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Landscapes of beauty and plunder: Japanese American flower growers and an elite public garden in Los Angeles

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Abstract
In 1942, Los Angeles newspaper publisher Elias Manchester Boddy purchased the nursery stock of at least three Japanese-owned nurseries. Two grower families, the Yoshimuras and the Uyematsus, were forced to sell their life's work prior to their indefinite incarceration by the U.S. government during the Second World War. These plants, including rare and unique breeds of camellias, became the basis of what is now Descanso Gardens, a celebrated public garden. In this article, I examine Boddy's transactions as an instance of racial plunder: a morally and affectively inflected act of theft structured by racism that is as much about the act's preconditions and afterlives as it is about the act itself. Using archival research, oral histories, and interviews with family members, I foreground the experiences and perspectives of the Japanese American families across multiple generations and landscapes, rather than a single perspective and defining moment. In doing so, a story emerges involving alternative worldviews forged through and superseding racism and dispossession as well as heterogenous relationships to land not dictated by capitalist logics. In detailing the specifics of the transactions, this work also challenges the silences and misrepresentations that exculpate those who benefited from Internment.

Keywords
Plunder, racial capitalism, landscape, gardens, Japanese American Internment, Southern California

Introduction

Los Angeles County's Descanso Gardens is a 165-acre expanse of graceful oaks, camellias, roses, and azaleas that sits in the suburb of La Cañada Flintridge at the foothills of the San

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Gabriel Mountains. It was the former estate of newspaper publisher E. Manchester Boddy, and since the 1950s, has been owned by the city of Los Angeles. Boddy's former home, a 22-room mansion that overlooks the oaks and camellias, is open to the public and contains wall panels explaining the history of the house and property.[1] In the timeline, a phrase from 1942 leaps out, describing "the moment that forever defined Descanso": the purchase, by Boddy, of the stock of two nurseries run by Japanese immigrants: Star Nurseries, headed by Francis Miyosaku Uyematsu; and Mission Nursery, headed by Fred Waichi Yoshimura. According to former Executive Director David Brown, "If Mr. Boddy had not purchased those camellias from the Uyematsu and Yoshimura families, there would in all likelihood not be a Descanso Gardens for the public to enjoy today" (Mori, 2015). Today, Descanso Gardens is home to one of the largest camellia collections in the world (Mori, 2015) and has been recognized by the International Camellia Society as one of the premier camellia gardens anywhere. Each year, as many as half a million camellias bloom simultaneously for the enjoyment of hundreds of thousands of visitors (Thompson, 1962: 9) (see Figure 1).

The wall text in the Boddy House continues: "Combining opportunism and compassion, Boddy provided Uyematsu and Yoshimura with reasonable compensation for their life's work." In a large panel, these transactions are similarly described as "the decisive moment," in which Boddy paid a "fair market price." Elsewhere, in Descanso Garden's official publications and in newspaper articles on the topic, the same narrative is repeated over and over: that Boddy paid "a fair price" for the "life's work" of these two nurserymen and their families (e.g. Brenner, 2013; KCET, 2017; Lawler, 2015; Mori, 2015). The impetus for these dramatic sales was, of course, the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans in the spring following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. The Uyematsus and Yoshimuras were among 120,000 Japanese Americans living on the West Coast of the United States who had to liquidate their belongings in a matter of weeks or even days before being confined in settings such as race track horse stables and hastily constructed barracks, and then in massive detention camps in remote landscapes.

Widely circulated narratives not only celebrate Boddy's generosity, but also characterize the relationship of the Japanese growers to Boddy as one of gratitude. But what constitutes

Figure 1. Family among the camellias at Descanso Gardens, 1950s. Source: Courtesy of Descanso Gardens.

a fair price for a life's work, in such a context? How is the liberal notion of "fairness" itself a fictive impossibility in a capitalist economy that depends upon the production and exploitation of difference?[2] And what do we make of a site created for public consumption that is predicated on the extraction of value from displaced and incarcerated Japanese American families?[3] In this article, I examine the story instead as an instance of racial plunder: a morally and affectively inflected act of theft structured by racism that is as much about the act's preconditions and afterlives as it is about the act itself. I ask: How does an analytical lens of plunder help us to understand the landscape in different ways? How do such relationships and histories endure in the landscape and why does it matter? Using archival research, oral histories, interviews, conversations, and correspondence with descendants of the two families, I turn the usual story upside down in order to examine its roots, soil, and rhizomatic undergrowth (cf. Glissant, 1997): to see it through the experiences and perspectives of the Japanese American families—the Uyematsus and the Yoshimuras—and through multiple landscapes, rather than only the ostensible perspective of Boddy and a sole defining moment. As critical ethnic studies scholars have pointed out, tracing violent histories of dispossession compels us "not merely to write and think about but also to see, smell, and feel the violence, beauty, dissonance, and desire that undergird the formation of material and political landscapes" (Critical Ethnic Studies Editorial Collective, 2016: xiv–x). In doing so, a story emerges involving alternative worldviews forged through and superseding racism and dispossession as well as heterogenous relationships to land not dictated by capitalist logics. In naming and detailing the specifics of the transactions, this work also challenges the historical silences and misrepresentations that both implicitly and explicitly exculpate those who benefited directly from Internment.[4]

Plunder, dispossession, and Internment

As a verb, plunder connotes theft—typically coercive or forceful—during a time of war or disorder. In this sense, it differs from plain theft or stealing because of its connotation of taking advantage of larger structural or historical conditions. It also connotes the taking of creative or intellectual property "for one's own purposes." As a noun, plunder refers to "the violent and dishonest acquisition of property," or to the property itself that has been acquired in that way (New Oxford American Dictionary). From a historically informed perspective, however, the immorality of plunder cannot be conflated with illegality. In fact, as Ugo Mattei and Laura Nader (2008) point out, the law has operated hand in hand with "a several-hundred-year-old system of Euro-American expansion and domination based on extraction and plunder . . . " (7). In this regard, beginning from the European colonial legal doctrine of *terra nullius*—justifying the occupation of "empty lands that are not empty" (Mattei and Nader, 2008: 4)—the law has worked as "powerful ideology concealing plunder" that has "provid[ed] for continuity in oppression rather than interruption of the colonial practice" (3). Indeed, history shows that white supremacist and settler-colonial states have been instrumental in actively creating the ostensibly "disordered" conditions of being (for Indigenous and racially othered peoples) on which plunder depends.

