

JAPANESE LATIN AMERICANS

Group Task

Read the following background information about Japanese Latin Americans and the article "Stealing Home," by Leah Brumer. Discuss the questions listed after the article. The article is about a former Japanese Peruvian, Arturo Shibayama, who was among the 2,264 Japanese Latin Americans deported to and interned in the United States.

Using these readings and handout 4-7b: *Photographs of Arturo Shibayama*, develop a poem for your group's photograph.

Background Information

During World War II, 2,264 members of the Japanese community in Latin America (issei, nisei, and some Latin American women married to Japanese) were deported to and interned in the United States. Many of the Japanese Latin Americans (1,799 of the total) were from Peru. The U.S. government forced their migration over international borders and their internment in U.S. Department of Justice internment camps. Most of the Japanese Latin Americans were interned in a former migrant labor camp at Crystal City, Texas. They were interned for several reasons: their race; their influential roles as community leaders, farmers, or businesspeople; anti-immigrant sentiments; and their perceived threat to Allied interests. This was all done without indictments or hearings.

More than 800 Japanese Latin Americans were included in prisoner-of-war exchanges with Japan that took place in 1942 and 1943. The remaining Japanese Latin Americans were interned until the end of the war. Because their passports were confiscated en route to the United States, these internees were declared "illegal aliens," and during the war they were told that they would be deported to Japan or to Japan-occupied territories.

More than 350 Japanese Peruvians remained in the United States and fought deportation in the courts with hopes of returning to their homes in Peru. At first, the Peruvian government refused to re-admit any Japanese Peruvians, even those who were Peruvian citizens or married to Peruvian citizens. As a result, between November 1945 and June 1946, more than 900 Japanese Peruvians were deported to war-devastated Japan. Eventually, about 100 Japanese Peruvians were able to return to Peru. It was not until June 1952 that the Japanese Peruvians who stayed in the United States were allowed to begin the process of becoming permanent residents. Later, many became U.S. citizens.

"STEALING HOME"

by Leah Brumer

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When Arturo Shibayama's father heard that police in Lima, Peru, were scouring the city for men with Japanese surnames, he fled his home and went into hiding. To flush him out, the police took Arturo's mother instead. When his father emerged, he and his family were told they were being deported. Carrying bags packed in haste, they were herded to the port and onto the U.S. Army transport ship *Cuba* along with hundreds of other Japanese. Their passports were confiscated. Food they'd prepared for the journey was taken and tossed overboard. Women and children got cabins on deck. Men were sent below to the hold. With soldiers on board brandishing whips and machine guns, destroyers and submarines escorted the ship and its 339 passengers out of Lima.

Twenty-one days later the *Cuba* docked in New Orleans. Ordered to strip naked, the passengers were sent to a warehouse and showered with insecticide. They were ordered to produce passports and, naturally, none could. Immigration officials then informed them they were in the U.S. illegally. They were put on a train, windows tightly covered, destination unknown. Some passengers feared they were riding to their death.

The year was 1944. Around the world, people were streaming across borders, fleeing bombs, scrambling for safety. But when police pushed 13-year-old Arturo Shibayama onto a U.S. Army transport leaving Lima, he was snatched from a nation at peace and delivered to one at war. Once in the U.S. his family—parents and five Peruvian-born brothers and sisters—were sent to Texas and locked up in a wartime internment camp. Finally released in 1946, they were stranded—stripped of country, belongings, security and hope for the future.

Today Shibayama, 68, lives in a tidy house on a busy street in San Jose. He's known as Art, not Arturo. He was among 2,264 Latin Americans of Japanese descent, including a total of 1,800 citizens and legal residents of Peru, who were deported to America and imprisoned here during World War II. The U.S. government has never told them why. The deportees say they know why—to serve as wartime hostages-in-waiting, pawns to be traded for Americans trapped inside Japan.

The story of the Japanese Latin Americans interned here is not widely known. Only recently have they demanded redress for what they call an international kidnapping by the U.S., asking that the government publicly acknowledge its wrongdoing. What they have gotten is hardly a peep. In June the Justice Department settled with five deportees who had filed a class-action lawsuit against the government: to each person, a curt letter of apology and \$5,000.

