the federal government should step in and deliver funding.<sup>114</sup> Best felt strongly on

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<sup>111</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 1 January, 1942.

<sup>112</sup> LAC, RG25, vol. 3037, file 4166-40, letter from Captain V.C. Best to Hugh Keenleyside, 15 January, 1942.

<sup>113</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 15 January, 1942.

<sup>114</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 7 February, 1943.

the issue; he called the absence of educational funding an “attempt to outlaw the children,” and it posed a risk for the future,

[opening] the door to the future outlawry of Chinese, Indians, Negroes, Jews or any other minority that happens to displease the ‘powers that be’ in the Legislation of the moment<sup>115</sup>

Best continued to frame his advocacy for funding as a difference between British and Nazi values, arguing that the federal government should pressure the BC legislature to stop acting in ways that “can only be construed as pandering to Nazism.”<sup>116</sup>

Even in the era of internment, Best was part of a larger community attempting to ensure that any government action was determined by British, or Canadian, values rather than Nazi ones. Writing after World War II, sociologist Forrest La Violette explained why the internment of Japanese Canadians took over 9 months:

It was, of course, the expectation of the general public that all Japanese would be picked up and whisked away very rapidly from coastal and valley points. To have accomplished this with the speed expected would have meant doing in in the Hitler fashion. To do it in a Canadian manner meant the acquisition of a housing and general living area until arrangements could be made for more suitable residential accommodations, outside the protected regions. On this basis, the actual evacuation required nine months, from early February through October, involving a total of 21,000 people<sup>117</sup>

## Conclusion

In his letters, Best had a clear idea of how he wanted Canada to act. He was aware that anti-Japanese rhetoric and internment at home could contradict the values that Canada was fighting for abroad. Best wanted to ensure that hypocrisy was avoided

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<sup>115</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 7 February, 1943.

<sup>116</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 7 February, 1943.

<sup>117</sup> Forrest E. La Violette, *The Canadian Japanese and World War II: A Sociological and Psychological Account* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948), 63.

through a firm implementation of British fair play and justice in programs that had the potential to be Nazi-esque. It is difficult not to pass moral judgment on Best's support for internment under certain conditions, but we also have to move past it to understand him and his views more fully.

## Forrest La Violette

Though my analysis of Captain V.C. Best's letters focuses on understanding him, there is a slim literature on people we could also understand as bystanders or witnesses to the internment and dispossession of Japanese Canadians. Elsewhere, I explored how Hugh Keenleyside, Frederick Mead, and Kishizo Kimura navigated the era. Adding to this small sample of notable contemporaries is Forrest La Violette, an American-Canadian sociologist who specialized in Japanese-American communities prior to World War II. Modern analysis of La Violette suggests he was a figure as complicated and contradictory as Best. La Violette's writings suggest that he and Best shared some opinions, but the different contexts of their work places them in separate historical categories that complicate direct comparison.

### Who was Forrest La Violette?

In his book, *After Camp: Portraits in Midcentury Japanese American Life and Politics*, Greg Robinson provides a brief background on La Violette. La Violette trained as a sociologist at the prestigious University of Chicago, focusing on race relations.<sup>118</sup> In the mid-1930s, he moved to Washington state where he became familiar with the local

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<sup>118</sup> Greg Robinson, *After Camp: Portraits in Midcentury Japanese American Life and Politics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), 31

Japanese-American community, working with Nisei, second-generation, sociologists and contributing to the local Nisei-American newspaper.<sup>119</sup> When World War II broke out in 1939, La Violette was still living in Seattle but he moved to Montreal in 1940 and was teaching at McGill University when Canada and the U.S. declared war on Japan. La Violette initially contributed to the war effort by volunteering as a radio trainer for the Royal Canadian Air Force, but his relationship with Japanese Americans and Canadians was complicated. Despite his strong ties to the community in Seattle, La Violette said nothing publicly when Japanese Americans and Canadians were removed from the west coast.<sup>120</sup> In 1943, La Violette took a leave from McGill and joined the American War Relocation Authority as an internment camp administrator, but he saw himself firmly as “an intermediary, trusted by both sides, between the camp administration and the Japanese ‘residents,’ someone who could facilitate communication and communal stability.”<sup>121</sup>

