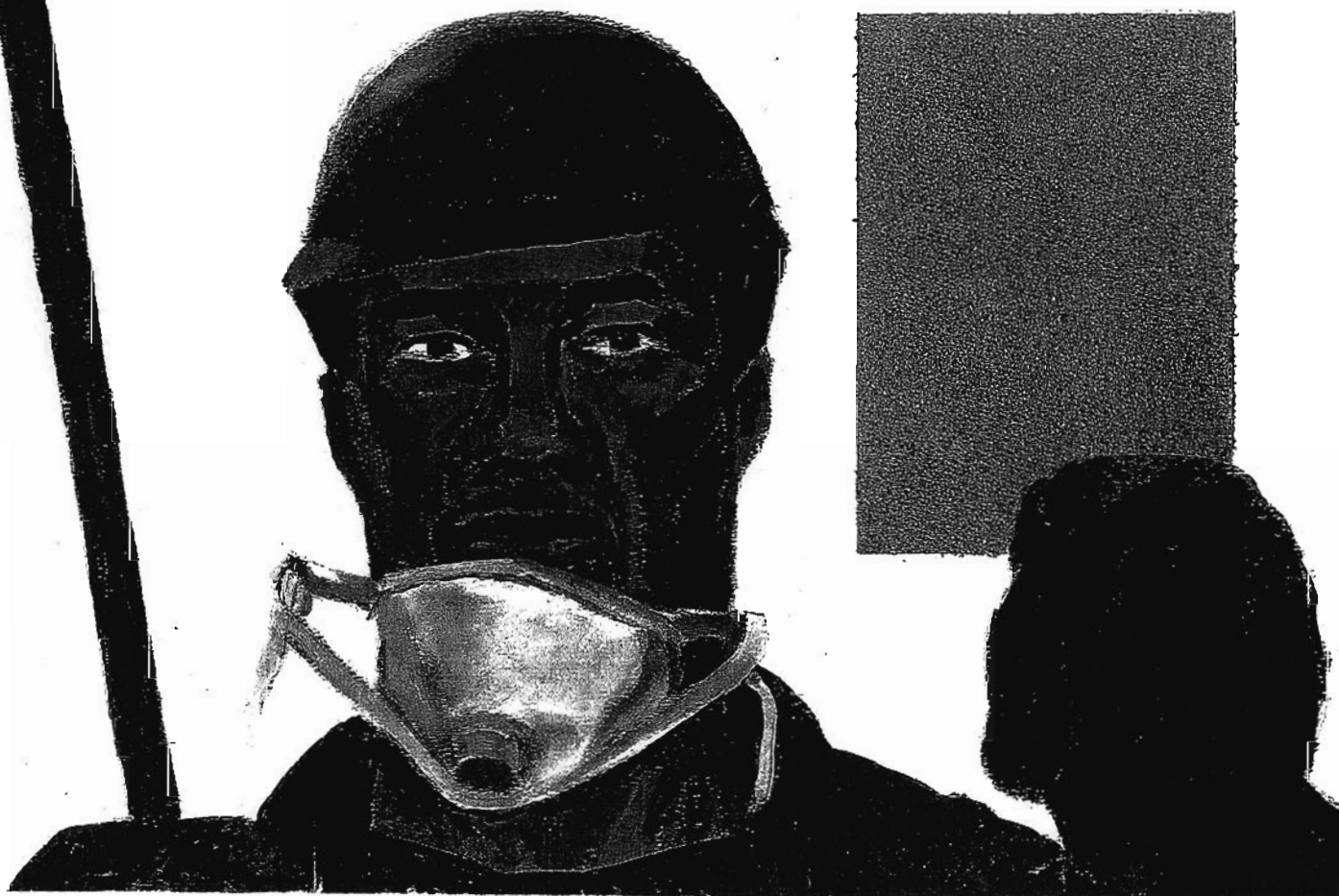


ARTFORUM

APRIL 1989 \$6.50

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

BAYONNE, NEW JERSEY, U.S.A!