When Shibayama was a boy, Peru was home to around 26,000 people of Japanese descent. Most of them had immigrated at the turn of the century to work as farm laborers on sugar and cotton plantations. When their contracts ended, many moved to coastal cities and started businesses. Shibayama's father began as a coal vendor and worked his way into the upper middle class. The family photo collection includes a black-and-white picture of his father, a prosperous clothing manufacturer, in the front seat of a shiny 1937 Plymouth. Lined up next to the car, mother and children reach from rear wheel to front grille. Father took the wheel on family outings but a chauffeur drove the children to private school. Maids helped at home.

Life looked secure for the close-knit community. Japanese Peruvian parents named their children Carlos, Carmen and Alicia. Families spoke Spanish at home. Business associations and women's clubs met regularly. One deportee recalls her father, a champion horseman, parading before the Peruvian president every year. But success bred hostility. After World War I the Peruvian government placed restrictions on Japanese businesses, limited immigration from Japan and in 1936 forbade Japanese from becoming Peruvian citizens. Four years later, anti-Japanese riots across the country destroyed homes and businesses.

The idea of deporting Japanese to the U.S. was hatched in the early 1940s, when American war planners and Panamanian authorities agreed that, in the event of war, the U.S. would intern Japanese Panamanians here. After the attack on Pearl Harbor the U.S. enlarged the scheme, casting a net over Japanese residents of Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico and 10 other Latin American nations.

As anti-Japanese sentiment mounted in the southern hemisphere, FBI agents went to Latin America to gather lists of suspected Japanese subversives. U.S. embassy officials in Lima, acting on flimsy reports (never confirmed) of Japanese subversion, encouraged Peru to deport "dangerous" Japanese residents. Once on U.S. territory they were seized and interned as citizens of a nation at war with the U.S. A 1997 U.S. government report revealed that Japanese Latin Americans were seen as valuable assets by a State Department anxious to free thousands of U.S. civilians trapped in Japanese-controlled territory. Although President Franklin Roosevelt had ordered the internment of Japanese Americans in 1942, deporting Americans was politically unacceptable. But trading Japanese Latin Americans wouldn't pose a problem.

Peruvian officials were happy to oblige. Interpreting the U.S. definition of

"dangerous" broadly, they rounded up merchants, barbers, waiters—practically anyone they could get their hands on. Art Shibayama's grandfather, a naturalized Peruvian citizen, was among the first put on a ship for America. From the U.S. he was sent to Japan on a civilian prisoner exchange and Shibayama never saw him again. After that, he says, "every time a U.S. transport came into port, people went into hiding."

Shibayama can remember nothing of his father's arrest. He learned the few details he knows from other family members. But he hasn't forgotten March 1, 1944, the day he was herded aboard the army transport *Cuba*. Soon, Lima was very far away.

More than 50 years later, seated in his dining room, Shibayama tells the story with little expression. His cabinets hold delicate Japanese ceramic dishes. His muscled forearms rest on the table. Occasionally he opens the palms of his broad hands to punctuate his words. "I knew we were going to the U.S.," he says, "but I didn't know why."

The Shibayamas managed to leave Peru together but deportation separated many other families for months, even years. Felicita Chieko Moriguchi lives in Pleasant Hill [CA] with her husband, a Japanese American who also was interned during the war. The Peruvian-born woman was nine years old in December 1942 when her father left his hiding place to check on his Lima business. He was arrested and she did not see him again until July 1944. Today her recollections are uneven and confused, as if her past was ruptured and never recovered. When she speaks she stares into the distance. Sometimes her husband offers a detail and she bows her head, cradling it in her hands.

Moriguchi's father was deported to the U.S. along with other Japanese men. Rumors swirled about their fate. Only a few letters reached families in Peru. By then, life in Peru was uncertain. The government was seizing

Japanese-owned businesses. Richmond [CA] resident Libia Yamamoto was seven when authorities arrested her father at his general store on a hacienda north of Lima. Interned first in Panama, he managed to send a card from there with pressed flowers for his daughter's birthday. "Then we didn't hear anything for a long time," she says.