Despite his attempts to stay publicly neutral, by 1944-45, La Violette unofficially began supporting several organizations that were combatting government discrimination against Japanese Canadians.<sup>122</sup> However, his attitude remained inconsistent. Even though his academic expertise and personal connections were focused on Japanese communities, La Violette essentially stopped writing about

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<sup>119</sup> Robinson, *After Camp*, 32-33.

<sup>120</sup> Robinson, *After Camp*, 33-35.

<sup>121</sup> Robinson, *After Camp*, 36.

<sup>122</sup> Robinson, *After Camp*, 41.

Japanese Americans after 1949 and he even remained silent on redress in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>123</sup>

Because of these contradictions, Robinson is unsure what to make of La Violette; he was familiar and friendly with Japanese-American and Canadian communities, yet his silence during the war complicates an understanding of him as an ally. Robinson concludes that

out of his interest in the abstract question of resettlement, and perhaps also his fear of alienating orthodox academics by political activism that could appear to slant his work, he remained aloof from overt political activity, despite his behind-the-scenes presence in the fight to protect Japanese Canadians from post-war deportation. Worse, he remained an outspoken apologist for official confinement of ethnic Japanese, even as concerned citizens in both nations deplored the wartime policy and the former inmates campaigned for reparations. Still, both for its qualities and for its ambivalences, La Violette's work merits further study<sup>124</sup>

Robinson is interested in better understanding La Violette, but not all academics share that curiosity. In her book, *Cartographies of Violence: Japanese Canadian Women, Memory and the Subjects of Internment*, Mona Oikawa is highly critical of La Violette's work on Japanese Canadians. Instead of attempting to understand him, Oikawa dismisses La Violette as an example of a 'liberal subject' that worked to mask the violence of internment.<sup>125</sup> In Oikawa's understanding, La Violette commended the federal government's presence in internment camps while ignoring aspects of internment that were highly disruptive and unjust.<sup>126</sup> While Oikawa is entitled to her

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<sup>123</sup> Robinson, *After Camp*, 41. For information about the redress movement in Canada, see Miki, *Redress*.

<sup>124</sup> Robinson, *After Camp*, 42.

<sup>125</sup> Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence*, 2, 10.

<sup>126</sup> Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence*, 27-28.

own reading of La Violette, La Violette's work, like Best's letters, resists such easy typecasting.

### **The Canadian Japanese and World War II: A Sociological and Psychological Account**

La Violette's book, *The Canadian Japanese and World War II: A Sociological and Psychological Account*, expresses the contradictions and complications that interest Robinson. Published in 1948, La Violette's book traced the internment, dispossession and forced repatriation of Japanese Canadians. Grounded in a history of racism that far pre-dated World War II, La Violette examined the federal government's policies on Japanese Canadians during and immediately following World War II. In addition to examining the motivating causes and explanations for government policy, La Violette also provided an analysis of Japanese-Canadian experiences, from being held in barns in Hastings Park to the breakdown of the Japanese-Canadian community because of their forced dispersal.

While La Violette may not have spoken out directly against the processes of internment and dispossession, the book's introduction frames his work as a reminder to future Canadians of the dangers of such actions. The introduction was written by H.F. Angus, a government official and UBC academic long sympathetic to Japanese-Canadian causes during World War II. Angus' introduction says that La Violette made no attempt to pass judgement on the Canadian government's war time policy, but his language suggests much the opposite.<sup>127</sup> Angus praised the book for enabling other Canadians to "know what it has meant to be for five years a displaced person in your own land,

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<sup>127</sup> La Violette, *The Canadian Japanese and World War II*, v.