Marxist and Indigenous studies scholarship on settler colonialism and dispossession have provided a rich intellectual baseline for thinking through plunder. In the Marxist literature, the concept of primitive accumulation articulates the initial seizure—of land and resources—upon which both capitalism and colonialism are founded. The idea of "accumulation by dispossession," elaborated by Rosa Luxemburg (1973) and David Harvey (2004), points out that this initial act is in fact repeated over and over in order to foster further cycles of exploitation and profit. Rob Nichols (2015), in an incisive analysis, brings together Marxist

scholarship with Indigenous studies, pointing out that while a common critique of dispossession states that "dispossession" assumes already existing proprietary relationships, in fact, both Marx and Indigenous studies scholars articulate dispossession as transformative: a forcing of alternative and heterogenous relationships to land into a single proprietary, capitalist logic (cf. Bhandar, 2018; Moreton-Robinson, 2015). This is the epistemological and ontological violence that comes with and compounds the material and embodied violence of dispossession. In this sense, "land" is not an object but demarcates a unique social relationship: "land stands in . . . for the foundational relationship to the original means of production as provided by the earth itself" (Nichols, 2015: 23). Therefore,

> To speak of dispossession as an element foundational to the production and reproduction of the capital relation is, therefore, to indicate something of the ways in which capitalism disrupts or disturbs our orientation in space, our place-based relations. This basic point has important implications for any theoretical analysis of the specificity of political struggles mediated primarily through relationships to the land, belying any simple reduction to questions of property and theft. (Nichols, 2015: 23)

Cultivating the land as an agriculturalist has implicitly and explicitly connoted white settler citizenship since the founding of the United States (Goldstein, 2018; Wald, 2016). But what kind of relationship to land, what kind of consciousness and worldview, are created when one's relationship to the land is constantly compromised, mediated, and denied? What is learned from labor without possession; from dispossession (in the transformative sense that Nichols identifies as emerging from Indigenous studies)?

A focus on plunder builds upon these conceptualizations of dispossession by foregrounding the personal, moral, and affective dimensions of historical dispossession writ large. Plunder puts the moral onus on those who benefited and places the act of theft in a larger set of structural or historical conditions. Plunder is not only about theft of property and profit, but (1) the conditions that made those possible and (2) the simultaneous and ongoing plunder of knowledge and culture which, in addition to wronging marginalized individuals and groups, obscures ways of being and "modes of relationship" (Karuka, 2019) that do not conform to capitalist and colonial logics. Examining the Descanso story through the lens of plunder helps us to see Boddy's purchase of the camellias—and indeed, Internment itself—as not an isolated event, but part of an enduring structure (to paraphrase Patrick Wolfe's (2006) succinct observation about settler colonialism)[5]. In mainstream historiography, the Second World War incarceration of Japanese Americans is treated as a mistake caused by racist hysteria, an exceptional blip in a national history that is just and good at its core. Following this logic, President Ronald Reagan's 1988 apology to Japanese Americans and "redress" from the United States government in the form of $20,000 checks to survivors of the camps appear to provide acknowledgment and closure. However, as Naomi Paik (2016) argues, this narrative obscures how the logic of Internment—the logic of the camp—is in fact foundational rather than exceptional to the formation of the U.S. nation state.

Internment reiterated the logics of settler colonialism and racism, building from and enacting dispossession, exclusion, removal, and containment. Prior to the "moment" of Internment, an accumulation of racist laws and practices in the decades prior to 1941 (e.g. racially exclusionary citizenship, restrictive Immigration laws, and alien land laws) created conditions of "group-differentiated vulnerability" (Gilmore, 2006) through which Japanese could (and would) be dispossessed, incarcerated, and exploited en masse (cf. Hong, 1999; Okihiro and Drummond, 1991). In addition to the psychic, emotional, and physical

traumas of indefinite detention, economic losses for Japanese Americans as a result of their incarceration are estimated to be from $1 to $3 billion (not adjusted for inflation) (Taylor, 1991). According to Greg Robinson (2009), "An estimated 75% of Japanese Americans removed from the West Coast lost all their property, and everyone lost something" (169).

As early as 1913, only a year after the passage of California's alien land law, assessing the effect of that law and other racist land tenancy schemes, Issei scholar Yamato Ichihashi observed, "All these systems were initiated by white farmers for their own convenience and economic gains to them were thus secured" (quoted in Okihiro and Drummond, 1991: 170).[6] The concentration of Japanese in farming and gardening was in itself a product of a racist, segmented labor market that severely limited occupational choices. The further concentration of Japanese in truck farming and flower growing derived from their precarious access to land and the necessity of choosing crops with short growing cycles. Further, Japanese were often restricted to marginal and undesirable land, and charged a racial rent premium—as of 1920, paying an average of 2.3 times, and as much as 5 times, as much as white farmers in CA, for less desirable land—all the while making improvements that increased the value of the land for the owner (Okihiro and Drummond, 1991).