Wives feared their husbands would be sent from the U.S. to Japan, splitting their families forever. Moriguchi says her family did not want to end up in Japan, but "my mother heard the last ship was leaving [for the U.S.] so she took off with the seven kids." Historian C. Harvey Gardiner, author of the only full-length study of these events, suggests U.S. authorities encouraged families' hopes of reunification in order to swell the number of prisoners for potential exchange.

At the time, no one in the U.S. questioned the transport ships that discharged waves of Spanish-speaking Japanese in U.S. ports. Only a few sketchy stories appeared in a handful of U.S. newspapers. And after all, the public supported President Roosevelt's internment of Japanese Americans. Given the political climate, few objected to a second internment plan, which claimed to strengthen security not only at home but throughout the hemisphere.

When Moriguchi and her family reached New Orleans they took the same train trip as the Shibayamas. Despite some passengers' fears, it was not a death train. Instead, after a two-day ride, deportees arrived in Crystal City, Texas, a desert town 120 miles southwest of San Antonio that promoted itself as America's spinach capital. They moved into a converted farm labor camp, the largest of six detention centers housing Japanese Latin Americans. (Smaller numbers of deportees were held in Idaho, Montana and New Mexico.) Inside the barbed-wire fence at Crystal City, a water tower, a long row of barracks and a communal bathhouse marked the barren landscape.

The Texas heat soon spread over the desert, baking those accustomed to Lima's cool marine climate. Having just crossed the equator, Shibayama says, "I had two summers in a row." As for the camp, "it was just like being outside, but fenced in." Parents tried to keep their children's lives normal. They organized baseball teams and Girl Scout troops. Most parents, unsure of their fate, enrolled their children in camp-run Japanese-language classes. "My father thought Japanese would be more useful, whether we were sent to Japan or back to Peru," Shibayama says. In Japan, youngsters would need the language. If, as hoped, families returned to Peru, parents still wanted Spanish-speaking children to be fluent in their grandparents' language.

In camp, men did such jobs as laundry, garbage collecting and hospital work. Families shopped for groceries at a camp store and ordered clothes from catalogs. They cooked at home. "We had a kerosene stove and an ice-box," Shibayama recalls. Though billed as a model camp, appearances didn't mask reality: workers earned a few cents an hour and internees paid for purchases with blue-and-red cardboard money. And nothing disguised the fence. "The camp had guard towers with machine guns, facing inward," Yamamoto says, twisting a tissue. "We were aware of the barbed-wire fence. One father was playing ball but it got away. He went to retrieve it and got too close to the fence. A guard fired a warning shot."

Yamamoto had arrived in Crystal City and been reunited with her father in July 1943. Parents knew little about the future and said less. They waited through countless dust storms, winds upending the camp's garbage cans and strewing trash across the desert.

Even after their release, parents rarely talked about camp. "There's nothing you can do about it," Shibayama recalls his parents saying. "It's just one of those things." Many Japanese Peruvians still won't speak about

their experiences. In a quavering voice, Shibayama's sister says, "I have a mental block. It is so painful."

As children, internees knew not to ask questions. "Our parents told us we were put [in camp] to wait for a ship to take us to Japan," Yamamoto says. Many were desperate to avoid that trip. Although international law protects civilians from being seized from a country at peace and deported to one at war, nearly 900 Japanese Latin Americans—permanent residents and citizens of Latin American nations—were sent to Japan during the war in exchange for U.S. civilian prisoners.

Hoping for help, Moriguchi's father wrote to a San Antonio bishop. She keeps his letter in a scrapbook, along with the arrest warrant issued to her family for entering the U.S. illegally. "I believe if we go back to Japan with these children, it is a sort of crime that I am committing," he wrote. "I shall be grateful if I am allowed to live in any other countries in this hemisphere. For instance if I cannot go back to Peru I am satisfied if I am allowed to enter in the Republic of Mexico." The bishop's assistant answered with a promise to pass the story on.

