# SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN THE LYRICS OF MIKE SHINODA: 'KENJI' AND 'NOTHING MAKES SENSE ANYMORE'

María Antonia Mezquita Fernández
Universidad de Valladolid/GIECO-Franklin-UAH

Abstract

A third-generation mix-raced Japanese American, Mike Shinoda is a renowned rock and rap musician. Thanks to his two bands, Linkin Park and Fort Minor, Shinoda has been able to raise his voice to condemn social injustices or environmental damage and degradation. The following paper will focus on two of his songs "Kenji" and "Nothing makes Sense Anymore," which include references to those issues. By analyzing the lyrics, we will evince how they distill criticism on social discrimination and environmental damage.

Keywords: Mike Shinoda, social injustice, environmental damage, popular culture.

## CONCIENCIA SOCIAL Y MEDIOAMBIENTAL EN LAS LETRAS DE MIKE SHINODA: «KENJI» Y «YA NADA TIENE SENTIDO»

Resumen

Mike Shinoda es un afamado músico de rock y rap perteneciente a la tercera generación de japoneses-americanos. Gracias a sus dos bandas, Linkin Park y For Minor, Shinoda siempre ha alzado su voz para denunciar injusticias sociales y daños medioambientales. El siguiente artículo se centrará en dos de sus canciones: «Kenji» y «Ya nada tiene sentido». Al analizar estas letras, veremos la crítica a la discriminación social y el daño medioambiental que rezuman.

Palabras clave: Mike Shinoda, injusticia social, daño medioambiental, cultura popular.



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In this technological era, music is a powerful tool for launching messages which can be spread immediately and heard by a wide audience around the world. Those messages can have an influence on achieving successful outcomes. As a subversive genre and a branch of hip-hop, rap music has always criticized and condemned social or political situations which make our world an unsatisfactory and deficient place to inhabit. In US slang, a rap is also "a judgement or a reaction" (Cambridge University Press & Assessment 2021) and that is precisely what rap music contains and provokes: a judgement and / or a reaction. This musical style was originally identified with black people and social deprivation; however, it was later acknowledged by white people and became a mass phenomenon.

The following paper will focus on the social and environmental messages Mike Shinoda's songs entitled "Kenji" and "Nothing makes Sense Anymore" encapsulate. Considering that no in-depth study analyzing these songs has so far been published, it will be both interesting and relevant to scrutinize them. A third-generation mixed-raced Japanese American, Mike Shinoda is a renowned singer, rapper, music producer, and graphic designer. Born in 1977 and raised in Agoura Hills (California), he has always been inspired by rock, hip hop and rap music groups such as Public Enemy or Run DMC. Thanks to his two bands, Linkin Park and Fort Minor, and as a solo singer, Shinoda raises his voice in denunciation of social injustices or environmental damage and degradation.[1] With his second project, Fort Minor, he has produced hip hop that touches on many other issues.

It is generally accepted that social fragmentation entails dehumanization and generates inequality. Fort Minor's "Kenji," included in *The Rising Tied* (2005), deals with Japanese internment during World War II and how Shinoda's father and aunt were relocated by the American Government and sent to an internment camp in retaliation after the attack on Pearl Harbor.[2] What makes this song unusual and unique is that it relates a story based on historical facts and supported by the words and opinions of the survivors themselves. On the other hand, "Nothing makes Sense Anymore" (*Post Traumatic,* 2018) was written after Chester Bennington's death and includes metaphors for water as decline and renewal. As we will evince, Shinoda takes the opportunity to deplore unacceptable conditions in the environment due to the lack of responsibility shown by individuals.

Music, indeed, has the power to express and disseminate social or environmental concerns that can both raise awareness and have a deterrent effect on unfair situations or detrimental practices. For example, the values of social rights or environmental concerns, such as the protection of nature or the rights of disadvantaged collectives or groups. In hip hop urban culture,[3] rap music has its root in "the African tradition of speaking rhythmically to a beat generally supplied by

[1] In both projects, Shinoda's role as a singer is mainly that of a rapper.