dependent on strength of character alone for the survival of self-respect” and encouraging them to ask what democracy means in Canada: can the majority impose rule on a minority, to the point of expelling them, or is democracy the mass recognition of an obligation to personal rights?<sup>128</sup> Angus even went as far as to point a finger at British Columbians who vehemently pushed for uprooting:

Even if we decide that our political ideals require that law-abiding minorities should suffer no discrimination on grounds of race, there remains a further question to be answered: How should society deal with intolerant local minorities which say that they are likely to resort to violence if they are not allowed to exclude from their occupations or their neighborhood a group which they dislike?<sup>129</sup>

Angus’ introduction politicized and contextualized the book by asking Canadians to reflect on what they wanted in their future and their country, and forcing them to face complex questions about the nature of democracy and rights.

### **Comparisons to Captain V.C. Best**

In the book itself, La Violette took a measured approach to his topic, both criticizing and accepting decisions made by the federal government, but he accepted few of the biases that drove anti-Japanese sentiment. Commenting on the initial process of internment, La Violette remarked "it was not, as suggested by the editorial above [in the book], a result of the conduct of the Japanese people in Canada. It was, rather, brought about by attitudes towards the Japanese which had been established long before the war."<sup>130</sup> Rather than accepting that the blame for anti-Japanese policies

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<sup>128</sup> La Violette, *The Canadian Japanese and World War II*, vi.

<sup>129</sup> La Violette, *The Canadian Japanese and World War II*, vii.

<sup>130</sup> La Violette, *The Canadian Japanese and World War II*, 36.



rested on well-founded fears of their potential disloyalty, La Violette connected this period to a longer history of racism in Canada.

However, La Violette appeared to accept some restrictions on Japanese Canadians. Describing the pre-February 1942 policies of the federal government, including the partial removal of Japanese citizens from the coast, La Violette called it a period of “more stringent but still moderate policy” that was influenced by the number of Canadians being held under Japanese control in the Pacific after December 1941.<sup>131</sup> La Violette argued that what followed the announcement of a complete ‘evacuation’ on February 26 was a failure of moderate government policy, writing that “these failures were a defeat for numerous Canadians of Japanese ancestry, and for the more liberally-minded citizens of the province [of British Columbia] and of Canada.”<sup>132</sup>

Like Best, La Violette accepted certain forms of internment but was highly critical of others.<sup>133</sup> As Robinson notes, such opinions confound readings of La Violette, and Best by extension, as an ally of the Japanese-Canadian community. While Best and La Violette’s conflict sets of opinions suggest an easy comparison, there are several key differences in context between the two that place them in different analytical categories.

Simply put, La Violette was not a ‘bystander’ to the history he was writing, as Best was. La Violette remained publicly quiet during the war and did not publish his research on Japanese Canadians until three years after it ended. Though most Japanese

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<sup>131</sup> La Violette, *The Canadian Japanese and World War II*, 44.

<sup>132</sup> La Violette, *The Canadian Japanese and World War II*, 50.

<sup>133</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 27 January, 1942.

Canadians were still barred from returning to the coast and a Royal Commission was still assessing how to handle Japanese-Canadian property, the book was published in a substantially different climate than the one in which Best was writing. As Patricia Roy notes in her book, *The Triumph of Citizenship: The Japanese and Chinese in Canada, 1941-67*, with the end of World War II there was an increased interest in human rights and awareness of what had happened during the war years.<sup>134</sup> This change in political climate likely made La Violette's study less controversial and potentially damaging to his career than if it had been published during the war.

The timing of La Violette's work does not diminish its importance, but it serves to highlight how much more exceptional Best's letters were. Best's letters are witnesses to the history they covered. Best wrote in the moment without the benefit of hindsight, without a historical record to reference, and without the backing of an academic institution. Best wrote as a private citizen, though one with military connections that facilitated his introduction to Hugh Keenleyside, and he wrote as it happened, sending letters nearly twice a week from December 1941 to February 1942.<sup>135</sup> Though his letters share some ideological similarities to La Violette's work, and are equally complicated and contradictory, Best's position as a witness to internment and dispossession places him in an historical category far different from La Violette's measured, academic analysis.

