

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT ASHEVILLE

“Shikataganai”*

**The Internment of the Japanese and the
Effects on the Family**

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(*It cannot be helped)

“Moral conditions in camp are not deteriorating, as yet...However family life is disintegrating- nobody eats together, children run around wild, and some people are purposely obnoxious. But there is a slight possibility, which I hope will materialize, that we will profit from this Camp existence.”¹

This is an excerpt of a letter, which Kenji Okuda wrote to a Japanese American friend attending the University of Chicago about his experience in the Puyallup Assembly Center in July of 1942. Okuda and his family, along with others of Japanese descent were in centers like this one for over a month. To understand what is happening to these families and why they were in internment camps, it is vital to be familiar with what ensued for the Japanese once they immigrated to the United States.

The *Issei* are the immigrants born in Japan and who made their way to America. The word Issei comes from a combination of the Japanese words for “first” and “generation” with each subsequent generation composed the same way. The second generation, those born in the United States are the *Nisei* and their children are the *Sansei*.² These three generations will be the focus of this paper as the generational experience of those interned and the effects on the family are explored.

The Issei brought with them their own values and familial traditions when they immigrated to the United States. The family, as the basic unit of society, had always played an important role in Japan and the Japanese people knew and understood this importance.³ I will argue that the internment experience solidified a shift that had begun with the acculturation of the Nisei away from the traditional concepts a Japanese family adhered to before World War II and indisputably changed the Japanese family.

¹ Kenji Okuda, letter to Norio Higano, 7 October 1942. Accessed at: <<http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/UW-new/five/letters.html>> (here after referred to as UW website), 9 September 2003.

² Roger Daniels, *The Decision to Relocate the Japanese Americans*. (Malabar, Florida: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1990), 4.

³ Chiye Sano, *Changing Values of the Japanese Family*. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1973), 1.

The scholarship surrounding the Japanese American internment is widely focused on the legality of the forced removal. However, some scholars such as Catherine A. Luther, Edward Spicer and Wendy Ng focus on how the internment affected the family. Luther's article on Japanese Americans centers on the identity crisis they went through as a result of the internment. She researched the newspapers published by and for the Japanese Americans in the internment camps.⁴

This article chronicles the changes and struggles the interned people went through as they navigated an area never before chartered. Her analysis is that once the Japanese proved their loyalty by joining the armed forces, they gradually accepted their Japanese identity rather than focusing all of their energy on being as American as they could. Luther concludes that the Japanese Americans exited the camps with a newfound, cohesive identity that mixed their Japanese heritage with their American nationality.⁵

Luther's research is thorough; however there are problems with her conclusion. To state that the Japanese were able to form a cohesive and accurate identity upon leaving the camps is not supported nor does she go beyond the newspapers to formulate her supposition. The evidence gathered and conclusions drawn in this paper will tell a very different story; one of betrayal and eventual acceptance of their fate as interned people.

Spicer and Ng give more of an overview of the internment experience and how the family tried to cope during this period. Their observations and findings are helpful in completing the picture of the family and subsequent formation of identity for the Japanese. Each experience was unique to the individual that lived through the

⁴ Catherine A. Luther, "Reflections of Cultural Identities in Conflict: Japanese American Internment Camp Newspapers during World War II," *Journalism History* 29:2, 73.

⁵ Luther, 76, 78.

internment, yet the outcome of such a denial of civil liberties on a group of people is irrefutable. The family was undeniably changed by such a displacement and disruption in their normal lives. The internment resulted in the absolute and total modification in the way of life for these people, which made a lasting impression for future generations. Those effects will be explored later with the information from the Sansei Research Project.

The main documents I will be using for this paper are primary correspondents, official documents and memoirs of the internment. The coverage of the internment in terms of the family as well as individuals is becoming more thorough as people are willing to share their experiences in the internment camps. To understand the internment, one has to first understand the background of the Japanese in the United States.