[2] Shinoda makes clear that "Kenji" was written "as kind of a generalized version of [his] family's experience during World War II" (Shinoda 2016).

[3] Hip hop emerged in New York in the 1970s and was originally created by Afro-American people.


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background music" (Richardson and Scott 2002, 176). Rap music is an intrinsically complex type of discourse which interweaves social practice –with the aim of tackling social inequalities– discursive practice, and the text itself (Filardo Llamas 2014, 13). Rap may also function as a form of catharsis. Artists feel a sense of powerlessness to change the way things are because the social, political and economic issues are so complex. This has led them to seek ways to express their discontent. For Richardson and Scott, rap music became a cathartic outlet (2002, 175) as it condemns political issues to change the world we inhabit into a better and fairer one through a cultural revolution which tends to censure power, morality, and the social injustices occurring nowadays. Regarding the relationship between power and morality:

> There is an obvious tension between power and morality [...]. [P]olitical theorists through history have given us a rich body of thought on this question –from Aristotle's insistence that virtue is both a cause and an end of good government, right through to contemporary writings in the academic study of International Relations addressing issue like humanitarian intervention, human rights, legality and legitimacy. (Garton Ash 2010, 72)

Be that as it may, some of the lyrics belonging to this style also seek environmental justice and defend marginalized groups. "In the last several decades, environmental justice movements around the world have grown out of convergences between civil rights movements, antiwar and antinuclear movements, women's movements, and grassroots organizing around environmental issues" (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 2002, 4). As human beings, we can adapt to the specific circumstances, conditions, or situations to fight for a world without blatant social injustices and for the protection of the environment. In *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, Murray Bookchin states that we can "innovate":

> Humanity did not emerge *ab novo*, without roots in animal evolution. The human being has been and still is an animal with emotional states that are animalistic, like "fight and flight" reactions and tormentingly basic fears. But humans are also animals of a very special kind: we are highly intelligent [...] [and] we have the ability not only to adapt to our environment but intentionally to alter them significantly. In short, we can do more than adapt; we can *innovate*, although we do not always innovate unwillingly if we can survive in a given environmental without doing so. (1996, 6)

Bookchin continues asserting that "our intelligence is also highly problematic" (1996, 6) and when it comes to social life, we must be empathetic and try to fully understand that our planet is shared by several species.

> [W]e [...] have yet to find our way towards a self-conscious, human, cooperative, and empathetic social life. With our animalistic as well as human attributes, we evolve in an ever-changing world and face stark problems of survival and well-being. Apart from those people who inhabit places with benign physiographic conditions, we are subject to material insecurity, contesting wills, challenges to our sense of self and self-regard, fears of disease, diminishing physical powers with age, frightening dreams, and so forth. (1996, 7)

On the matter of empathy, environmental justice is determined to ensure proper living conditions for marginalized groups and to counteract the degradation of nature worldwide. "Environmental justice initiatives specifically attempt to redress the disproportionate incidence of environmental contamination in communities of the poor and / or communities of color, to secure for those affected the right to live unthreatened by the risks posed by environmental degradation and contamination, and to afford equal access to natural resources that sustain life and culture." (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 2002, 4). Were music used as a pedagogical tool when defending the environment, the harm would be reduced. Therefore, music –particularly rap– fulfills the task of raising environmental awareness and embodies a commitment to those populations excluded from social, educational, or economic life. Additionally, it must be considered that "[a]ny serious environmentalist must now realize that for decades the worst forms of environmental degradation have been enabled by governmental and corporate policies of dumping problems on communities of color, poor whites, and the Third World" (Reed 2002, 146).