The Moriguchis, the Yamamotos and the Shibayamas all avoided the exchange ships. When the war ended they were among the 1,300 Japanese Latin Americans still in U.S. custody. But the U.S. didn't want them and Peru refused to take them back. (Eventually, about 100 did return to Peru.) They had nowhere to go. "Nine hundred decided there was nothing to do but go to Japan," Yamamoto says. "We were going to be part of that group but my father fell ill the day before."

By 1946, Crystal City still held around 400 Japanese Peruvians, some of them internees from other camps who had been transferred there as the government closed its other detention centers. With few contacts, little English and labeled as enemy aliens,

they faced immediate deportation to Japan. They wanted to stay in the U.S., hoping to return eventually to Peru, and as the two countries bickered over their future, they found an American attorney outraged by their plight. San Francisco lawyer Wayne Collins filed test cases to prevent deportations and managed to delay them indefinitely.

Collins also convinced immigration officials to parole internees to Seabrook Farms, a truck farm and frozen-foods plant in New Jersey. German prisoners of war had worked there, as had Japanese Americans seeking to avoid internment. Now a third isolated, frightened group would save Seabrook from a postwar labor shortage. Some 200 Japanese Peruvians, including the Shibayamas headed east. "If we went to Seabrook and Peru [later] agreed to take us back, the U.S. said it would supply transportation," Shibayama says. "That's why so many went."

The Shibayamas lived at Seabrook for two and a half years. "It was just like camp," he says matter-of-factly. "Just no fence or guards." Though underage, he received a permit to work 12-hour shifts in the plant, seven days a week. He earned 60 cents an hour and never returned to school, struggling to learn English on his own. "After that, I just looked at my sisters' books."

Not everyone went to Seabrook. Her father still ill, Libia Yamamoto and her family remained at Crystal City. With just enough money to buy train tickets, they came to Berkeley where her mother's sister agreed to sponsor them. They lived in a church basement. Her father worked as a janitor cleaning doctors' offices. "We had to help because he wasn't well," she says. "We would leave the house at 5 a.m. My mother would take us on the bus, we'd clean and go to school."

Chioko Moriguchi's father, a pharmacist in Peru, found a Japanese foreman on a Stockton farm to sponsor his family. "It can't

be helped," he told his children. After a few years they saved enough to move to San Francisco. During the week Moriguchi lived with a white family, doing laundry and babysitting while she attended high school. On weekends she came home. The family was separated again during summers, when her mother returned to the farm in Stockton to work as a cook. Moriguchi looked after her father. "He always wanted to start a business," she says, "but it was too hard because he didn't speak English." Instead he worked as a gardener and house cleaner.

As families struggled to survive their immigration status remained cloudy. Although no longer threatened with imminent deportation, they were still vulnerable and fearful. As parolees they reported monthly to Immigration and Naturalization Service. Hopes of returning to Peru faded. The Shibayamas moved from Seabrook to Chicago, where the father had friends.

In 1952 Art Shibayama received a draft notice and the army sent him to Germany. By then he wanted to become a U.S. citizen. His officer-in-charge tried to help. But because Shibayama's 1944 entry papers were marked "illegal," his application was denied. The irony of being drafted into the military of a country that refused to accept him as a citizen still outrages him. "We came on a U.S. Army transport and were put in a Justice Department camp administered by the immigration service," he says, voice rising. "How can that not be legal?"

He remained stateless. In Washington negotiations with Peru over the internees' fate dragged on. Finally, in 1954, convinced nothing would come of talks, Congress gave Japanese Latin Americans interned in the U.S. one year to apply for residency, which would be made retroactive to their arrival here. Around 100 people, including Moriguchi and Yamamoto, got permanent residency and, later, citizenship. But Shibayama, among others, never heard about the legislation. On

leaving the army, he asked the immigration service how to resolve his problem. He was told to leave the country and reenter legally, so he went to Canada in 1956, returned with the proper immigration stamp and received permanent residency. He became a citizen, moved to California in 1971, married and bought a gas station in San Jose. His story remained a private pain.

