Home Loss and Housing Segregation on the World War II Home Front

The Yamauchi and Coleman Families in Pasco, Washington

Figure 1: Lou Yamauchi with her younger sister, Hannah, inside the Yamauchi family grocery store in East Pasco with Lou's best friend, Gladys Sutton. The photo was likely taken circa the mid to late 1910s. (Credit: Courtesy of the Hanford History Project.)

The archive Hanford History Project includes a remarkable photograph for its significance to the history of Pasco, part of Washington state's Tri-Cities region. In the photograph, Lou (Haluye) Yamauchi is in her family grocery store with her younger sister, Hannah, and her best friend, Gladys Sutton. Lou and Gladys became the first Asian American and African American graduates of Pasco High School in 1922 and remained friends for the rest of their lives.[1]

Taken in the late 1910s, the image captures the rural railroad depot town of Pasco before it grew in population and national importance for its connection to several military sites of the World War II home front. This photograph provides a window into a community where a Japanese immigrant family could own several businesses and where people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds lived together and formed close friendships.

What the photograph does not reveal is that the families of Lou and Gladys had been restricted to living in the same East Pasco neighborhood. Ever since Chinese railroad workers settled in Pasco in the late 1800s, non-whites were expected to live east of the railroad tracks. Both the fathers of Lou and Gladys came to Pasco through jobs with the Northern Pacific Railroad. Harry (Asaichiro) and Chika Yamauchi, Lou's parents, came to Pasco in 1907 from Hiroshima, Japan after first working on a sugar plantation in Oahu for a few years. In Pasco, Harry worked additional jobs to support his growing family that eventually included nine children. In late 1908, Harry purchased two buildings. By the 1920s, the Yamauchis owned a half dozen businesses in East Pasco. In addition to the grocery store pictured above, they ran a pool hall, fish market, hotel, and two cafés, including the popular M&M Café.[2]

Figure 2: The Yamauchi Family's M&M Café in the mid to late 1930s. It was a popular Pasco spot that welcomed cliental of all different backgrounds. (Credit: Courtesy of the Hanford History Project)

The Yamauchis' success allowed them to buy their own home in East Pasco.[3] Harry and Chika acquired their house and business properties before Washington passed an updated Alien Land Law in 1921 aimed at prohibiting Japanese immigrants from owning land. While the Yamauchis found a relatively welcoming community in Pasco, the acceptance was unusual. Anti-Japanese sentiment and violence was common in eastern Washington during the 1910s and 1920s.[4]

As African Americans, Gladys' family was not subjected to the Alien Lands Law, but they were expected to reside in East Pasco with other non-white residents. Gladys' father likely moved to Pasco in 1906 from Mississippi, and Gladys and the rest of the family followed later. Gladys recalled that the few African Americans in Pasco lived in boxcars on the east side of the train tracks.[5]

A few African Americans were able to buy property in a limited area of West Pasco before World War II. This included Gladys' eventual husband, the Reverend Samuel Coleman, who also came out West from Chicago working for the Northern Pacific Railroad. Like Harry Yamauchi, Samuel Coleman was an enterprising businessman, and he acquired property and businesses in different parts of the West. Gladys and Samuel married in 1927 when Gladys was working at Whitman College. The couple moved all over the American West doing missionary work before settling back in Pasco during WWII on property Samuel had acquired in the 1930s.[6]

Before World War II, there were so few African Americans residing in Pasco that city leaders and white residents were generally not concerned about their race. Samuel recalled that the small Black population was welcomed at most establishments in Pasco, as captured in the photograph of Lou and Gladys.[7] Despite this acceptance, a defining feature of early Pasco was racial segregation in housing. World War II deepened and formalized racial exclusions in housing in three main ways: home loss, housing segregation, and subsidized white suburbanization.

World War II Home Front Loss

"What is an American? Is he white, black, yellow, red, or any certain color? It is generally conceded that he is any one of these or a mixture of them all. That is one of the principles of our Constitution, is it not?"

-Sergeant George Yamauchi, The Pasco Herald, December 16, 1943

For Japanese immigrant families like the Yamauchis, World War II came forcibly to their doorstep in early 1942 when President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 authorizing the removal and incarceration of all Japanese Americans on the West Coast. The boundary line for determining what counted as the West Coast – the Columbia River – ran right through eastern Washington.