Living in a world in which every resource is exploited has led us to an environmental crisis. The structure of our society is hierarchical and only if we changed our relationship with all the elements of nature would we be able to improve the conditions on our planet. For Bookchin, "the domination of nature by man stems from the very real domination of human by human" (2005, 1) and the environmental crisis has its roots in the structure of our society. Even though rap is an urban genre, Shinoda has always been aware that the environmental crisis constitutes a serious problem which must be eradicated and he takes this question seriously enough to decry the way our planet is being eroded by our harmful practices. Many of his songs –particularly those performed by Linkin Park– distil concern for nature and its devastation and through the NGO Linkin Park founded in 2004, Music for Relief, Shinoda himself has helped people suffering from poverty and the damaging effects of earthquakes or floods, such as the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami (2004) or hurricane Katrina (2005). The purpose of Music for Relief was to raise money for the victims of natural disasters, to provide them with aid and to make people aware that we must make a huge effort to protect nature.

The band's conviction is that they might reach their audience and make people conscious of the way our planet is being annihilated by dangerous procedures or behaviors and the need to concentrate on sustainability. Motivated by the assumption that their audience could realize the damage done to the earth by human beings, they promoted an initiative through which all the band members tried to sustain life and foster recovery in underdeveloped countries severely affected by environmental degradation, hunger, climate change, and natural phenomena. When poor communities clamor for help and relief, music acts as a catalyst to stir up consciences and sensibilities and raise environmental and social justice awareness.

The first song to be analyzed focuses on an individual vision and experience of injustice. Fort Minor's "Kenji" deals with Japanese interment during World War II. The song pays homage to all those Japanese people who were relocated from their homes and sent to internment camps after the Japanese air attack on

the American fleet at Pearl Harbor (Hawaii) on December 7th, 1941. At 7:55 AM, local time, the first Japanese dive-bomber appeared. Nearly 200 aircraft, including torpedo planes, bombers, and fighters destroyed more than 180 American planes at the Naval Air Station on Ford Island and adjoining Wheeler and Hickam Field. The ships anchored in the harbor saw intensive action and several American ships were bombed. The USS *Arizona* and The USS *Oklahoma* were completely destroyed, and more than 2,300 American lives were lost. The attack "precipitated the entry of the United States into World War II. The strike climaxed a decade of worsening relations between the United States and Japan" (Britannica's editors 2020). On December 8th, President Roosevelt defined the previous day as "a date which will live in infamy" and finished his speech by adding: "I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7th, 1941, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire" (Roosevelt 1941).

Two months later, on February 19, 1942, Roosevelt signed the Executive Order 9066, in which military forces were provided with the authority "to exclude any persons from designated areas" (Ray, n.d.). Even though the word "Japanese" was not included in the text, it was fairly obvious that "the Japanese Americans were the focus of the initiative" (Ray, n.d.). Thus, "[b]etween 1942 and 1945, approximately 120,000 Japanese Americans were detained in 10 camps for varying periods of time in California, Arizona, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Arkansas" (Ray, n.d.). They were forced to abandon their properties, after packing some belongings and clothes in bags they were confined in barracks. Certainly, those Japanese Americans had nothing to do with the attacks; however, the order was signed, and the President's commands had to be complied with, as the U.S. Government was afraid of Japanese espionage and conspiracy. Furthermore, "[r]acial fears contributed to the decision to evacuate more than 11,000 people of Japanese descent from their Pacific Coast homes" (Leonard 1990, 465). After the confinement, some Japanese Americans were not welcome in certain places and hostilities continued in areas such as California. "Terrorists fired shots into the homes of no fewer than fifteen Japanese American families, and arsonists and vandals destroyed property belonging to at least fifty other families. By late 1946, most of the overt hostility had disappeared." (Leonard 1990, 463).

As already mentioned, Shinoda's birthplace is Agoura Hills, whose natural areas are part of California interior chaparral and woodlands.[4] Being half-Japanese, he has always been aware of his racial heritage. The interment of his family in Manzanar during World War II made him shape and write a song which would honor all those Japanese Americans or Japanese descendants who were stuck in the camps –living under lockdown– and experienced racial tensions, even when

[4] "Within [this] ecoregion, one finds a mosaic of grassland, chaparral shrublands, open oak savannas, serpentine communities, closed-cone pine forests, pockets of montane conifer forests, wetlands, salt marshes, and riparian forests" (Olson, n.d.).