By 1941, over 200 Japanese flower growers made up just over half of the total number of flower growers in the LA area and produced over half of the products sold in a year. However, they were particularly vulnerable to plunder: immediately prior to the war, due to the racist land tenancy laws, some 90% of them operated on leased land. Ultimately, according to geographer Noritaka Yagasaki (1982), "some ninety percent of Japanese nurseries in the Los Angeles area were taken over by whites, almost always at severely reduced prices" (304). As the white Western Growers Protective Association put it in February 1942, "the alien Japanese element are going out of the wholesale produce trade in Los Angeles, and many of the large farms are on the market for a few cents on the dollar" (Okihiro and Drummond, 1991: 171). In the five months that elapsed between the attack on Pearl Harbor and the mass evacuation and incarceration of Japanese Americans in April 1942, the majority of Japanese-run florists went out of business (Yagasaki, 1982: 301).

In 1942, E. Manchester Boddy, the wealthy publisher of the Los Angeles *Daily News*, was known as "a friend to the Japanese" and was one of a handful of white public figures in Los Angeles who had long been willing to speak out in support of Japanese in the United States (Sasaki, 1939; *Rafu Shimpo*, 1941a,1941b, 1941c, 1941d). He was also an avid plant enthusiast who, in addition to the Uyematsu camellias and Yoshimura nursery, took over at least one other Japanese-owned nursery on the eve of Internment: that of the Yokomizo family of San Fernando. Just as FM Uyematsu was a specialist in camellias, the Yokomizo family specialized in ranunculus; patriarch George Morizo Yokomizo was known as the "king of ranunculus," having successfully hybridized award-winning varieties (Hirahara, 2004: 110). The fact that Boddy was involved in such arrangements with at least three families—all of whom were well-known, highly skilled, and respected nursery operators—suggests that he rather systematically sought out such opportunities, rather than being motivated by personal sympathy for one or two families (more on this later).

'A Fair Price': Narrative and the racial naturalization of plunder

Marxist thinkers have long observed the dialectical relationship between ideology and the material conditions of being. Material conditions, such as political, economic, and social structures, are naturalized and justified by ideology—as well as resisted and contested—through representations such as narratives, images, and other cultural productions. Everyday landscapes constitute a nexus, terrain, and dynamic product of this dialectic.

Writing about the "connection between the material production of landscape and the production of landscape representations," geographer Don Mitchell (1996) has pointed out that it is only through an "'exercise of imagination' that . . . work and its products [become] knowable" (1–2). Therefore, struggles over representation are also struggles over social hierarchies of power, over visibility and belonging, over who and what are known or even seen at all. Seen in these ways, the story of Boddy's transactions with the Uyematsu's and Yoshimura's is in need of much closer examination. As a historical account of a foundational moment for Descanso Gardens, what work does the story do as a representation of material relationships in the making of that landscape?

As much as the "fair price" language is repeated, the actual details of the sale are shrouded in mystery—often, it seems, willfully so. For example, the Descanso wall text states the number of camellias involved in the transaction as "either 60,000 or 100,000," and that "the record varies." However, within a couple weeks of research, I was easily able to find numerous reliable accounts that put the number of camellias purchased by Boddy from Uyematsu alone at 300–320,000 (Uyematsu, "My Life"; War Relocation Authority, n.d.; Williams and Thompson, 1950). According to Uyematsu's wartime business correspondence, Boddy paid $50,000 for the lot, or 15.5 to 16.6 cents per plant. It's difficult to say exactly how this price compares to pre-war market values for camellias. However, as early as 1908, Uyematsu reported selling camellias for 50–65 cents per plant (at a production cost of 12 cents each); during the war, the Star Nurseries manager reported selling a dozen camellia plants for $3, or 25 cents each (Uyematsu, "My Life"; War Relocation Authority, RW Augspurger to FM Uyematsu, 22 April 1844). According to Yoshimura family records, Boddy purchased an additional 34,200 camellia plants and over 50,000 azaleas from them, among other plants; for their entire nursery stock, he paid approximately a fifth to a quarter of its estimated value.[7] In other words, while more than "a few cents on the dollar," in each case, Boddy's "fair price" was still just a fraction of the value.[8] Given that in the weeks and months preceding their Internment, most Japanese farmers and nursery operators in California sold at 10% or less of their agricultural holdings' value (Broom and Riemer, 1949), Boddy's prices were probably *relatively* better. "Fair price," however—even "fair market price"—leaves unsaid that the price in question was fully within the context of a rapacious buyers' market created by state-sponsored racism and dispossession. As Yagasaki (1982), puts it, "All business transactions were conducted in an abnormal market. Outright criminal practices, such as fraud, confidence rackets, and the impersonation of police, were rampant" (320; also see Broom and Riemer, 1949).

So where does this "fair price" language come from? During a day sorting through Descanso Gardens' archives with the help of their part-time archivist, I traced the "fair price" language at least as far back as a 1961 term paper on the history of Descanso Gardens in their archives, by Donald Finch. Finch was then a student in Professor Emmett Greenwalt's Western history seminar at Los Angeles State College of Applied Arts and Sciences (later California State University, Los Angeles). For his information on this topic, Finch interviewed Boddy himself as well as the Superintendent of the Gardens at the time, John Threlkeld. In Finch's words:

> When World War II came and the Japanese-Americans were forced to move to relocation centers, Manchester Boddy and a friend of his . . . Charles Stone Jones, President of the Richfield Oil Corporation, purchased the remaining stocks of camellias from the Japanese nurserymen.

Finch (1961) does not mention any of the "Japanese nurserymen" by name, but goes on to assert that, "A fair price was paid for these thousands of Camellia plants which might have

otherwise died" (19). He continues: "Many of them were used in experimentation and grafting new varieties. It has been estimated that at one time there were up to 600,000 Camellia plants in Descanso Gardens" (Finch, 1961). If Finch's estimate is correct (for which he cites Threlkeld), the Star Nurseries and Mission Nursery camellias together would have constituted 60% of Boddy's camellia stock at its height, and the Star Nurseries camellias alone would have been over half.