The narratives taken on in Warren Neidich's recent photographic diptychs engage perhaps the two most controversial and repressed passages in modern U.S. history: the everyday life of blacks in the mid-19th-century pre-Abolitionist South, and the internment camps that held Americans of Japanese ancestry during World War II. These are passionate moments of American history, moments of national trauma, of mass blindness and mass complicity, moments that still figure in our construction of "racial" difference, moments that return in the flash of a stereotype or at the butt of a joke; moments that appear well documented but that are equally well disguised. Rarely are such moments alluded to at all in the contemporary art world, and more rarely still are the means found to question the apparent neutrality of the archive of images that re-forms

across the entire sequence of the diptychs, and that spills over into the greater series of visual and textual narratives that have constructed, and still construct, the social and political meanings of the two "episodes" addressed. I want to concentrate in this discussion on the images of the relocation centers. The representational histories at stake on both sides of the diptychs are sufficiently complex that only one narrative can be attempted here.

The relocation centers were hastily established by the newly formed federal War Relocation Agency (WRA) following the destruction of Pearl Harbor in 1941. Some 110,000 Japanese-Americans, citizens and noncitizens alike, were identified, rounded up, placed in holding camps ("assembly centers"), and then sent on to remote "permanent townships." There were two relocation centers in California, Arkansas, and Arizona

flecting the photographic sign from its work in the social and political. His images of Kazuo Kageyama, Henry Hanawa, the photographer Toyo Miyatake, and especially Yuichi Hirata, all 1943, conjure an engrossing special "territory" out of their scrupulously monitored zones of representation. Their crisp, formalized, passively configured, and follicle-sharp images appear to insist on the conundrum of personality equally as they chart only quiet resolve or silent (inscrutable, "oriental") resignation—precisely the qualities of stoic expression that usually characterize Adams' technical dramatization of the face, but that are knowingly exaggerated here through the cultivation of *japonisme* enigma.¹

Adams' preferred photography insists, in fact, on the site/sight of the face as the governing locus for the collocation of difference. It takes its place,



CLATES
 BLACK SISTERS HAPPILY AWAIT RECEPTION AT THE
 OXFORD, South Carolina—CLATES and RECEPTION—BLACK
 photographed next to their tent garden. After a
 hard day's work they are ready to retire for
 their afternoon tea. Their break expected to five are
 already hour late.
 A.P. 678 by:JCM 9/25/1650



Warren Neidich, untitled, 1987, text and black and white Polaroid photographs, 20 x 70" overall. From "Text":

(and effaces) these histories.

On the right side of each of Neidich's diptychs (part three of a five-part work entitled *American History Reinvented*, 1985-89) are a found image and text, from the Associated Press, describing various activities in the relocation centers. On the left is an invented historical narrative staged in one or another of the recent simulated, pay-as-you-enter wooden townships that reconfigure a preindustrial America. Thus Neidich explicitly sets up a negotiation between the preexisting repertoire of citable images and the construction of imaginary tableaux. These idioms, of (supposed) documentary verisimilitude on the one hand and willful imaginative projection on the other, are clenched in a debate about the production of history and the coding of historical value(s) that is active

respectively, and one each in Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, and Idaho. The extraordinary central-government apartheid reflex that effected this policy, and its ghostly echoes in the popular press, were predicated solely on the visible and the inferred biologies of facial difference and oriental blood. The constitutional guarantees of citizenship (where applicable) were summarily suspended; and a mass of faces was interned.

Of all the photographic "accounts" of the relocation centers implicitly referenced in Neidich's scheme, that by Ansel Adams (whose "houseman" was transported to the Manzanar Center, California) makes the most emphatic use of the portrait mode. Adams apparently found the portrait an efficient means of loading his images with a strong personal, formal, and symbolic aura, thus de-

then, within the period's media-fed populist backlash against an ethnic group as a *visual field*. This approach is attested to in numerous contemporary articles both castigating and defending the rights of the Japanese-American citizenry. "An American with a Japanese Face," read a headline in the *Christian Science Monitor* of May 22, 1943; "My Only Crime Is My Face," said another in *Liberty*, on August 14 of the same year. When we engage them critically, then, Adams' portrait photographs necessitate our taking into account a set of wider and more powerful political constructions that converge in the representation of the translocated (non)Western other.