the war was over. "Kenji" includes the voices of his own father and aunt. Shinoda planned the interview carefully to make them feel comfortable to recall and relate their experiences in the camp. He added:

> I knew my dad would do the interview. They are two of 13 brothers and sisters. Nine are left. They are two different experiences that sum up the internment. My dad was 3 to 4 years-old and my aunt was in her 20s. [...] I had to plan my questions very carefully. I obviously wanted to get information she was comfortable telling. It took a couple of hours. She ran out of standard answers after an hour [...]. [T] hen they reveal what really happened. She told me about the way they set up the partitions in the room. They used thumbtacks and bed sheets. They had 20 to 30 people in one barrack. I don't believe there was a toilet; they had to go to center of camp. (Shinoda 2006)

Despite being written in verse and containing rhymes, "Kenji," the core of which are the personal experiences in an internment camp, is eminently narrative. Having three narrators, the song begins with the words of Shinoda's father explaining how the family emigrated to America to make a living: "My father came from Japan in 1905 / He was 15 when he immigrated from Japan / He worked until he was able to buy respect and built a store" (2005). However, the American dream was interrupted by the relocation to an internment camp. In the sentence "He worked until he was able to buy respect and built a store," his father makes clear that immigrants had to work hard to gain respect, which means that they were considered second class citizens who had to demonstrate that they were only interested in living honestly by running their own businesses.

The discursive disposition of the facts commences when Shinoda addresses the public by narrating "the story in the form of a dream" and requests them to close their eyes, "just to picture the scene" as he paints it for them (2005). Of course, he does not use the terms "picture" and "paint" randomly. His abiding interest in visual arts, such as painting and drawing, connects him with another *brand* of hip hop: graffiti. Many artistic trends originate in order to highlight the need to face political and social changes in history, and graffiti constitutes a good example. In this sense, Shinoda's career combines his facets both as a painter and a musician and it is his intention to place an emphasis on the former. So, he paints scenes in which small passages of his family's internment can be observed.

Kenji –a typical Japanese name and the keyword of the song– belonged to the first generation of Japanese immigrants, or "Issei," who started arriving in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. They kept their customs, language and religion and sometimes they were perceived as a threat and faced discriminatory legislation. The unequal distribution of the benefits of immigration and discriminatory legislation jeopardized not only the welfare and security of this group, but also their lives. Bearing this in mind, the attack on Pearl Harbor would mean a turning point in the relationship between the US Government and the Issei. Social differences among groups constantly provoke inequality and the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people are those who suffer more. This ultimately might lead to racial discrimination.

When Shinoda indicates that Kenji "was not a soldier" and was ready to have breakfasts before going to work in the little store he ran, he means that he was a man of peace whose main concern was to earn enough money to live and to feel respected. Serenity and endurance are part of the Japanese temperament which Shinoda highlights here. He does not hesitate even to include the word "Japs" when he remarks that "everybody was afraid of the Germans, afraid of the Japs, / But most of all afraid of a homeland attack" (2005). Although the previous abbreviation of "Japanese" is a derogatory and offensive term,[5] Shinoda's intention might be to show the word used those days. The American Government was afraid of another attack or even espionage and Japanese Americans were thought to have been traitors. Here, the tone of the song shifts completely, and, for the first time, the language used is a rough one. He has not used any aggressive word previously to describe the attitude of Americans towards Japanese; however, it seems that he attempts to underline ethnological discrimination.