The unnamed "Japanese nurserymen" are not mentioned before or again besides those two sentences. Always named in Descanso's telling of their camellia history, however, is Howard Asper, the camellia expert Boddy hired in 1941 who oversaw the planting of the Uyematsu and Yoshimura camellias at Descanso Gardens. According to Finch (1961), it was "Through his [Asper's] services" that "the Gardens contain a Camellia planting second to none in the world" (19). Asper, along with Walter Lammerts, is consistently credited for the experimentation in camellias and development of new varieties at Descanso.

Asper (1988) published his own account of the 1942 Star Nurseries sale in *The Camellia Review*:

> On March 1, 1942, Mr. Boddy and I drove over to the nursery to see the plants. We were amazed to see the thousands of camellia plants ranging in size from twelve inches to eight feet. Mr. Boddy asked the price for the lot and immediately decided to buy. Without any bargaining or hesitation he wrote a check for the entire amount asked. When he handed his check to the Japanese owner his oriental face lit up with smiles and tears filled his eyes. (4)

Although Asper (1988: 3), a camellia expert, was "amazed" by Uyematsu's plant collection—earlier in the same essay, Asper notes that Boddy's estate had in its possession only 300 camellia plants so far—Uyematsu is never recognized as an individual with a name, much less one of the leading camellia importers and cultivators in the United States with a nursery business that had by then been established for over 30 years. By contrast, in Japanese horticultural circles, Uyematsu was widely known as "the camellia king" (Interview with Saburo Ishihara, 27 July 2019). To Asper, however, he is only a "Japanese owner" whose "oriental face" fills with smiles and grateful tears at Boddy's benevolence.

Beyond an insult to an individual's life work, the abstraction of FM Uyematsu to one of many undifferentiated "Japanese nurserymen" and his reduction to an "oriental face" fits within a racist colonial logic to naturalize the appropriation by Boddy and Asper of Uyematsu's labor, property, and knowledge. To return to the analytical framework of plunder, Sarita See (2017), examining the coloniality of knowledge in museums, has pointed out that the concept of *terra nullius* works hand in hand with what can be called "knowledge nullius," or the presupposition of epistemological vacancy. Building upon the work of Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Goenpul) and Lorenzo Veracini, See observes, "Knowledge does not count as such until it is individuated and appropriated." To put it more bluntly, knowledge nullius is the "idea that there was no knowledge until [individual] whites came along" (See, 2017: 48). The problem for racial others, of course, is that in the terms of modernity dictated by white supremacist, settler-colonial nation states, they do not register as individuals and therefore cannot properly or rightfully lay claim to anything, including knowledge.

The persistence of the "fair price" narrative for decades after the sale shows how the racialization of the Uyematsus and Yoshimuras as undifferentiated, grateful Asians precluded institutional actors and researchers again and again from seeing any other historical possibility. Indeed, innocence—or rather, ignorance on the basis of a lack of available information—cannot really be claimed in this case. It is not as though other accounts of the transaction were not available. In contrast to the Finch and Asper accounts, which have

been the most widely disseminated, a detailed 1950 article by Frank D. Williams and Roy T. Thompson, published in the *American Camellia Society Yearbook* and carefully researched for over a year by its authors, tells a much different story. The date of the sale is stated as 22 February 1942—not 1 March, as in Asper's account—and Asper is not mentioned. Williams and Thompson concur with Finch that Boddy visited Star Nurseries with his friend, Charles S. Jones, president of the Richfield Oil Company, who was also an amateur camellia collector.[9] While Boddy "got the bulk of the named varieties" (including dozens of the "best varieties obtainable at the time" imported from Japan in 1930), Jones "got a certain number of seedlings as yet unnamed." The seedlings in question referred to some "60 new camellia seedlings" Uyematsu had been cultivating privately and deemed "worthy of propagation" (Williams and Thompson, 1950: 42). At that point, Uyematsu had named only one of the seedlings: "My Darling," in reference to his daughter Marian (Williams and Thompson, 1950: 45; Marian Uyematsu Naito Interview, 2008) and released only one other to an outsider. Williams and Thompson (1950) write, "Mr. Uyematsu had no wish to sell the seedlings at all, but as some of them were in bloom at the time the buyers insisted that they be included in the sale" (42). In contrast to Asper's narrative of smiles and tears of gratitude, of the sale, Uyematsu himself had this to say: "I was very sad to have to part with my seedlings which I had nursed for over 12 years" (Uyematsu, "My Life"). As for the "fair price," Marian Uyematsu Naito (2008), FM Uyematsu's daughter and Star Nurseries' bookkeeper after the war, recalls how it was spoken of in the family:

> to hear my brother [Francis G. Uyematsu, who ran the nursery after his father] tell it, it was more like . . . I don't want to use the wrong words. But we probably didn't get, you know, what they were actually worth . . . he [Boddy] got 'em for a song.

Boddy later acquired many of the seedlings initially sold to Jones and propagated them at Descanso. He also named many of them, implicitly taking credit for their development. Nowhere in Descanso Garden's literature is Uyematsu's creative labor and intellectual property acknowledged. In the American Camellia Society article, Williams and Thompson list 17 varieties, the majority of which were sold in the 1942 transaction, which should be attributed to Uyematsu. They conclude:

> [I]t becomes clear that Mr. FM Uyematsu, through Star Nursery, has made an outstanding contribution to American camellia varieties, and it is one of the purposes of this article to give him the recognition he is entitled to and which is long overdue.

However, they qualify that "it should be remembered that it [the list of 17 varieties] is not only incomplete but that further additions of fine camellias will be added to it" (Williams and Thompson, 1950: 47). To my knowledge, however, in the nearly seven decades since Williams and Thompson's article, no further work has been done to trace the provenance of the Descanso Gardens camellias acquired in the 1942 transaction.