Pasco lay on the non-incarceration side of the Columbia. By 1942, however, many of Harry and Chika's children had started families of their own and moved away from Pasco. The Yamauchis who had moved west of the Columbia River ended up imprisoned in incarceration sites in Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana. Jeanne (Minatoya) Kozawa, daughter of Chiyoko Yamauchi, remembers how her family lost their home and all their belongings, including family photo albums, when forced to relocate. Lou had married Henry Satoh, a prominent Issei businessman based in Portland. Satoh chose to return the family to Japan, where they remained for several years, after facing the humiliation of incarceration at Fort Missoula.[8]

Figure 3: Harry and Chika's granddaughters, Arlene and Connie Minotoya, at Heart Mountain Confinement Site in Wyoming in 1942. (Credit: Courtesy of the Hanford History Project)

Despite the shock of having their rights stripped away, the Yamauchi children had been raised "to be good American citizens." Several of the Yamauchi sons elected to join the U.S. army. This included the second eldest son, George Yamauchi, who was incarcerated along with his wife and children at Minidoka in Idaho. When visiting home, George penned a powerful letter to the *Pasco Herald*. As a soldier, he appealed for "tolerance and understanding of the problems facing minority groups all over the world." He wrote directly to the people he had grown up with, asking them to reject the "narrow mindedness" and "distrust" he saw everywhere in Pasco. Gone was the "neighborly" attitude he remembered from the prewar years.[9]

George urged the citizens of Pasco to recognize that the U.S. Army included Americans of all racial backgrounds "dying for a common cause." He pointedly asked:

"What are they fighting for—surely not for a life of discrimination for themselves or their families."

But discrimination was exactly what his family, who had resided in Pasco for over three decades, faced. He detailed how the town had illegally denied his sister, Mary, the renewal of the business license for the family's popular M&M Café "on the grounds that she was a Japanese." Mary later recalled that those of Japanese descent in Pasco were not just restricted from visiting nearby Kennewick but also places in Pasco: the railroad depot, the airport, the Big Pasco military warehouse complex, or anywhere that was not their home from 8 pm to 8 am. Both George and Mary also noted how their well-respected parents experienced persecution in the form of "over-zealous patriotic home guards" and "telephone threats."[10]

Surprisingly, George did not recall the most crucial indignity that his parents experienced. Despite residing in Pasco on the "right" side of the Columbia River, Harry and Chika were incarcerated in Arkansas, likely because they were Japanese nationals and successful businesspeople. Their eldest son, Charles, worked hard to have them released. With the help of some prominent Pasco citizens, who agreed to sponsor Harry and Chika, Charles succeeded in 1943.

However, Harry and Chika were not allowed to return to their home in Pasco. Instead, they were forced to live in Spokane, 100 miles away. Pasco was considered too close to Hanford, a top-secret defense site of the Manhattan Project forty miles away, as well as the Pasco Naval Air Station and Big Pasco. Harry and Chika only returned to Pasco several years after the war ended when it was deemed safe. They then had to begin the process of rebuilding their lives after being forced to leave home, family members, and businesses behind.[11]

Manhattan Project Takes Over

The removal of Japanese Americans from their homes to incarceration sites would not be the last displacement to shape the lives of Pasco residents and the larger Hanford region. When the government took possession of the 600 hundred square miles that composed the Hanford Engineer Works, it displaced rural residents in three towns – White Bluffs, Hanford, and Richland – almost overnight in early 1943. For the Wanapum, whose winter village lay on the seized land, they never had a chance to return to their homes and retrieve their belongings. The Army also barred the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and the Nez Perce Tribe from returning to lands they had used for traditional practices under treaty rights granted in 1855.[12]

Figure 4: Hanford Construction Camp, circa 1944. When plutonium production began, the camp was dismantled. (Credit: Courtesy of the Hanford History Project)

While the Tri-Cities home front became a place of home loss for many, it simultaneously became home to a huge influx of workers. The Manhattan Project was the most expensive construction project of World War II. To build and maintain the Hanford site, the government tasked the DuPont Corporation with recruiting the workforce. The population of the area increased dramatically, with some 120,000 workers passing through Hanford during the war years. DuPont limited African American employment to 10-15 percent of the total Hanford workforce in an effort to both appease white residents and laborers and to avoid drawing unwanted attention from the Fair Employment Practice Committee, which oversaw the federal ban on employment discrimination in war-related work.[13]

Most Hanford workers arrived via the railroad depot at Pasco and immediately faced the issue of a housing shortage. For Black workers, Jim Crow conditions amplified the lack of housing. Barred from staying in hotels in West Pasco or nearby Kennewick, African American workers were forced to find a place to stay in either East Pasco or far-off Yakima until they could move to segregated barracks at the Hanford Construction Camp.[14]