Shinoda also depicts the horror and the tragedy the attack caused. The sentences "Pictures of soldiers dyin' and runnin' / Ken knew what it would lead to" (2005) underline that, after an attack that had caused the destruction of so many lives, and caused so much bloodshed, there would be an immediate response from the US Government and that response was President Roosevelt's speech. The use of the adjective "evil," when describing the President's statement to relocate Japanese people ("The evil Japanese in our home country will be locked away") (Shinoda 2005) confers the song more subjectivity as those words attempt to classify all Japanese people as guilty of an attack and a horrendous crime that the vast majority had no intention at all to commit and probably would not have approved of. The negative connotations included in the word "evil" accentuate the idea that the attack on the American harbor would separate these two countries and increase their opposition in the global armed conflict. The ensuing conflict destroyed millions of human beings and, indubitably, devastated the environment. At the same time, the adjective portrays the pain and anger that American society experienced after the attack. As matter of fact, Roosevelt did not pronounce that sentence. In "December 7, 1941, A Day Which Will Live in Infamy," he admitted that hostilities existed and, as a consequence, American people, territories and interests were in grave danger (Roosevelt 1941). The social isolation of the Japanese community led to denials in fundamental rights. They were regarded with suspicion and could not remain in their houses anymore, practicing their tradition and culture. It made no difference whether they lived in America or in Japan: General John L. De Witt, "who was in charge of evacuating [them], indicated that there was no distinction between Japanese in Japan and Japanese Americans in the United States. 'A Jap's a Jap,' he

[5] "In the 1950s, Shosuke Sasaki launched a campaign to have the word "Jap" re-classed as racial slur and eliminated from print media." Sasaki was an activist who immigrated to the US in 1919 and "was incarcerated at the Minidoka concentration camp for the duration of World War II" (Varner 2019).

asserted" (Hane 1990, 570). They were all politically suspect and "All the Japanese had to go" (Shinoda 2005). Thus, guiltless people were taken to the internment camps. Shinoda's aunt asked herself why. For her, there was no reason to relocate honest citizens and it was an outrage. "They took Mr. Ni / People didn't understand / Why did they have to take him? / Because he's an innocent laborer" (Shinoda 2005). Shinoda implies that Japanese Americans had to pay a high price for the faults committed by someone else.

In an anthropocentric society, where individualism prevails, acknowledging that all individuals –no matter their race or ethnicity– are equal should be fundamental to the stability and the social welfare of the world. Concerning Japanese internment, avoiding injustice and certain racial prejudices was not possible, as the Executive Order 9066 condemned them to be relocated without any specific evidence for the whole community being responsible for the attack, or that some of them could even be spies. "The US is lookin' for spies" (Shinoda 2005). Japanese people were removed for national security and were also feared as a risk due to war hysteria. Hence, they were given two days to pack their belongings "in two bags / Just two bags" in which they "couldn't even pack [their] clothes" (Shinoda 2005). The question that arises now is how to pack a whole life in two bags. This is what Shinoda indirectly asks the public and he leaves room to create controversies surrounding questions of oppression and injustice.[6] For Shinoda's family, Manzanar was the place chosen. The internment had a decisive and negative impact on the quality of Japanese Americans' lives. Furthermore, the verses "When the kids asked mom 'Where are we goin'?' / Nobody even knew what to say to them" (Shinoda 2005) illustrate how sad the situation was and how difficult for the Japanese families it was to explain what was happening. Although his life had changed completely, Kenji tried to reassure his wife and children. The conditions experienced in the camps were not optimum and the only solution for a stoic man was to endure till the end of the confinement. His hopes in the future could be summarized in "Someday we'll get out, someday, someday" (Shinoda 2005).

The Second World War devastated not only millions of human lives but also amplified the hatred and antagonism existing between America and Japan. In "Kenji," Mike Shinoda denounces the terrible and difficult situation his family went through in the camp. He reveals how, due to racial prejudices and contempt, relocating Japanese in internment camps caused apprehension and anguish. These camps, according Shinoda's elucidation, had enclosed walls and towers with soldiers. Unable to experiment any feeling of frustration or scorn, Kenji opts for empathy and decides that hate must be avoided to survive and to be released one day. In his view, the soldiers watching the Japanese should not be blamed for that, since they are only doing their job: "Ken couldn't really hate them at all; / They were

[6] "Japanese were to bring, for each member of the family: bedding and linens (no mattress); toilet articles, extra clothing; knives, forks, spoons, plates, bowls and cups; and essential personal effects." And "no pets were allowed" (Daniels 2002, 20-21).