The repetition of Finch's "fair price" language, Asper's sketchy account of the sale in 1988, and Descanso Gardens' vague interpretive signage on the topic to date show that although more detailed information has long been publicly available, the story of Boddy as a sympathetic benefactor during an anomalous event has been chosen again and again as the preferred version. In fact, available evidence shows Boddy to be a hardheaded and perhaps vindictive businessperson, regardless of historical circumstances that he himself, as a newspaper publisher and public figure, had repeatedly condemned as unjust. During the war,

correspondence held in Uyematsu's War Relocation Authority case file yields an account of an annoyed Boddy attempting to drive Star Nurseries out of business because of various dissatisfactions with the camellia deal. In a letter to Uyematsu dated 22 April 1944, acting manager RW Augspurger (admittedly himself not necessarily a trustworthy source, in Uyematsu's eyes) presented a detailed account of Boddy's ire:

> Mr. Boddy has been underselling us at the market and to the dealers for the past several months . . . [at] one third of our selling price. Our customers continue to buy from us even in the face of these ridiculously low prices. (War Relocation Authority, n.d.)

Next, according to Augspurger, Boddy purposely interfered with Star Nurseries' regular sales of azaleas and gardenias to Sears Roebuck by offering a lower price for those flowers. Augspurger concluded:

> I am sure that you can readily appreciate that with his supply of camellias, gardenias and azaleas and his attitude toward you and Star Nursery that the outlook for this nursery is not a favorable one . . . . The fact that we have been outselling his organization in our particular lines of course treads upon his ego. (War Relocation Authority, n.d.)

The experience of the Yokomizos, the third Japanese flower grower family whose nursery was taken over by Boddy prior to Internment, supports this view: as previously mentioned, prior to the war, George Morizo Yokomizo was known as the "king of ranunculus." When faced with Internment orders, all he could do was ask his wife, Chiyoko, and their four children (Akio, Susumu, Hideo, and Fusae), each to carry one or two packets of the precious seeds in their suitcases en route to Manzanar. The rest of the plants were "left with Manchester Boddy" (Hirahara, 2004: 110). Yokomizo and Boddy made an arrangement for Boddy to lease the Yokomizos' nursery land and operate the nursery at cost for three years, with an option to purchase the land for an agreed-upon price during those three years. Boddy also agreed not to sell any of Yokomizo's proprietary variety of ranunculus. In January 1946, however, Boddy sued the Yokomizos, freshly returned from camp, for not turning the land over. He further alleged that because of this, he had missed an opportunity to sell the land himself for three times the price he had agreed to pay the Yokomizos and demanded that they fully compensate him for this lost opportunity (*Downs v. Yokomizo*, 1947). The Yokomizos countered that Boddy had not fulfilled the agreed-upon lease terms and therefore rendered the rest of the agreement void (*Rafu Shimpo*, 1946). George Morizo Yokomizo further countered that Boddy had violated the agreement regarding the ranunculus and was selling Yokomizo's proprietary variety in Mission Nursery—the nursery Boddy had purchased from the Yoshimuras. After nearly a year and a half of litigation, the case was dismissed just days before the trial date, suggesting that Boddy and the Yokomizos were able to settle it out of court. While I am still searching for further details about this case and Boddy's relationship with the Yokomizos, Boddy's willingness to sue them for their land plus damages—like his willingness to undersell the Uyematsus while they were interned in Manzanar—shows that Boddy was not restricted by any kind of sentiment of benevolence, but bent on getting what he felt he deserved out of a business deal. His belief that he, not the Yokomizos, should rightfully profit from a threefold increase in the value of the land from 1942 to 1945 expressed not only a lack of moral compunction but a sense of entitlement to profiting from structural racism. His further denial that Yokomizo had any proprietary claim whatsoever to the ranunculus variety Yokomizo had developed—set against the claim that he was selling that variety in a nursery purchased from another

interned family—showed a willingness to profit from the negation of others' intellectual property claims.

Although the Yokomizo–Boddy story shares many similarities with the Yoshimura and Uyematsu stories, it is conspicuously absent from histories of Descanso Gardens and biographies of Boddy. It's possible that in the particulars of the arrangement, the Yokomizos had no direct connection to Descanso Gardens. Whatever the reasons, including the Yokomizo case alongside the Uyematsus makes the story of Boddy as a liberal benefactor all but impossible to tell. As Mona Oikawa (2012) points out, Internment shaped not only its Japanese subjects but "was also constitutive of white people who participated in its far-reaching processes. Part of this process . . . entailed obfuscating and forgetting its effects and harms, that is mnemonic processes that produced both the subjects forgetting and the subjects forgotten" (22). Oikawa (2012) elaborates:

> The construction of history through a liberal temporal discourse minimizes the violence of the Internment. The forgetting of that violence is, in fact, a continual process of remembering in ways that exonerates those who inhabit the present and negates complicity in the processes of domination . . . upon which present privilege is founded. (54)

'She never said she was lucky': Submerged perspectives in the landscape

In the official company history of the San Gabriel Nursery, the same "fair price" story is told, but with a key one-word difference: "Mr. Boddy purchased the business, including the nursery stock . . . at a fair *enough* price . . . ." (San Gabriel Nursery website; emphasis is mine). This measured assessment decenters Boddy and refocuses the story on the Yoshimura family.

In the early 1930s, Fred and Mitoko Yoshimura's Mission Nursery in San Gabriel employed over 60 employees and the business was doing well. Fred Yoshimura was a member of the San Gabriel Chamber of Commerce and a leader in the local Japanese American community. Along with scores of other Japanese community leaders, he was taken away by FBI agents the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, leaving Mitoko Yoshimura—a former maid who learned the nursery business on the fly after she got married—alone to deal with the chaos and loss of the months to come, a time so stressful that she developed ulcers (Interview with Mary Ishihara Swanton, 30 May 2018). For decades afterward, Mitoko Yoshimura recalled being harassed night and day by predatory would-be purchasers—some of them from local nurseries—who pressured her to sell in the months before Boddy came, making offers so low they were "ridiculous." According to family members, she sold to Boddy because he told her he was a fair person with a reputation to uphold, but beyond that she did not say anything else about the sale. "She never said, 'I was lucky to [have] sold to Manchester Boddy,' " said her son-in-law, Saburo Ishihara (Interview with Saburo Ishihara, 27 July 2018).