The racist paranoia against which these headline voices were raised was fueled by the unmitigated xenophobia of government officers such as Lieu-

tenant General John L. DeWitt. With its talk of "undiluted racial strains," the general's "A Jap's a Jap" statement, delivered before the House Naval Affairs Committee in San Francisco on April 13, 1943, represented the apogee of what now seems almost an official U.S. incitement to racial violence. For DeWitt, as for many in his government, there were two (incompatible) tests for Americanness—physiognomy (the face, the blood) and certification (passports and paperwork). Yet his elimination of the relevance of the second of these "tests" was swift and absolute: "It makes no difference whether he's an American citizen. Theoretically he is still a Japanese and you can't change him... by giving him a piece of paper."²² Between the social abstractions of the (collective) body (with its unitary face) and the bureaucratic endgame (the certificate of citizen-

of the sheer ideological power of the press, the scenario of racism is repressed and tempered, even excused and explained, in the generational exchange of memories. Maybe surprisingly, the image is more efficient as a historical solvent than are the textual documentaries of the centers—perhaps in part because there are many written (*factum* and *post factum*) reports of the internment from the evacuees themselves, and relatively few visual records of their own making. But the photographic image begins its work of hermeneutic revisionism even at the moments of its production and of its first display and captioning. The image fixes the shifting, always interested, misrepresentation of historical memory.

Yet in the matter of the face another discourse emerges, a discourse of liberal intellectualism, less remarkable than the xenophobic one, and certain-

faciality to "an ideographic character,"²⁴ and the analogous "resumption" of oriental "beauty" from (Western) "singularity" to "the great [Eastern] syntagm of bodies,"²⁵ literally inscribe the Other as a semiarbitrary notational language articulated by an endless column ("syntagm") of partially legible faces. To the Western gaze, the oriental mass becomes an index of signs whose syntactical relation is the product of the West's classificatory imagination. The horde is hoarded (and held) as a dictionary of Others compiled by the West.

Something of this ulterior fixing and conditioning of the Japanese (-American) body is revealed in the visual archive that represents the relocation centers. Various series of photographic and other images were produced for this purpose. First, and most significant for the contemporaneous production of meaning, was the panoply of mass-circulated captioned press images such as those of the Associated Press. These display a litany of domestic events that precisely and elaborately narrate the conditions of American social normality, even as those conditions had palpably to be feigned under the duress of wartime exigencies. Thus a series of thematically associated images, originally encountered in the newspaper day by day or side by side, are positioned by text, bracketed under disingenuous generalizing rubrics ("keeping cheerful," "making the best of it"). In this condition they are overcoded by a calculated effacement of any signs of the arrest, captivity, and abnormality of life to which the evacuees were actually subject. These signs are always unrendered in the press photograph, though they constitute the very ground for its generation. We might say that the first term of such photographs is that the evacuation has already happened: the invocation of war emergency, the hackles of military paranoia, the grooves of government fiat, have already produced internment. There is no going back, there is only *accommodation*—the manufacture on behalf of the non-Japanese-American population of a comfortable specular relation to the scene/seen of the camp.

Neidich's "appropriated" format puts forward such press photographs as already *read*; the layering of their sign systems, their precise modes of producing information—modes clarified by the social decodings taken on in Barthesian and post-Barthesian analysis—are made visible in the (re)presentation of the material. This "second order" posture is revealed most obviously in Neidich's separation of photograph and caption. To insist that image and text have no necessary natural relation is also to have produced the first term of a semiosis. In itself, such a "first term" is of only slight interest, but Neidich has used the press image as the common currency in the complex exchange of ideological information that structures our historical knowledge of these centers. By printing the image somewhat apart from its text—complete with the AP's irregular typography and unfathomable numeric schemes—he is interrupting both the design and the swift, non-



Protest, Lessons in Visual Subversion," part three of the five-part work *American History Reinvented, 1945-88*.

THIS WOULD BE THE
PLACE OF THE
-1-16-43
JAPANESE EVACUEE NINE
WAZUWA, CALIF. FLORENCE
-1-16-43
LOS ANGELES, PHOTOGRAPHER UNDER AN
APPEAL TO THE U.S. RELOCATION
AUTHORITY CENTER FOR EVACUEES OF
JAPANESE ANCESTRY. (MAN YAMAGUCHI IN
A PRISON AND WITH RELOCATION AUTHORITY
1-16-43, (AP) (AP) (AP)

ship or residence), there took place an extraordinary relegation of the vast diurnal middle term of acculturation. The DeWitt scenario of racial difference was the product of a hysterical, yet politically potent, nationalist reflexology. It exemplified the geneticist fear of the repetition (the perpetual duplication) of a face considered intrinsically antagonistic to the European-originated status quo, a face as if permeated by corpuscles of malignity mysteriously fed from body to body along the conduits of "race." It activated the expedient terror of the horde.