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just doin' their job and, / He wasn't gonna make any problems" (Shinoda 2005). Unquestionably, being trapped in camp is not what one expects and, on certain occasions, the need to survive and overcome a difficult but temporary situation –such as the internment– leads people to learn how to go about things unnoticed, or, at least, not to be known as the perpetrator of any riot. "He had a little garden with vegetables and fruits that / He gave to the troops in a basket his wife made, / But in the back of his mind, he wanted his family's life saved" (Shinoda 2005). In a metaphorical way, these vegetables symbolize a kind of truce between Kenji and the soldiers. Growing vegetables in a private garden in America was commonplace during both the First and the Second World Wars to supply the troops and prevent hunger. The sudden severe economic and financial crisis forced Americans "to contribute to the war effort by planting, fertilizing, harvesting, and storing their own fruits and vegetables so that more food could be exported to [their] allies" (Schumm 2018). After the First World War, these gardens reemerged.

On the other hand, the empathy which was perceived in the previous verses turns into resentment when Shinoda asserts Kenji and his family were "prisoners of war in their own damn country, / What for?" (Shinoda 2005). Shinoda utilizes rap music here to openly censure how absurd and unjust the internment was. It is the first time in the song he uses an adjective with negative connotations, "damn," to explain Kenji's feelings and to curse a country which repudiates innocent Japanese immigrants. This notion is reinforced with the name Shinoda gives to the camp: "prison town" (Shinoda 2005).

The desolation felt due to the confinement gave rise to the idea of escaping. One way might be to join the army, and yet, for Kenji, killing his own people was not the proper solution. "And supposedly, some men, went out for the army, signed on, / That 15 kiloton blast, put an end to the war pretty fast, / Two cities were blown to bits; the end of the world came quick" (Shinoda 2005). The incident mentioned in the previous lines corresponds to that of the devastating nuclear bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the 6th and 9th of August 1945, respectively, as a final response to the attack on Pearl Harbor. The attack on its navy had ended the United States' neutrality in World War II and the nuclear bombs put an end to the war with the surrender of Japan. All these events were responsible for the deaths of millions of innocent human beings.

After their confinement in the camps, it must have been difficult for the Japanese Americans to hope or even imagine that life would go back to normal and when they returned to their homes, what they discovered was that their houses had been vandalized. "These people had trashed every room, / Smashed in the windows and bashed in the doors, / Written on the walls of the floor, / "Japs not welcome any more" (Shinoda 2005). In addition, returning home was not an easy task and the Japanese Americans found many difficulties, since an anti-Japanese sentiment was spreading throughout California.

> When the decision was made toward the end of the war to close the camps and allow the internees to return to their homes in California, another outburst of anti-Japanese sentiment broke all over the state. Earl Warren continued his campaign

against Japanese Americans.[7] In opposing the return of the internees to California, he argued that every evacuee being released was a potential saboteur. There were seventy incidents of terrorism and seventeen shootings. (Hane 1990, 574-575)

In the last verses, Shinoda portrays Kenji's impression after being released and observing his house ruined and his whole life in a state of collapse. Desperate and with no words left, he shows resignation and says to his wife: "Someday we'll be OK, someday" (Shinoda 2005). The sentence, which is repeated in the song, epitomizes Kenji's hopes, despite the fact that they were never fulfilled.

It is worth indicating the power of the lyrics and how they make the listener aware of the awfulness of wars and internments. The song also condenses an implicit message that social conflicts, whatever and whenever they may be, maximize racial prejudices and discrimination and unleash inequality. The last three lines recap Shinoda's main intention, that is to say, to reveal a true story from the point of view of his family and the suffering they experienced in the internment camp. "Now the names have been changed, but the story's true / My family was locked up back in '42 / My family was there it was dark and damp / And they called it an internment camp" (Shinoda 2005). Shinoda is cognizant that being forced to spend three years in the camp was not constructive. He admits that, apparently, his family "sound relatively benign" when talking about it:

> My dad was the second youngest out of 13 [kids]. They packed dozens of people in our family into one little barrack room. The barracks were quickly and loosely thrown together, and when you woke up in the morning you had to wipe off everything. These are stories that I grew up hearing. [My family] made it sound relatively benign and they played a lot of things down, but if you dug into a kind of detail with them, you could tell it was really an awful experience. (Shinoda 2016)