Disparity on the Home Front

Like George Yamauchi, the Colemans found a changed Pasco when they arrived in late 1943. They were met with a segregation shocking for how all-encompassing it was. In an interview the couple did in 1972, Samuel recalled:

> *"They closed all the cafes [to African Americans]. And even you couldn't get a doctor to attend a colored person in Pasco. That's right, I'd load them up in my car and took them to Yakima and different places…Couldn't get a tooth pulled… In 44, through the NAACP and the Urban League, we were trying to get them to take the signs down, all the restaurants and eating places they had signs up, 'we cater to whites only'…They didn't want no coloreds on the west side of the tracks in 44. They wanted all the coloreds on the east side."*[15]

As one of the few Blacks who owned property west of the tracks, Samuel decided to make a stand and build on his property. This decision resulted in a drawn-out fight with the city of Pasco.

In March of 1944, Samuel Coleman petitioned the city to build cabins and a church for new Black migrants. According to Coleman, white pastors asked him to build a church specifically for incoming Black workers.[16] Two weeks after his petition, fifty Pasco property owners presented the council with a counter petition to "halt and remove" Coleman's construction.[17] While Coleman was technically allowed to continue building, the city impeded his progress every step of the way. The mayor even came to him with an offer: if Coleman exchanged his west side property for east side property, the mayor guaranteed the city would "put water and lights over there for you." Coleman refused the offer "for the principle of it."[18]

When Samuel refused the mayor's offer, east side residents were actively, yet unsuccessfully, petitioning the city council for sewer connections for their community. East Pasco did not obtain full sewer service, as well as paved streets, streetlights, and even a city park, until later in the 1950s. Despite the wealth that the Manhattan Project brought to the Hanford region—in the form of higher wages and jobs—housing conditions in East Pasco were appalling. The one barrack and one bunkhouse the DuPont Corporation placed in East Pasco was not adequate and many Black residents lived in old trailers or small

shacks made of salvaged materials. If an African American worker did hope to buy a home in East Pasco, no financial institutions would lend to them.[19]

As conditions in East Pasco remained substandard, the DuPont corporation contracted G. Albin Pehrson to build a planned community for Hanford's permanent employees in Richland. Since the DuPont Corporation only hired African Americans as temporary laborers, the planned suburban community of Richland was almost exclusively white. In their exclusionary version of the American Dream, residents lived in thoughtfully constructed Alphabet Houses made of Douglas Fir and placed on comfortable lots provided with grass seed from the government. Envisioning a model utopia, Pehrson organized the houses in tree-lined neighborhoods centered around a commercial and entertainment core. Schools, parks, and churches were all within walking distance. Even the prefabricated units Pehrson eventually incorporated because of housing demand were of much higher quality than what was available in East Pasco.

Richland's government-owned houses were also affordable, with a monthly rent of $30-$37. In contrast, rents in East Pasco were a steep $60-80 a month.[20] The discrimination shown in disparities between East Pasco and Richland prompted one Black migrant to reflect:

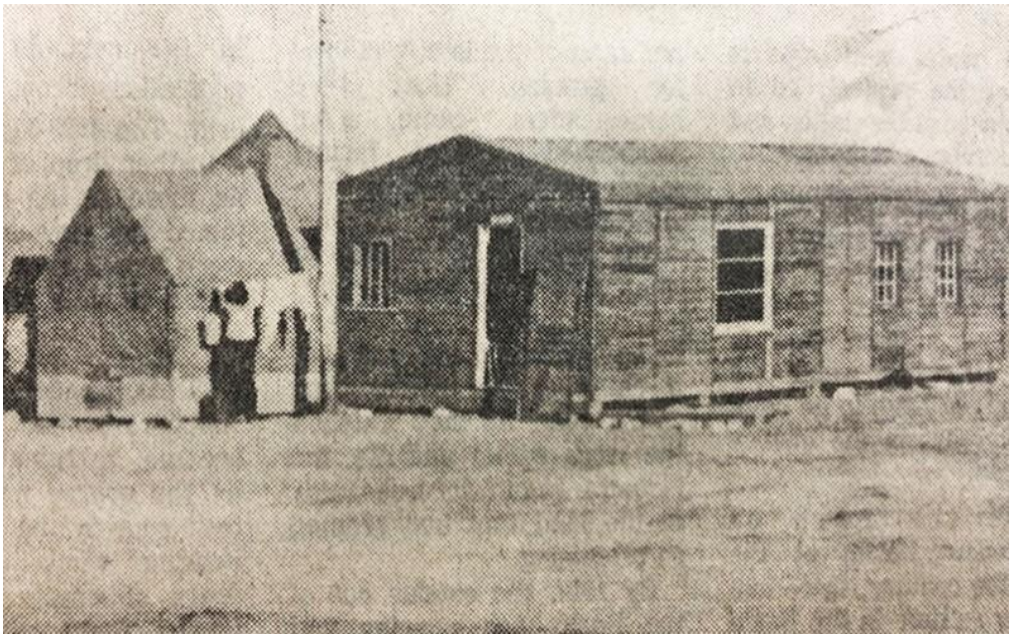
> *"[The] Tri-Cities was worse than the south ever was, because you knew where you stood there. But you didn't know where you stood here."*[21]