But 30 years later the past played another cruel trick. In 1988 Congress passed the Civil Liberties Act, providing an apology and \$20,000 in redress to Japanese Americans and Japanese Latin Americans interned during World War II. Shibayama's mother got both; he assumed he would too. Instead, the government turned down his claim. To qualify, he was told, internees had to have been permanent residents or citizens at the time of their internment. Because Shibayama had missed the deadline for the special retroactive status, and with 1956 as his official date of entry, he was denied the apology and the payment.

Others got the same denial and, like Shibayama, they were unwilling to accept another blow. They and their U.S.-born children and grandchildren, who were spared the shame their elders knew, expected accountability.

In 1990 El Cerrito [CA] resident Grace Shimizu attended a reunion of Japanese Peruvian internees with her father. At 92, he's one of the oldest surviving internees. "We realized the older people were passing away and their stories were being lost," she says. So with several other families she founded the Japanese Peruvian Oral History Project. In 1993 Shimizu and others went to Washington to lobby for redress for Japanese Latin Americans denied the 1988 apology. "The response at the Department of Justice was shock," she recalls. "They said, 'Did this really happen?'" Then they told us their hands were tied. We should get Congress to pass a

new law." But members of Congress pled helplessness too.

The political route looked hopeless, so they decided to sue. "We felt we had no other recourse to right the injustice," Shimizu says. But lawyers were skeptical. The circumstances were unusual and no relevant case law existed. Some internees were apprehensive about speaking publicly, let alone suing the U.S. government. And if they did sue, they insisted on including Japanese Latin Americans who had ended up in Japan or managed to return to Peru.

Despite the odds, two Los Angeles attorneys agreed to take the case pro bono. In 1996 they filed a class action lawsuit challenging redress denials and asking for the same settlement awarded Japanese Americans. Three of the plaintiffs in the suit were Peruvian-born Japanese who are now U.S. citizens. Two others were Peruvian-born Japanese who are now Japanese citizens. They represented some 1,200 Japanese Latin Americans, inside and outside the U.S., estimated to have been alive when the Civil Liberties Act became law and who would, if the suit succeeded, be eligible for redress.

The government responded harshly. "We had to struggle to get officials to look at this in a larger moral sense," says attorney Robin Toma. "They treated it like any other lawsuit,

instead of recognizing that expending government resources to deny redress didn't serve justice." To expose the situation's absurdity, he hammered on one question: if Japanese Latin Americans were brought here forcibly, how could they be denied redress on the basis that they were here illegally at the time?

Public pressure helped convince the Justice Department to settle the case. In June the government announced its offer. Plaintiffs and supporters were glad to get an apology for former internees now living in the U.S., Japan and Peru. But they were stunned when the government offered \$5,000, one-quarter of the amount granted internees in 1988. They were further shocked to learn that payment is not guaranteed. They will be paid from the Civil Liberties Act fund after the 1988 claims are settled—if any money is left.

Despite their misgivings, most decided not to fight anymore and accepted the settlement. Shibayama and 17 other deportees turned it down. "They're still discriminating against us," he says. He's now considering suing on his own. He says no amount of money can compensate for what happened to him on March 1, 1944, but he had hoped the government's offer would, finally, bring a full accounting of his life. Instead, he says, "it's a slap in the face."

Discuss the following:

1. Why was it important to the U.S. government that the Japanese Peruvians were in the United States "illegally"?
2. Do you feel Arturo's human and civil rights were violated? If so, how?
3. How did the internment of Arturo's family bring discontinuity to their lives?
4. How did Japanese Peruvian parents help their children lead "normal" lives in the camp?
5. What is your reaction to San Francisco lawyer Wayne Collins' efforts?
6. Japanese Latin Americans who were forcibly brought to the United States consider this event an international "kidnapping." What are your thoughts?

PHOTOGRAPHS OF ARTURO SHIBAYAMA



Arturo's grandparents' store in Callao, Peru (early 1930s)



Arturo (on fender of car) with his parents and siblings in Lima, Peru (1939)



Arturo (fourth from the left, front row) with his classmates in Crystal City internment camp, Texas (1944)



Arturo (third from the left, front row) with his baseball team in Crystal City internment camp, Texas (1944)



Arturo (second from the left, front row) serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean War (1953)



Arturo (second from right) serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean War (1953)