The second of Shinoda's songs analyzed also includes the emotions of the individual but extrapolates them and juxtaposes them with greater environmental issues. The track "Nothing makes Sense Anymore" was composed after Chester Bennington, Linkin Park's vocalist, died in 2017. The style is not exactly rap, but seemingly alternative hip hop in which significant influences of pop are detected. The title of the song is quite revealing, in the sense that it attests that the core will be a devastation, either personal or environmental. Shinoda himself explains that the whole album, *Post Traumatic*, was "a journey out of grief and darkness, not into grief and darkness" (Camp 2018). On December 15, 2017, a firestorm in Bel Air (Los Angeles), known as The Skirball Fire, burnt 422 acres with 100% containment. According to Los Angeles Fire Department, 12 structures were damaged and 6 structures destroyed. "[T]he investigators have determined the fire was caused by an illegal cooking fire at an encampment in a brush area adjacent to where Sepulveda

[7] See *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps* (Weglyn 156). Earl Warren was Governor of California from 1943 to 1953.

Boulevard crosses under the San Diego (405) Freeway" (Stewart 2017). Harmful and irresponsible actions clearly destroy nature. We live in social structures and not understanding that our planet is shared by all of us will bring about severe consequences. "Ironically, the very period when long-term human impacts upon the planet have escalated to such an extent that our era has been dubbed the Anthropocene is also the era in which the entanglement of morality and materiality, social relations and natural phenomena, has become veiled" (Rigby 2015, 6).

Shinoda seized the opportunity to show his grief and decided to exhibit videos of the incident, which had a tremendous impact on nature, to corroborate the extent of the devastation, juxtaposing his own personal desolation with the destruction of the environment and he requested his fans to send him films recorded by themselves which would be used at the beginning of the video (@mikeshinoda, February 8, 2018c).[8] Owing to Shinoda's enduring interest in environmental problems, the use of the firestorm images is not by chance. The mastery of fire by humans can be traced back to primitive societies. In classical mythology, the Titan Prometheus stole fire from the gods to empower humans. As reported by Rigby, "[i] n availing himself of technologies powered by combustion of ancient biomass [...], the modern Prometheus is fashioning the Earth and its atmosphere in ways that are fast becoming calamitous" (2015, 112).

The first lines of the song indicate that Shinoda has always been able to control himself and has never experienced any trouble. The quietness of his life allowed him to feel safe and secure and he contemplated fear and difficulties from a reliable and stable position: "I used to know where the bottom was, / Somewhere far under the ocean wave. / Upon a ledge I was looking down / It was far enough to keep me safe "(Shinoda 2018a).

It should also be added that Linkin Park's lyrics contain several images of water when talking about human feelings. In general, water is a symbol of fertilization, purification, and dissolution. Heavy seas and choppy waters imply bad omens or adversities. In literature, water connotes birth –or the origin of life– death or redemption by cleansing. Gaston Bachelard defends the concept of water as extinguishing fire and, as a result, water defeats fire (2011, 162). As Juan Ignacio Oliva points out, "this liquid element serves to exemplify the constant and slight mutation of human lives in their existential evolution. Likewise, water also presents its elusive condition which is used as a metaphor for the changing reality, which makes one doubt and shudder" (2016, 81).[9] In this song, being far from "the ocean waves" conveys that Shinoda's life was relatively easy and he was able to look at complications from a comfortable position. However, if life changes, everything alters in a flash: "But the ground was cracked open / Throw me in the ocean / Cast me out away at sea" (Shinoda 2018a). What generated Shinoda's fall was Bennington's death. Shinoda again uses an element of nature, "ground," to describe the collapse

[8] #FireVideoForMike.
[9] My own translation.

he suffered. The prevailing images in the song are those of water. The fierce ocean and the sea are a metaphor for dissolution, destruction and death and the breaking waves convey the ferocity of the destruction, both physical and psychological. Meanwhile, the personal destruction is equated with environmental destruction, which means that feelings are mirrored in nature.