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<sup>134</sup> Roy, *The Triumph of Citizenship*, 186.

<sup>135</sup> LAC, Captain V.C. Best (R.O.). LAC, RG25, vol. 3037, file 4166-40, letter from Colonel H. Desrosiers to Dr. Skelton, 14 January, 1941.

## Contradictions in Best's letters

Reading Captain V.C. Best's letters, it is easy to call them contradictory because of seemingly conflicting statements Best made about Japanese-Canadian enlistment, loyalty, and internment. Many of these contradictions appear in his letters after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 as Best's opinions underwent a substantial shift. However, we can try to understand these contradictions by finding underlying assumptions that guided Best's worldview. Three of Best's main tenants seemed to be:

- A belief in justice and fair play
- Acceptance of state intervention into civilian life during an era of war
- A rejection of the assumption that Japanese Canadians were

fundamentally different from Euro-Canadians

Finding ideological continuity in Best's letters is a way to bring a framework of meaning to the apparently contradictory statements.

### **Before December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941**

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 marked a turning point in Best's opinions on Japanese-Canadian military service and loyalty. Prior to the attack, Best supported Japanese-Canadian efforts to enlist and believed in their allegiance to Canada. Best wrote to Hugh Keenleyside in October 1941 asking him to lobby Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King for the fair treatment of Japanese Canadians:

Would it be possible to draw the attention of Prime Minister Mackenzie King to these facts in order that this harrying of a Canadian minority may cease? Surely he will heed a call for British justice!<sup>136</sup>

Best followed this up with a letter directly to the Prime Minister later that month, advocating for Japanese Canadians in the military, citing their on-going commitment to the war effort as proof of their loyalty: "I am convinced that the Canadian-Japanese would be loyal if enlisted – their monetary donations, Red Cross work, subscriptions to the War Loan etc – attest this fact."<sup>137</sup>

In addition to arguing that Japanese Canadians should have the opportunity to prove allegiance through enlistment, Best also disputed blanket stereotypes about their loyalty. Best researched the dual citizenship of some Salt Spring Island residents and found that many Canadian-born Japanese Canadians had dual citizenship simply because their parents had registered them for it, rather than because of their own choice. Best urged the government to deal with dual citizens individually, rather than making generalized assumptions about all Japanese Canadians because of their purported racial characteristics, saying that "to get a true perspective [on dual citizenship and loyalty], individuality must be considered and contact must be made with individuals."<sup>138</sup>

Lastly, though Best did not mention internment prior to Pearl Harbor, he was already highly critical of politicians like Alderman Wilson who would later lead calls for the forced removal of Japanese Canadians from the coast. Best worried about the

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<sup>136</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 10 October, 1941.

<sup>137</sup> LAC, Best to Mackenzie King, 26 October, 1941.

<sup>138</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 24 February, 1941.

implications stereotyping and political propaganda for the fair treatment of Japanese Canadians. He argued that this problem had to be solved by starting with the politicians as “matters can only become worse as this political persecution is allowed to continue.”<sup>139</sup>

### **After December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941**

After Canada declared war on Japan following Pearl Harbor, Best continued to think Japanese Canadians were loyal. However, in an increased state of warfare, that loyalty had to be proven. Reflecting on ways to test loyalty in this context, Best argued that

the closer the problem is scrutinized, the more apparent it becomes that enlistment is the sieve through which all Japanese, naturalized and Canadian-born should pass. Those who do not pass this [?] process can and should, be accommodated in Internment camps. This also applies to all other nationalities with whom the ABCD are at war<sup>140</sup>

This passage suggests that Best accepted state intervention into the lives of all Canadians with ‘enemy’ nationalities. However, Best went further than just suggesting ways of proving loyalty – he actually tested the loyalty of a few Japanese Canadians who lived on Salt Spring. Best wrote Keenleyside on February 24, 1942 about his test, coincidentally the day that the federal government passed order-in-council PC 1486 which allowed the Minister of Justice to remove “any or all persons” from “protected areas” along BC’s coast.<sup>141</sup> Best reported interviewing the Okano family and testing the father’s loyalty. After outlining Mr. Okano’s possessions – “the largest truck, the fastest

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<sup>139</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 24 February, 1941.