In the end, or after the event, this extravagant racism recedes from historical memory. Though injected into the public domain, its incendiary rhetoric fanned by the mass trauma of military emergency and by the concomitant accentuation

ly less immediately powerful in the social arena, but producing an equally duplicitous accommodation to the travesty of the Other. The Japanese (oriental) face is colonized by the textualist metaphors of the Western intellectual, and is returned as a script to be written. This is Roland Barthes in *L'Empire des signes*, 1970, his tropism explicitly signaled right from the outset of his commentary: "As if the anatomist-calligrapher set his full brush on the inner corner of the eye and, turning it slightly, with a single line, as it must be in painting *alla prima*, opens the face with an elliptical slit which he closes toward the temple with a rapid turn of his hand; the stroke is perfect because simple, immediate, instantaneous, and yet ripe as those circles which it takes a lifetime to learn to make in a single sovereign gesture."²³ The reduction here of Japanese



Toyo Miyatake, *Group of Majorettes*, 1944, black and white photograph. From *Two Views of Manzanar*, 1978, exhibition catalogue. Courtesy of the Frederick S. Wight Art Gallery, University of California, Los Angeles.



Ansel Adams, *The "Jive Bombers"*, 1943, black and white photograph. From *Two Views of Manzanar*

enduring passage of the newspaper format. He is inviting us to reinscribe the moment of the camps in terms of the fuller system of their representation elsewhere. Affirming the newspaper image-text as negotiable and contingent at the same time (and in the same place) that he lays bare its "rhetoric" and assertiveness, Neidich suggests that its coded vacuity and the unnegotiated instantaneousness of its captioning require the qualification of historical supplements.

These include, most immediately, the documents of the material conditions in the camps and the repertoire of photographic (and other) images produced in and about them. Beyond the press image we can construct an assemblage of phototypes (and other image types) whose relative positions (coordinates, if you like) will reveal something of the condition of the relocation centers, and of their resistance to the staged denotation of the newspaper photograph, with its message of "well-being under a certain duress." Positions within the vitriuous space of ideology thus described include the photographs that Adams took during (private) visits to Manzanar in the fall of 1943 and subsequently; some 13,000 photographs commissioned by the WRA (including work by Dorothea Lange, Clem Albers, Charles Mace, and others); a significant number of photographs commissioned by the Farm Security Administration (FSA) and by the Fourth U.S. Army & Western Defense Command; photographs taken by Miyatake, a Los Angeles photographer who was himself interned at Manzanar; other "casual," occasional, amateur photographs made by both internees and visitors; and finally a number of non-photographic representations of which the line drawings of Miné Okubo ("Citizen 13660"), made at the Tanforan Assembly Center in California and the Topaz relocation center in central Utah, have probably been the most widely published.

This list is not exhaustive, but it includes the most important kinds of image production. Any comparative reading of these series will reveal that the centers cannot be adequately known and displayed by any one intervention. All these representations relate to the condition of "documentary realism"; but studied in their mutual relation, they shatter the naturalizing pretensions of this generic ideal. In the photography of group activities, for example, Adams' calculation, his drive to produce a formally ordered, "hieroglyphic" sign, is forcefully signaled when measured against Miyatake's renderings of the nonopaque, nonstatic contingencies of the group.⁶