Another feature which should be mentioned is the prevalence of opposites. Shinoda delineates a world containing pairs of antitheses which complement themselves. Every noun and adjective has its counterpart, and both cannot be avoided to fully understand the real meaning of the song. The second stanza provides a good example of his mental and physical situation and the despair he feels: "My inside's out, my left is right, / My upside's down, my black is white. / I hold my breath and close my eyes, / And wait for down but there's no light" (2018a). The adjectives "black" and "white," in combination with the nouns "dark" and "light," emphasize the contrast between the positive and negative parts of human existence. Shinoda transmits the inconsistency and conflict he experiences and his difficulty overcoming this situation. In the phrases "the world was turned over / Washing out the lines" (2018a), water does not have a purifying function but acts as a destructive force which confuses him. More specifically, the end of the song exudes negativity, since Shinoda claims that he is lost: "I'm call without an answer / I'm a shadow in the dark / Trying to put it back together / As I watch it fall apart" (2018a). Again, darkness covers everything and he cannot escape from the nightmare.

The disastrous effects of the Skirball Fire are displayed in the video Shinoda recorded, which deals with the harmful effect and disastrous consequences of damaging or toxic practices. At the beginning, images of the Getty Center including the fierceness of the firestorm are displayed. Several cars and trucks circulate while mountains are being scorched by the fire and, subsequently, the opposition between nature and industrialization is patent. The next image is that of Shinoda himself walking through the burned terrain. The devastated environment can be brought into line with Shinoda's physical appearance. Looking thinner and visibly affected by Bennington's death and the landscape he is contemplating, he screams hopelessness "Nothing makes Sense Anymore" (2018b). On the edge of the precipice, the suffocating atmosphere does not allow him to breath properly. He even states: "I hold my breath and close my eyes / And wait for dawn, but there is no light" (2018a). Only a colorful cap hanging on a burned tree branch, which probably belongs to one of his children, suggests that there is hope and that light will shine. The same hope is felt at the end of the video, where images of green shoots constitute a symbol of recovery for both Shinoda and the environment (Shinoda 2018b). No doubt with this video he was trying to make the audience understand that thoughtless actions can deteriorate the planet. As a result, an enormous effort should be made to remedy its destruction.

The analysis of these two songs can lead to some conclusions about the role of Shinoda's music in raising public awareness of both personal and environmental issues. The subversive undertone contained in rap music allows artists to denounce unfair situations and social injustices. In the case of Mike Shinoda, what he is denouncing in "Kenji" is the internment suffered by his family. Throughout the lines

of the song, he exposes the negative experience his family went through. Without using a hard language, except for the occasional word or sentence, Shinoda's intention is clear: to condemn an act of racial discrimination such as Japanese internment during World War II. Of course, the use of certain hard words or expressions constitutes an example of the pain Shinoda has inside himself. Writing a song which reveals a traumatic experience is likely to have had a cathartic effect on him and, at the same time, he was able to pay homage to all those Japanese Americans confined in the camps and, more specifically, to his family. The song is not an act of revenge, but aims to open up the social debate around race and the consequences of war. Shinoda narrates a true story whose victims, his father and his aunt, are given voice so that the episode is not forgotten. The reason why he does not make use of hate and rancor may be found in the following words belonging to Martin Luther King Jr.: "We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vault of opportunity of this nation. [...] Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst from freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred." (1963).

"Nothing makes Sense Anymore" is a good example of how inner and personal devastation may correspond to environmental destruction. If we do not pay attention to the fact that harmful practices and damaging human actions can annihilate nature, its devastation will be rapid. Shinoda's interest in protecting the environment is reflected in many of the songs he composes and in the specific projects he carries out with the NGO "Music for Relief." Providing marginalized communities affected by natural phenomena with aid is something the organization has been implementing since its inception. Both Shinoda's lyrics and actions exemplify his abiding interest in environmental problems. Those issues have led him to use his lyrics to raise awareness about the positive contribution we all could make to keep the environment safe and help social groups in need of aid.

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