Non-white residents of Pasco had always experienced segregation in housing. However, the World War II home front, and especially the arrival of the Manhattan Project, escalated and widened this divide in significant and lasting ways. Families like the Yamauchis were torn apart, with some members relocated and imprisoned, losing their homes and possessions, while others experienced restrictions on their movement and livelihoods. Families like the Colemans watched as segregation deepened for incoming Black workers – spreading from housing to multiple aspects of their lives.

The side-by-side development of East Pasco and Richland during the war years transformed the region, casting a long shadow of racial segregation in housing. Restrictive racial clauses continued to be written into property deeds well into the 1960s and non-white residents continued to be pressured to live in East Pasco into the 1970s and later. While Richland and Kennewick eventually became desegregated, the loss of generational wealth for non-white residents due to housing segregation has been considerable.[22]

Figure 5: The house captured above is one of the famous alphabet houses (model H, photograph likely taken in mid 1950s) and designed for permanent professional, primarily white, workers. (Credit: Courtesy of the Hanford History Project)

Figure 6: The house captured below is the condition of some dwellings in East Pasco circa 1949. (Credit: Franklin County Historical Society)



Conclusion: Resistance and Resilience

The intertwining story of the Yamauchis and Colemans illuminates several devastating dimensions of housing on the WWII home front. However, it also offers a powerful story of resistance and resilience.

Despite his family's situation, George Yamauchi chose to write and publish his letter, imploring his neighbors to stop riding "rough shod over the rights of minority groups." Samuel Coleman refused to move to the east side of the railroad tracks "for the principle of it" and instead engaged in a long and aggravating battle with the city of Pasco to build on his land. In the end, the Colemans won, and the church they built eventually became housing for workers. They also opened a café to feed Black workers since no other restaurants would serve them during the war. Mary Yamauchi did not give up petitioning the city for a business license to operate her family's café, and in 1946, she was finally granted the right after being denied repeatedly during the war.[23]

Figure 7: Figure 7: Holiday card that Gladys and Samuel Coleman sent to the Yamauchi Family circa 1940s that showcases the lasting bonds between the two families. (Credit: Courtesy of the Hanford History Project)

Perhaps the most powerful form of resistance in a period of such division was the lasting friendship between the Yamauchis and Colemans. Someone in the Yamauchi family saved a holiday greeting card from the Colemans. While undated, it is likely from the 1940s and reveals how through the turmoil of war and its aftermath, the families remained close. In 1951, the local newspaper even reported on how Gladys held a birthday celebration that two Yamauchi women attended.[24]

By that time, most of the Yamauchis who had been imprisoned had returned to Pasco, including Lou from Japan with a young son in tow. Tragically, both her husband and oldest child had died during their time there. With her extended family around her, Lou persevered, as did her good friend Gladys. The Colemans paved the way for a vibrant Civil Rights movement in the Tri-Cities region during the 1960s and 70s that demanded an end to Jim Crow conditions, including housing segregation. Over forty years after WWII ended, the City of Pasco issued a formal apology to the Yamauchi family for the "discrimination and inconvenience" they experienced during the war years.[25] Despite the discrimination, felt most acutely in the form of home loss and housing segregation, the Yamauchi and Coleman families never stopped modeling a commitment to building a Pasco accepting of all Americans.

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1 Robert Bauman, "'What is an American?' The Yamauchi Family, Race, and Citizenship in World War II Tri-Cities," in Echoes of Exclusion and Resistance: Voices from the Hanford Region, ed. Robert Bauman and Robert Franklin (Pullman, Wash.: Washington State University Press, 2020), 66-67. The 1922 date of graduation comes from, "1st Black Pasco Graduate Dies at 73," Tri-City Herald, November 26, 1976, p.1.; "In Memory of Lou (Yamauchi-Satoh) Williams," Tri-City Herald, April 27, 2001, p. 13.