<sup>140</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 5 January, 1942.

<sup>141</sup> LAC, RG2 A-1-a, vol. 1749, file 2512G, P.C. 1542.

speed boat and the largest (short wave) radio on the islands” – and his wealth, Best was suspicious:

Frankly, I was dissatisfied with him – and in order to convince myself of his loyalty, I asked him to turn over his boat to me to use as an emergency 'crash boat' to aid RCAF planes in the sea. He gave it to me at once subject to my getting permission from the Custodian<sup>142</sup>

Why Best felt the need or right to do this is unclear—it marked a significant departure from his previous role as a bystander or, at most, an information gatherer. Best provided little justification for the action and did not reflect on what authority he had to undertake such a test. In later letters, Best did not dwell on the situation, he does not say if his concern about Mr. Okano’s loyalty was resolved, and the incident is omitted from subsequent communication.

Just as he equivocated on questions of loyalty, Best strongly protested against Wilson’s call for a “ghetto” for all people of Japanese origin while also accepting internment as the only “solution” to the “problem.”<sup>143</sup> Best seemed to have two main reasons for supporting internment:

1. as a place for Japanese Canadians whose loyalty remained in question
2. as a safe place for all Japanese Canadians away from the potentially violent anti-Japanese sentiment on the coast.<sup>144</sup>

Best even told Keenleyside that internment was something that Japanese Canadians wanted:

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<sup>142</sup> LAC, RG25, vol. 3037, file 4166-40, letter from Captain V.C. Best to Hugh Keenleyside, 24 February, 1942.

<sup>143</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 5 January, 1942.

<sup>144</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 5 January, 1942.

The Japanese are settling down to the view that safety lies away from the coast. If they stay here – they get killed by the Japanese for their loyalty to Canada. If one Japanese were caught assisting the enemy – they would be killed by the Canadians. Between two fires!<sup>145</sup>

What Japanese Canadians wanted is not the subject of this analysis, but rather this comment demonstrates how Best understood his support for internment to be different from Wilson's anti-Japanese reasoning. Best's acceptance of internment but under certain conditions, like his belief in Japanese-Canadian loyalty makes him a complicated figure and difficult to understand either as an 'ally' of the Japanese-Canadian community or as an anti-Japanese agitator like Wilson.

### **Uniting worldview**

In trying to explain the contradictions in Best's opinions on Japanese-Canadian military service, loyalty and internment, we have to try to understand what assumptions united all of his thoughts. This is more important than framing him as pro- or anti-Japanese because we have to understand what framed his worldview before we can even begin to conclude he was anything beyond a 'bystander.' Analyzing these contradictions, Best seemed to have three key underlying assumptions.

#### **A firm belief in British justice and fair play**

As explored further elsewhere, Best firmly supported British justice and fair play. In implementation, this is likely why Best supported internment as a solution to a problem, but was also critical when it violated his sense of its ideal process. In his last letter from February 1943, Best criticized the BC Minister of Education's proposal to

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<sup>145</sup> LAC, RG25, vol. 3037, file 4166-40, letter from Captain V.C. Best to Hugh Keenleyside, 3 February, 1942.

deny Japanese-Canadian children the right to education. While he did not specifically mention British values, Best called for the federal government to prevent the BC legislature from acting in ways that “can only be construed as pandering to Nazism.”<sup>146</sup>