Boddy's "fair enough" payment—paid in installments—did enable them to pay off the lease on the former Mission Nursery property and purchase the new land across the street after the war (San Gabriel Nursery Website, n.d.). However, beyond this, even within the family, there was mostly silence on the matter. According to Ishihara, in all the years he knew Fred Yoshimura—as both his manager and son-in-law—Yoshimura "never" said a word about Boddy and Descanso Gardens.

The Yoshimuras' various measures and rather terse accounts of the exchange trouble the celebratory single narrative put forward by Descanso Gardens. They point to the more complicated, "submerged perspectives" percolating underneath the surface of dominant narratives that gloss over, erase, or ignore histories of structural inequality and their lasting effects (Gómez-Barris, 2017). In fact, for the Yoshimuras, the instance of purchase by Boddy was not a defining moment, but rather one moment in a lifetime filled with many such moments, during which family members were forced to be both resilient and creative in order to survive. Although they valued their family business and made certain decisions accordingly, the Yoshimura family history also evidences a consistent assertion of values not wholly dictated by the state or capital, with a clear-eyed commitment to local and transnational community-building. Before the war, they were deeply rooted in San Gabriel with close horizontal ties to their Japanese American, Mexican American, and Tongva/Gabrielino neighbors and employees, and these continued after the war. They built community in local and transpacific ways, turning the nursery property into a temporary shelter for other Japanese American families coming back from detention camps, and participating in a Japanese agricultural trainee exchange program for several decades. The nursery became a regular stop for Japanese horticulturalists visiting the United States, and both Fred Yoshimura and Ishihara were well-known and well-regarded in horticultural circles when they in turn visited Japan (Interview with Saburo Ishihara, 27 July 2018).

In the 1990s, when the city of San Gabriel was courting Wal-Mart and threatening the nursery with eminent domain, the family hired a condemnation attorney and collected tens of thousands of signatures of support from customers. According to Mary Ishihara Swanton, granddaughter of Fred and Mitoko and chief financial officer of the Nursery, "Having to fight the city . . . made us more aware of what our place in the community was . . . ." (Interview with Mary Ishihara Swanton, 30 May 2018). "We told them [Wal-Mart] we weren't interested. It was really a simple decision, because what our company generates is way more than what you'd get from selling the land. It just wouldn't make sense to do something like that" (quoted in San Diego Source, 1998).

Almost 20 years later, however, in 2016, due to changes in the nursery industry and dwindling interest from younger family members, the Yoshimuras did decide to sell the majority of their San Gabriel land: a 5-acre parcel adjacent to the 2-acre lot on which their nursery still operates today. Swanton carefully vetted the potential buyers, choosing not the highest offer, but a developer she felt would be mindful of community input and the history of the site (Interview with Mary Ishihara Swanton, 30 May 2018). When a fire broke out on the lot in February 2018 and destroyed multiple greenhouses, a nursery representative publicly mourned the structures as "a notable part of our business and history," noting that "[m]any plants that are still alive and thriving in our community were propagated and nurtured in these structures over the years" (San Gabriel Nursery Facebook page, n.d.). The mourning of the structures and the lives, labor, and knowledge they housed and nurtured evokes "forms of life that cannot be easily reduced, divided, or representationally conquered or evacuated" (Gómez-Barris, 2017: 4): an alternative set of values and relationships to land that the Yoshimuras were able to put into practice for nearly a century.

Star Nurseries: "I think I'm going to be sick"

While the Yoshimuras were able to rebuild their nursery and retain control of their family legacy, the story of the Uyematsus is quite different. As already mentioned, in the spring of 1942, FM Uyematsu, the proprietor of Star Nurseries, was one of the leading camellia purveyors in the United States. During the 1930s, Star Nurseries and the family's fortune

flourished: they held elaborate cherry blossom viewing parties each spring at the Sierra Madre location, and their children were driven to school in the family car by their driver. In addition to the 7 acres in Sierra Madre, they owned 5 acres in Montebello as well as a newly purchased 120 acres in Manhattan Beach, which Uyematsu referred to as "the Manhattan Beach estate."

Within a few years, however, the family's fortunes turned completely. Late in 1941, one of their sons, Starr (Kunio)—named after the nurseries—died at 16 in a freak accident. The attack on Pearl Harbor followed. In the spring of 1942, the massive camellia sale to Boddy and Jones took place. Uyematsu tried to control the conditions of his family's incarceration as well as he could by proffering a donation of 1000 cherry and wisteria trees to the Manzanar camp (Burton, 2015; Hirahara, 2017); presumably as a result, they were sent to Manzanar, rather than Heart Mountain, where most families from Los Angeles were assigned (Naito, 2008). During their time at Manzanar, he applied for and received special leave at least once to travel to Los Angeles to attend to the business. Regardless of Uyematsu's efforts, however, the business went steadily downhill. After the family friend they had initially asked to run it turned the business over to their former bookkeeper, a man named RW Augspurger, the financial problems deepened, despite Uyematsu's continuing attempts to manage the business through copious correspondence from Manzanar (War Relocation Authority, n.d.). A Japanese-language biography of Uyematsu written in the 1970s strikes an unambiguously bitter note about what happened:

> Uyematsu was forced to leave the management to his book-keeper (Caucasian-American), who was from his [the book keeper's] point of view an 'enemy alien.' The nursery served so well for lining the book keeper's pockets, and as a result, Uyematsu ended up with a huge deficit from it. He had no choice but to give up the nursery after all. (Takeda, 1975)