Adams' well-known *The "Jive Bombers"*, 1943, locks the camp's young jazz musicians into a strange moment of strong visual symmetry and well-controlled abandonment. The grid of horn players, with their greased and slicked-back hair, is caught vividly acting out a new American ritual; yet between the crowded tessellation of "J/B" (Jive Bombers) placards, and the even lines of fastidiously groomed heads, only the faintest glimpses are afforded of the real conditions of the intern-

ment—the bare wooden boards of the "flimsy, tarpapered Army barracks" that were both hostel and recreation center to the ten thousand.⁷ The image is a fantasy image of the transport of music and performance, and of the (often willing) submission of the evacuees (especially the American-born Nisei) to the sanctioned yet policeable release of American cultural rituals. Miyatake's *Group of Majorettes*, 1944, on the other hand, parodies the absurdity as much as it celebrates the achievements of ritualized Americana. The adolescent majorettes are posed before completely snow-filled mountains, caught in a bothersome, dust-blowing wind, yet struggle to retain their camera-induced smiles, some wearing the proper white boots that go with their uniform, others obviously unable to find or afford them. Telegraph poles and drab Nissen huts are still visible at the peripheries of the photograph, and one effect of the image is to signal the brave, vaguely self-conscious sense of irony manifested by this group of young women—an irony and awareness that contrast with the preoccupied (and scrupulously arranged) male abandonment of Adams' jazz cadets.

The intervention of government-sponsored agencies in the photography of the centers presents a more elaborate case. John Tagg, analyzing the particular "régime of truth" (Michel Foucault's term) participated in and constructed by New Deal reformism, has discussed how the state-funded "documentary" representation of "poverty and deprivation" in the '30s and '40s was "constituted as a distinct genre and category" that became, momentarily, "a formidable tool of control and power."⁸ Dorothea Lange's WRA images of the relocation centers, then, not surprisingly recapitulate the elaborately itemized pathos that she had already formulated in her *Dustbowl* and *Depression* photographs. The caption accompanying her *San Bruno, Calif. June 16, 1942* reads as a snatch of psychological narrative, offering the viewer a privileged glimpse of a domestic moment:

Old Mr. Konda in his barrack apartment, Tanforan Assembly Center, after supper. He lives here with his two sons, his married daughter and her husband. They share two small rooms together. His daughter is seen behind him, knitting. He has been a truck farmer and raised his family, who are also farmers, in Centerville, Alameda County, where his children were born.⁹

Labeled first with a specific place and time and supplemented by a spare, humanizing "documentary" statement, this advertisement of social injustice is activated by a kind of transcultural *miseri-cordia humana*. The clamor for an empathetic response is even more determined in captions such as that for *Woodland, Calif. May 20, 1942*, which reads, "Tenant-farmer of Japanese ancestry who has just completed settlement of his affairs. Everything is packed, ready for evacuation the following morning. . . ."¹⁰ The marks of suspended narrative (. . .) are snares baited to entrap the viewer's social conscience. The Lange image is thus loaded with embellished calls for spontaneous sympathy;

it is offered as saccharine liberal propaganda.

Yet, contingent as it usually is on the physical and psychic isolation of the individual sufferer, much of the pathos of Lange's work recedes in her (rare) photography of social routines. In her image of a relocation-center mess hall, some of the crowding and squalor attending the daily consumption of food in the centers is effectively revealed. It is this aspect of communal representation that is undertaken in the drawings of Okubo, whose work displaces the pathos of Lange and the formalism of Adams with a succinct, anecdotal irony. Unencumbered by a surfeit of the documentary "real," Okubo's drawings work through the specific concerns of the internees and the common episodes of their lives—bugs and pests, perishing heat, an unyielding alkaline soil, Americanization classes, wage conditions, the 6S-book library, a debilitating lack of personal privacy, common shower latrines, and so on. And the text he supplies with the works is specifically drained of Lange's dramatizing naturalism. In this note, which follows one of his mess-hall drawings, the sudden intervention of the personal pronoun, rather than a pointed suspension of narrative, supplements the terse adumbration of the experience of shortage:

Each mess hall fed from two hundred and fifty to three hundred persons. Food was rationed, as it was for the civilian population on the outside. The allowance for food varied from 31 cents to 45 cents a day per person. Often a meal consisted of rice, bread, and macaroni, or beans, bread, and spaghetti. At one time we were served liver for several weeks, until we went on strike.¹¹