The Japanese who first immigrated to the United States in the late 19th-early 20th centuries were mainly young, second-born males of the peasant and middle-classes of Japan.⁶ These men first worked as contract laborers in Hawaii and intended to return to Japan to buy land and start families. Unfortunately, due to rising inflation in Japan, this dream became out of the question.⁷ Instead, most of these men chose to stay in the United States, save their wages to start their own farms and small-scale businesses. Many of those who chose to stay were financially able to send home for a picture bride⁸ by 1908.⁹

⁶ Edward H. Spicer, *Impounded People; Japanese Americans in the Relocation Centers*. (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1969) 47.

⁷ Elizabeth Haller and M. Mark Stolarik, eds. "The Japanese American Experience," n.d., <<http://www.balchinstitute.org/museum/japanese/japam.html>> (20 April 2003)

⁸ Picture Brides were women born and raised in Japan who saw only a picture of their new husbands in the United States. This was not an uncommon practice in Japan, as most marriages were arranged.

⁹ Spicer, 47.

There were changes going on in the United States during this time. An important distinction to understand was the competition Japanese farmers posed in agriculture. The Japanese were adept farmers and able to grow specialty and labor-intensive crops in areas Caucasian farmers had trouble utilizing. Because of their aptitude in this area, the Japanese acquired many enemies among their Caucasian counterparts.¹⁰ In addition, laws passed at the local and state level against people of Asian descent finally culminated in the federal Immigration Act of 1924, virtually ceasing all immigration from Asian countries.¹¹ Very few women came to the United States in the years 1905-1915, therefore a typical Japanese family consisted of a father in his mid-thirties, a mother in her mid-twenties and children typically born between 1918-1922. These age differences created distinct generational groupings between and among the Issei and Nisei.¹²

The challenge for the Issei was to find their place in a society that was vastly different from their own, in language and custom. These people were acutely aware of the discriminatory practices that had affected the Chinese, and so the Issei quickly adapted Western-style clothing and encouraged their children to assimilate to American society. On the contrary, the Japanese also formed exclusive communities and neighborhoods where their stores, doctors, homes and churches were located.

Nichonmachi, or Japantown, were the homogeneous neighborhoods that the Issei created in which to live and work.¹³

¹⁰ John W Jeffries, *Wartime America: The World War II Home Front* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1996), 130-131.

¹¹ For more information on the exclusionary practices of California in particular, see Roger Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.)

¹² Daniels, 4.

¹³ Wendy Ng, *Japanese American Internment During World War II: A History and Reference Guide*. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002), 5.

A member of the Sansei generation remarked, “It is understood that the Issei worked the hardest jobs imaginable, and that the Nisei in fact were beneficiaries of that hard work.”¹⁴ The Issei worked hard so their children would be able to pursue their studies and become educated members of society. Because of this aspiration for their children, the Nisei distinguished themselves as the highest educated group in the country. Their education provided the family with an objective indication of status, prestige and honor.¹⁵

The membership of the family in Japan defined relationships, status and roles for the members. In Japan, marriage was not only a normal occurrence; it was a duty to society as well as the family. Not all of the children who married would leave their paternal home, the eldest son, or daughter, would continue in this home after marriage. Emphasis, in a Japanese home, placed the care of elders as a main priority; there was no situation in which it would be tolerated that the older generation was left alone. As age was associated with wisdom, it was imperative to respect and therefore care for the parents as the older generation.¹⁶ This concept of respect for the elders of the family is an important and central theme of Japanese ideology.

As the Japanese began immigrating to the United States, they brought their beliefs regarding raising and caring for children as well as their ideals of family. Stemming from their own upbringing, the Issei felt it essential their children be literate and educated. Although the Issei had to rely on their children to communicate with those outside the Nichonmachi, they tried to instill the cultural heritage of Japan on their children. The

¹⁴ Donna K. Nagata. *Legacy of Injustice: Exploring the Cross-Generational Impact of the Japanese American Internment*. (New York: Plenum Press, 1993), 141.

¹⁵ Leonard Broom and John I. Kitsuse, *The Managed Casualty: The Japanese-American Family in World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 7.

¹⁶ Sano, 31, 33, 38.