2 Bauman, "What is an American?," 58 60-62, 66; Brenda Kupfer, Roy Satoh, Linda Yamauchi Adkinson, and Bruce Yamauchi, interview by Robert Bauman and Robert Franklin (hereafter Yamauchi Family Interview), Hanford History Project (HHP), September 18, 2018.

3 According to the 1910 United States Federal Census, the Yamauchis rented. By the 1920 Federal Census, they owned their own home.

4 Nicole Grant, "White Supremacy and the Alien Land Laws of Washington State," The Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project, University of Washington, 2008. Bauman, "What is an American?," 63-64.

5 Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Coleman, interview by Quintard Taylor (hereafter Coleman Interview), Black Oral History Interviews, 1972-74, Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, December 8, 1972.

6 Coleman Interview.

7 Robert Franklin, "'I Chose East Pasco Because I Didn't Have No Other Choice' African American Migration, Segregation, and Civil Rights at Hanford and the Tri-Cities, 1943-1960," in *Echoes of Exclusion*, 84. See also Coleman Interview. According to the 1940 United States Federal Census, only 27 African Americans resided in Pasco.

8 Bauman, "What is an American?," 67-69. For Jeanne Kozawa's recollections, see "The Silent Generation Speaks," *Franklin Flyer* (Franklin County Historical Society) 48, no. 2 (June 2015): 1, 3.

9 George Yamauchi, Letter to the Editor, *Pasco Herald*, December 16, 1943.

10 George Yamauchi, Letter to the Editor. For Mary Yamauchi's recollections, see Gale Metcalf, "Suspicion Over Descent: Citizens of Japanese Ancestry Stripped of Rights as Americans," *Tri-City Herald*, December 1, 1991, p. E4. Mary's request for a license to operate the café was repeatedly denied, as tracked in the Pasco City Council Minutes. In one instance, the City Council specifically cited her Japanese heritage as the reason. See Council Meeting Minutes, October 5, 1943, City of Pasco, Washington.

11 Bauman, "What is an American?," 68. See also Yamauchi Family Interview.

12 Thomas Marceau, "The Ties That Bind: Hanford's Ancient Landscape and Contemporary Native Americans," in *Echoes of Exclusion*, 35-39. According to Marceau, the government gave residents 90 days to as little as 48 hours to gather their belongings and evacuate.

13 Franklin, "I Chose East Pasco," 76-77. See also "Green Bridge Historical Marker," Manhattan Project National Historical Park, National Park Service.

14 Franklin, "I Chose East Pasco," 77. For more on the Jim Crow conditions in Pasco, see Robert Bauman, "Jim Crow in the Tri-Cities, 1943-1950," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 96, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 124-131.

15 Coleman Interview.

16 Council Meeting Minutes, March 21, 1944, City of Pasco, Washington. See also Coleman Interview.

17 Council Meeting Minutes, April 4, 1944, City of Pasco, Washington.

18 Coleman Interview. See also Franklin, "I Chose East Pasco," 88-89. To follow some of the tug of war between Coleman and the City Council, see the Council Meeting Minutes for April 18, 1944, June 6, 1944, June 7, 1944, and February 13, 1945.

19 Franklin, "I Chose East Pasco," 88, 98, 100. See also Coleman Interview, and "Green Bridge Historical Marker."

20 Franklin, "I Chose East Pasco," 100-01. Robert Franklin, "Alphabet Houses," SAH Archipedia, 2012.

21 Quotation in Franklin, "I Chose East Pasco," 95.

22 Robert Bauman and Robert Franklin, "Latino/as and the Continuing Significance of Race in the Tri-Cities," in *Echoes of Exclusion*, 172. For racial gaps in generational wealth in Pasco from housing policies, see Eric Rosane, "'A Very Long Shadow': Thousands in Tri-Cities Still Live in Homes with Racial Covenants" and Annette Cary, "Remnants of Housing Discrimination Linger, *Tri-City Herald*, February 26, 2023, A1, A10.

23 Coleman Interview + Franklin, "I Chose East Pasco," 89, 102. For Mary Yamauchi license, see Council Meeting Minutes, September 3, 1946, City of Pasco, Washington.

24 “Birthday Dinner,” *Tri-City Herald*, February 8, 1951, p.8.

25 For more on the civil rights movement in Pasco, see Robert Bauman and Robert Franklin, “‘The Birmingham of Washington’: Civil Rights and Black Power in the Tri-Cities,” in *Echoes of Exclusion*, 135-167. Metcalf, “Suspicion Over Descent.”