### **An acceptance of state intervention into civilian life during times of war**

Underlying his acceptance of internment in the first place, Best more broadly accepted state intervention into civilian life during wartime. As explored above, Best believed the government, and himself, had the right to test loyalty and to intern those who did not pass, but this had to be applied equally to all Canadians of ‘enemy’ nationality.<sup>147</sup> Best did not accept the discriminatory treatment that Japanese Canadians received after Canada declared war on Japan while other Canadians with ‘enemy’ nationalities were not treated similarly, arguing “why only Can-Japs? Why not Can-Germans, Italians, Austrians, etc?”<sup>148</sup>

To Best, government intervention was to be expected, but racial or ethnic background only mattered as a reflection of realities in times of war – suspicions about potential enemies or fear of sabotage were acceptable, but only if Canadian governments were equally critical of all of Canada’s enemies.<sup>149</sup>

### **An opposition to understandings of Japanese Canadians that viewed them as fundamentally different from Euro-Canadians, especially by various levels of government**

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<sup>146</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 7 February, 1943.

<sup>147</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 5 January, 1942.

<sup>148</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 24 February, 1942.

<sup>149</sup> LAC, RG25, vol. 3037, file 4166-40, letter from Captain V.C. Best to Hugh Keenleyside, 26 January, 1942.



In Best's emphasis on similarities between nationalities at war rather than stereotypical attributes of certain 'races,' he set out analytical categories that differed fundamentally from the politicians he protested against. Instead of accepting that Japanese Canadians were intrinsically incapable of being loyal to any country other than Japan, Best broke down the "Asiatic" vs. "European" binary that characterized the era by being equally suspicious of everyone and highly critical when Japanese Canadians were treated differently.<sup>150</sup> Best acknowledged that it must have been difficult for Japanese Canadians to even consider being loyal to Canada after the discrimination they had faced, writing that "loyalty must come hard after the discrimination against them in which no other enemy aliens are involved."<sup>151</sup>

Building on his criticism of the internment camps, Best's belief in the fundamental similarities between Japanese Canadians and other Canadians, and the government's obligation to respect this, explains why Best argued that Japanese Canadians in internment camps still had a right to receive the same educational opportunities as other British Columbians. Best called the BC government's refusal to fund internment camp education an "attempt to outlaw the children," a cowardly act that

open[ed] the door to the future outlawry of Chinese, Indians, Negroes, Jews or any other minority that happens to displease the 'powers that be' in the Legislation of the moment.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Roy, *The Triumph of Citizenship*, 8-9.

<sup>151</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 5 January, 1942.

<sup>152</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 7 February, 1943.

Best argued that the federal government should intervene to put a stop to discrimination that could set a precedent for the treatment of racial minorities in the future.<sup>153</sup>

### **Conclusion**

These three fundamental assumptions in Best's worldview do not resolve all of the contradictions in his letters and are likely not the only beliefs that motivated him. However, this analysis provides a starting point for understanding why Best wrote, what he wrote, and how he conceived of his own actions by providing a structure and internal logic to his letters. What we can conclude is that when the Japanese-Canadian community was treated in ways that conflicted with his core values, Best was willing to speak strongly and to lobby officials for fair and just treatment in a time of war.

### **Website as prototype**

This project, by design and because of time constraints, is a prototype – an informed prototype that begins to explore concepts related to digital history and narrative theory, but one that has room to grow and develop in the future. While this sounds like the project is unfinished, the process of prototype building is an important research effort itself. In their article, "How a prototype argues," Alan Galey and Stan Ruecker contend that a prototype is a valid form of argument and outline five conditions that a prototype must meet to be considered rigorous scholarship:

1. The argument being made must be refined, defensible, and substantial

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<sup>153</sup> LAC, Best to Keenleyside, 7 February, 1943.

2. The prototype must take a position
3. The prototype must be part of a series of prototypes in a moving trajectory
4. The prototype must address possible objections
5. The prototype must be an original contribution<sup>154</sup>

If it meets these five requirements, then the digital prototype is at a stage where it can be peer reviewed, and, by extension, realized as a piece of scholarship.