The difference between the representational fields of Lange and Okubo is a model for the opposition between Adams and Miyatake. It is the difference between the voyeur and the victim. Many of Adams' photographs, for example, explicitly celebrate an almost unrestrained fecundity in the food production of the centers. We see Richard Kobayashi wearing an open smile of agricultural accomplishment and clutching a symmetrical brace of burly cabbages, one under each arm; and we find Benji Iguchi holding the same confident, hands-on-hips stance, his figure all but crowded out by cornucopic ranks of orderly squash. Here Adams recapitulates the socioculinary myth-making of the Associated Press, with its significations of effortless production and happy consumption. Miyatake, on the other hand, denies much of the stage-managed virtual space of the comestible. His *Vegetable Delivery at the Camp Mess Hall*, 1944, shows a truck loaded with crates of carrots and stacks of potatoes, with nine younger Nisei (American-born Japanese-Americans) perched and leaning on the vehicle. The figures are not heroic-individual producers but haulers and unpackers of imported foodstuffs. They appear passive more out of fatigue and resignation than from prideful camera-posing. *North Farm*, 1944, images a tractor ploughing an arid dust-clouded tract, and makes no apologies:

for the severity of the camp's climate and terrain and the sheer difficulty of farming it. *Children Vegetable Gardening Between the Barracks*, 1944, literalizes the cramped marginality of growing fresh vegetables for the ten-thousand-odd deportees at Manzanar. In these and other photographs, Miyatake has partly confronted the effortfulness and deprivation of the relocation center with respect to the importation, production, and social consumption of food. And in so doing he is drawing, like Okubo, on his actual experience of the camp and its daily routines. Verbal accounts by other eyewitnesses corroborate the suggestions in Miyatake's photographs that though there was usually *enough* food to go round, it was generally poor in quality, nutrition, and preparation. Furthermore, the cooking and eating arrangements were completely at odds with the social codes of the internees, who conceived of meals as commodiously managed and properly ritualized, leaving them frustrated and dislocated. One report observes that "being ignorant of the evacuees' diet, the army produced huge quantities of Bologna, sauerkraut, shredded wheat, potatoes . . ."¹²

The issues addressed by Miyatake and Okubo

are partly effaced by Lange and Adams, and all but entirely eclipsed by the newspaper image-text. The comparative reading of the *difference* between the phototypes offers a means of interrupting the busy quietism of the press photograph. It reveals some of the political tonalities and social experience that the overcoded and undernourished newspaper image can only fake. The environments of the relocation centers (their deserts, mountains, and margins); the constructed faciality of the internees; their experiences of sustenance and personal space; their social interaction and group rituals: all these determinations suffered by the people of the camps are mobilized in the silences between these phototypes. And insofar as Neidich's images are successful, they manage their critique through the withdrawal from (literal) appropriation, and their bypassing of appropriation's unitary deconstruction. It is the *system* of appropriation that is at stake here, a system that can be effectively revealed only through a plurality of images and image supplements. □

John Welchman, an art historian and critic, teaches at the University of California, San Diego. He contributes frequently to *Artforum*.

1. For an extended analysis of the position of the face in systems of representation see John Welchman, "Faciality, Notes on Faciality," *Artforum* XX, 3, November 1982, pp. 131-38.
2. Quoted in Toshiro Yasushiro, *Politics and Cultural Values: The Work of Japanese Relocation Centers and the United States Government*, New Arno Press, 1978, pp. 438-39.
3. Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trans. Richard Howard, New York: I. Strauss and Citroux, Inc., 1983, p. 99.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
6. The photographs of Adams and Miyatake were interestingly, if oddly paired in a Los Angeles exhibition a decade ago, "Two Views of Man" at the Frederick S. Wight Gallery, University of California, Los Angeles, 1974.
7. Yasushiro, p. 111.
8. See John Tagg, "Currency of the Photograph: New Deal Reformist Documentary Rhetoric," *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographs and Histories*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978, pp. 174, 181.
9. Quoted in Maude and Richard Conrad, *Executive Order 9066: The Internment of 110,000 Japanese Americans*, Los Angeles: California Historical Society, 1972, p. 119.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
11. Mine Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 1946, reprint ed. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983, p. 143.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 486.

This article is a version of "News from No-Place . . . Ideological Formation: Photographic Representation of the Other," John Welchman's essay for *Nedich's American History Reinvented*, to be published by Aperture, New York in the late spring. In this essay, the author also discusses the left-hand's Nedich's diptych.

Ansel Adams, *Richard Kobayashi with Cabbages*, 1942, black and white photograph. From *Two Views of Manzanar*.