In 1953, Uyematsu himself wrote tersely:

> After going to the relocation center many things happened to the nursery business. Two years and eight months later, we found that our nursery business was run down, and even up to 1950 we were not able to bring the business up to our pre-war standards. ("My Life as a Nurseryman")

Beginning in 1944, Uyematsu had to start selling off pieces of his beloved Manhattan Beach estate: between April 1944 and June 1945, he sold six parcels accounting for two-thirds of his total land. Two years later, in 1947, one of the Uyematsu daughters, Alice (Kumiko), died at the age of 23 in a sanitarium of tuberculosis she had contracted at Manzanar. The same year, Uyematsu sold the last 40 acres of the Manhattan Beach property to the Redondo Beach Unified School District for $60,000, 40% less than the district had budgeted for land for a new high school (Currier, n.d.). The local newspaper's headline lauded the purchase as a "$60,000 Bargain" (*Daily Breeze*, 1947). By 1950, a portion of the Uyematsu's former Manhattan Beach "estate" became the site of Mira Costa High School. Through the generations, as the land values in Manhattan Beach skyrocketed, the sale did not sit well in the historical memory of the Uyematsu family. In a 2017 essay in the *Rafu Shimpo*, granddaughter Mary Uyematsu Kao wrote:

> Always an unspoken tension between my folks, Sunday drives down Pacific Coast Highway would abruptly sour the pleasant outing as we would near Manhattan Beach. My mother would say, 'I think I'm going to be sick—' and Dad would turn us back toward home.

However, she continued, "My understanding of Nursery Grandpa's 120 acre Manhattan Beach property never went much further than these memories" (Kao, 2017). While the details had dissipated, a bitter taste remained.

FM Uyematsu retired in 1951 and turned the business over to his son, Francis Genichiro. After only a year, however, by December 1952, the Montebello Unified School District (MUSD) was eyeing the Uyematsu's Montebello land to expand the immediately adjacent high school. Within a month, MUSD superintendent John Whinnery and business manager George Schurr were negotiating with the Uyematsus.[10] The district purchased the property for $56,000, "a purchase price considerably lower than the appraised value"[11] and agreed to the continued use of the property for an additional two years. The acceptance of a "considerably lower" price in return for being able to stay longer was meant to allow for the smooth transfer and consolidation of the Montebello plants and trees to Sierra Madre (Uyematsu, "My Life"). Yet again, the sale did not sit well in family memory. Speaking to writer Naomi Hirahara in 2002, Francis G. Uyematsu said, "[The city] threatened eminent domain and said that it would go to a public court in which the jury would be white, and the city would win" (Hirahara, 2004: 176).[12] In 1953, in a time of rapid expansion, MUSD purchased several properties. In none of the other purchases was the negotiated price less than the appraised value; in one case, the owner argued for—and got—a slightly higher price than the appraised value. While I cannot speculate further about the dynamics and motivations involved, what can be objectively stated is the following: In 1942, the Uyematsu family owned approximately 132 acres of land in three locations across Los Angeles County, and their business was thriving. Within just over a decade, all but the 7 acres in Sierra Madre was gone. In 1963, the Sierra Madre property, too, was sold—this time to a developer, Richter Builders. According to Francis G. Uyematsu, "the city of Sierra Madre told the Uyematsus that they needed to sell the nursery because they were changing zoning laws" (Hirahara, 2004: 176). In a third real estate encounter in which the state was involved (in this case the local government of the city of Sierra Madre, where the family had numerous encounters with hostile racists over the years), the transaction left a bitter taste.

Ultimately, the Uyematsus lost their land for three reasons: financial duress due to Internment; exploitative opportunism by individual white men enabled by the state; and because in each case, their land was in the path of postwar suburban development and vulnerable to the threat of eminent domain. Because pre-war alien land law restrictions had created the need for Japanese-farmed land to be close to urban markets, this was a common outcome for the relatively few who had managed to hang onto their land during the war (Yagasaki, 1982). After all of their compounded losses, some families managed to profit from land sales in the long run, but many others, like the Uyematsus, did not.

'Those who love plants cannot be nurserymen'

In 1952 or 1953, having just retired and with the sale of the Montebello land imminent, in a memoir essay called "My Life as a Nurseryman," FM Uyematsu reflected: "A professor in a horticultural college in America is said to have made the following statement: 'Those who love plants cannot be nurserymen.' I consider myself a lover of plants and not a nurseryman." He concluded with a description of the legacy of cherry trees he hoped to leave in the landscape:

> I love plants and among those the flowering cherry tree is the one closest to my heart. I have nourished my flowering cherry trees for over twenty years. I am 71 years old now and I have reached the stage where I must give my plants to somebody who loves cherry trees.

> So after serious consideration, I donated my trees to the city of Los Angeles. I donated 50 trees which were over 20 years old. They are all planted at the entrance of Griffith Park in Bronson Canyon. There are seven kinds of cherry trees planted there. I hope these trees will grow and remain as a memory to an old man who loved them. (Uyematsu, "My Life") (see Figure 2)

In doing this, Uyematsu echoed official efforts by the Japanese government nearly 50 years earlier to assuage the disastrous effects of racist United States policies in what can be considered a form of horticultural diplomacy: the gifting of 2000 cherry trees to Washington, D.C. in 1909, in the aftermath of the anti-Japanese "Gentlemen's Agreement." As Philip J. Pauly (1996) details, a nativist United States Department of Agriculture officer made a "thoroughly political" decision to have the trees burned on the grounds that they were infested with dangerous immigrant pests (51). Undeterred by the "horticultural auto da-fé," the Japanese government "countered experts with experts" and sent a second shipment that was approved this time by USDA officials and planted in 1912 "around the Tidal Basin, along the Potomac, and on the White House grounds, 'as a living symbol of friendship between the Japanese and American peoples'" (Pauly, 1996: 52, 67–68). More than 100 years later, "the annual displays [of cherry blossoms] are more spectacular than ever" (Pauly, 1996: 73). The initial intended symbolism of the trees, that the blooms each year "would symbolize the enduring friendship between the Japanese and American peoples," became "ironic and even embarrassing" during the Second World War. Ultimately, however, by "sponsoring the planting of their own varieties within sight of the Washington Monument," Pauly (1996) argues that the Japanese "were linking themselves to American stories in ways that no one could fully predict" (73).