Galey and Ruecker frame their argument using Langdon Winner's idea that "artifacts have politics."<sup>155</sup> This concept suggests that no object is without biases and assumptions that help to determine who interacts with it and how. As an example, Galey and Ruecker share Winner's observations of city planners who created plans for highway overpasses that were too short for buses. This limited transportation options in the suburbs and, consequentially, ensured that only people who could afford cars lived there.<sup>156</sup> Similar to the plans for the overpass, a digital prototype as an artifact is designed with a set of conscious decisions that inform how the prototype functions, privileging certain aspects over others. This set of decisions by designers creates an argument, and Galey and Ruecker's framework shows how to evaluate that argument.

Using their rubric, I evaluated my website to see if it meets all five points, and if not, what are the implications?

1. The argument being made must be refined, defensible, and substantial

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<sup>154</sup> Alan Galey and Stan Ruecker, "How a Prototype Argues," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 25, no. 4 (2010): 405–24, <https://llc-oxfordjournals-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/content/25/4/405.full>, 405.

<sup>155</sup> Galey and Ruecker, "How a Prototype Argues," 406.

<sup>156</sup> Galey and Ruecker, "How a Prototype Argues," 406.

Yes, there is an argument articulated in my project, both implicitly and explicitly. Implicit in my project is an information architecture substantially different from the historical narrative that encourages visitors to follow associative connections through the material rather than chronological ones. I have also described the theoretical underpinnings explicitly in a series of short essays on the shape of history, narrative theory and the origin stories of the web. While the key focus of my writing is analyzing Best's letters, this secondary argument is articulated in my writing and the form the website takes.

## 2. The prototype must take a position

Galey and Ruecker do not fully outline what taking a position means, but that my prototype makes an argument is the first step. My intentions are to see what can happen when historians move away from publishing their articles on the web to utilizing internet features to create 'born digital' narratives.

Though I have done several informal environmental scans of digital history projects, I have not undertaken a formal review to show how my website is substantially different from what already exists. In some regards, this would be nearly impossible because of the multitude of projects out there, but I have used guides such as Daniel Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig's *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web* to see what standards digital history projects typically use and notable examples.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Daniel J. Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web*, n.d., <http://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/index.php>.

3. The prototype must be part of a series of prototypes in a moving trajectory

This point does not easily apply to my project as an honours thesis and may make more sense for a prototype that is part of a larger grant or long-term research project where there is time to make several iterations of a prototype. This prototype certainly builds on my earlier digital history papers and projects, but not as a conscious development of an on-going theme.

However, the prototype is connected to the Landscapes of Injustice project, which will be looking at this example as they build their own digital narratives of dispossession. Furthermore, this project has gone through several iterations during the building process, from a simple information structure, to a working draft, and finally into the final project here.

4. The prototype must address possible objections

In the limited space I have, the prototype has addressed possible objections by reflecting on the history of historical writing. Some may argue that a website is no longer a 'history' in the conventional sense, but research into historical representations shows that the form of history has been evolving since the first historians and continues to change today as new stories are being told in new ways. Understanding the evolution of narrative form allows new approaches to be understood as part of a continuing process, rather than an unprecedented rejection of convention.

5. The prototype must be an original contribution

The number of historians experimenting with digital history has grown, including several historians at UVic. However, it is uncommon at the undergraduate level and at first glance, many projects seem to be historical narratives that do not explore how the web is changing the form of history.

### **Conclusion**

While my project tenuously meets some of Galey and Ruecker's points, I argue that it can be scholarly reviewed and may benefit from not rigidly adhering to peer review standards. As an undergraduate student, this is my first attempt at building something new, rather than relying on pre-existing conventions or formats. Working at the undergraduate level allows me freedom to be creative and experimental without having to meet traditional publication expectations. Evaluation metrics are still necessary, and Galey and Ruecker's five points have acted as guiding principles as I wrote and built, but this project is an experiment and any future iterations will further the scholarship of this initial prototype.

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