Unfortunately, the city of Los Angeles had neither the resources nor expertise to care for Uyematsu's beloved cherry trees, and they died in a matter of years. However, Uyematsu's

Figure 2. FM Uyematsu and Kuniko Uyematsu with donated cherry trees in Bronson Canyon (Griffith Park), Los Angeles, in 1953. Source: Courtesy of Uyematsu Family.

horticultural legacy remains—in addition to the camellias at Descanso Gardens—in another place: in the high desert of Manzanar. In the plans for the opening of the Manzanar Historic Site, National Park Service-funded archaeologists worked to exhume the plans and layout of Cherry Park, where Uyematsu's donated cherry trees were planted 77 years ago. They planned to plant cherry trees there once again, and center an interpretive site around the trees and park. However, the National Park Service may choose to interpret the site, the cherry trees stand "as a memorial to the Issei long after they are gone from this world," as Uyematsu wrote in another essay (Uyematsu, "The Cherry Blossom"). They also stand, I argue, as a marker of submerged perspectives and alternative relationships to land. Neither Uyematsu nor agents of the state ultimately controlled the trees: even during the incarceration period, Uyematsu noted that at least one other camp resident stole a tree for their own purposes and enjoyment (Burton, 2015: 164); after the camp was closed, local Inyo County residents reportedly transplanted remaining trees to their own yards (Burton, 2015: 88). Rather than stable signifiers of culture, friendship, and beauty, then, the trees are clues to oppositional landscape histories (cf. Mitchell, 1996) that instruct us to understand landscapes as sedimentations of social relations[13] and histories of racial plunder that bear bitter, defiant, and unexpected fruits.

Conclusion

In the summer of 2019, Descanso Gardens took down the historical display at the Boddy House in order to temporarily redecorate it as a "Pasadena Showcase House of Design." The Gardens' Curator of Education, Emi Yoshimura (no relation to the San Gabriel Nursery Yoshimuras), took advantage of the opportunity to change the signage. As of fall 2019, the signs showcasing Boddy's "fair price" were gone. Instead, visitors were now greeted with a KCET "Lost LA" video on the history of the gardens. In the library, visitors could now peruse firsthand the 1950 American Camellia Society article that detailed the Uyematsu sale and credited Uyematsu with the camellia varieties he had developed himself. Also prominent in the library was a large framed document dated 1939 and detailing the "chain of title showing the principal transfers of the Ranchos San Rafael and La Cañada . . . through which the land of E. Manchester Boddy and Berenice Boddy was deraigned from the King of Spain." Through 36 transactions, one sees the passage of ownership from the King of Spain through Spanish and Mexican land grants; from landholding Californio families to Anglo settlers; and finally, to the Boddys, in the late 1930s. The chain of title shows the colonial legacy of this "public" land, occupied and cultivated for thousands of years by Indigenous Tongva peoples, and made beautiful by the largely unacknowledged and ongoing intellectual and material labor of marginalized people. Below the house, under the intricate canopy of California live oaks, the camellias remain, having outlived the hands that first cultivated them: a testament to both beauty and plunder.

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Notes

1. The signage was created and installed in 2008 under the directorship of then Executive Director David Brown. Prior to that none of Descanso Gardens' official literature mentioned the Uyematsus or Yoshimuras (Phone conversation with Robin Sease, former Manager of Visitor Education and Services at Descanso Gardens, 16 July 2018; McCarthy, 2006).
2. Here, I paraphrase Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2015) insight that "capitalism requires inequality and racism enshrines it."
3. I thank Juan De Lara for emphasizing this particular point.
4. Mona Oikawa (2012) has identified this issue as one of Internment's lasting harms.
5. Settler-colonial "invasion is a structure not an event" (Wolfe, 2006: 388).
6. Scholars of Japanese American incarceration have long characterized the Japanese experience in the US as an experience of racial domination and internal colonialism (Daniels et al., 1991). While this is accurate in many respects, Eiichiro Azuma (2005) has shown that Japanese American experience in the United States should be understood more comprehensively as a transnational history of identity and social formation.
7. Private family records, viewed during interview with Mary Ishihara Swanton (30 May 2018).
8. For a different approach to determining a fair price under comparable circumstances, we can consider Janice Marion Wright La Moree's (1990) account of her father, lawyer J. Marion Wright's, purchase of a Japanese-owned hog ranch:

   > One of [Wright's clients] owned a hog ranch in Artesia, California. All his assets were tied up in the land and stock. There was no one to care for the hogs while he was away. He wanted to sell out but could find no one to buy on short notice without lowering the price drastically. Wright decided to help him out by purchasing the ranch in partnership with a man who had agricultural experience. In order to insure a fair price, Wright insisted on three appraisals, two from private appraisers and one from the War Relocation Authority. (58)
9. Presence of Jones is also confirmed in Uyematsu's "My Life" and by Jones himself in a letter he wrote to the War Relocation Authority on Uyematsu's behalf in 1945 (Pasadena Digital History Collection).
10. MUSD Board of Education meeting minutes, 22 January 1953.
11. Ibid.
12. The facts related by Francis G. Uyematsu here do not quite square up to the official record: in Hirahara (2004: 176), the date is listed as 1962 and the price is $53,000. However, how Uyematsu remembered and felt about the transaction is the more significant point.

13. Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro, quoted in Pulido (2000: 16).

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