Nisei however were beginning to rebel against their parents' discipline and teachings. Living in the United States and attending public schools made the Nisei prefer and reach out for the independence other American's their age were enjoying.¹⁷

Assimilation into the dominant American culture was inevitable for the Nisei yet the family tried to be a conservative influence on them. Family life became strained as the Nisei started to challenge the strict patriarchal pattern of traditional authority and dependency relationships, which in turn, emphasized the differences between the generations.¹⁸ The rebellion against their Issei parents was twofold; for the Nisei, their Issei parents belonged to a previous era and they were members of a foreign group.¹⁹

As the threat of war with Japan became imminent, it began to affect the family and the Japanese community as a whole. When Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 the country was shocked and the Japanese community outraged.²⁰ A recent trip to Japan, business connections with companies of Japanese origins, language school teachers or Buddhist and Shinto elders, because they were citizens of Japan, were on FBI watch lists.²¹ Issei elders arrested from the FBI watch lists and later moved to detention camps²², numbered over one thousand individuals. Since these people represented the leadership of the Japanese population in the United States, the community was henceforth deprived of its' religious and social leaders which effectively ended normal community functions. The Nisei, inexperienced twenty year olds, were to take

¹⁷ Spicer, 47-48.

¹⁸ Broom and Kitsuse, 9.

¹⁹ Daisuke Kitagawa, *Issei and Nisei: The Internment Years*. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1967), 29.

²⁰ Ng, 13.

²¹ Audrie Girdner and Anne Loftis, *The Great Betrayal: The Evacuation of the Japanese-Americans During World War II*. (London: The Macmillan Co., 1969), 14.

²² The detention camps held "enemy aliens" from Japan, Germany and Italy. Enemy aliens, anyone not naturalized as a citizen of the United States from a country that the US was then at war with.

the place of the aging and wise Issei men.²³ This was an obviously difficult position for the Nisei as they were told throughout their upbringing that wisdom would come with age and the years they acquired did not fit for the position they were to hold, according to parental views.

As the Japanese community settled down in the days and weeks following Pearl Harbor, different organizations began voicing their opinions. *The Japanese American Courier (JAC)*²⁴ published a loyalty resolution signed by more than twelve hundred people and addressed to President Roosevelt. The resolution, in part, reads:

“BE IT RESOLVED that we Americans of Japanese ancestry and the members of our parent generation here assembled and elsewhere reaffirm our allegiance and loyalty to the United States of America and pledge our efforts toward a victorious prosecution of the war by extending unstinting co-operation to the President of the United States...”²⁵

The resolution went on to name five points in which the Japanese community was ready to act on including volunteering for the armed services and serving in the American Red Cross.²⁶ The Nisei considered themselves 100 percent Americans, though reared in traditional family homes; they were educated in American schools. Truly, the Nisei as a whole did not expect the extreme backlash that was to come.

The JAC also addressed the void felt by the community due to the absence of the Issei leaders. Dependence, economic as well as moral, was addressed in conjunction with the Nisei having to assume a new role they were neither prepared for nor accustomed to assuming. One of the many examples of respect the Nisei held for their parents is

²³ Louis Fiset, “Listening to the Sound of Shoes,” *Imprisoned Apart: The World War II Correspondence of an Issei Couple*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 31-33, 36.

²⁴ The Japanese American Courier was the first English language publication for the Nisei.

²⁵ The Japanese American Courier, “Ringing Resolution of Loyalty Sent to President from Rally,” December 26, 1941. < www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/UW-new/jac.html > (3 September 2003).

²⁶ Ibid.

obvious from this quote, “Regardless of what may be said against the Issei during the present crisis, they have undoubtedly trained us Nisei well in the ways of intelligent citizenship...”²⁷

President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 into law on February 19, 1942. Effectively this order stated that the Secretary of War and military commanders authorized to appoint military areas in which could exclude anyone. The order went on to state that all Executive Departments and Federal Agencies to help in, “the furnishing of medical aid, hospitalization, ...transportation, use of land, shelter... and other services.”²⁸ The blanket statements of this order and the ambiguity of the language allowed for assumptions and a transfer of power to the military on the West Coast. Without actually declaring martial law, this order came very close to crossing that line.

The American government determined that there was a military necessity to remove the Japanese on the West Coast to internal areas of the country. The decision made to evacuate and relocate anyone of Japanese decent included those citizens’ only one-sixteenth Japanese.²⁹ Between January 29 and February 2, 1942, one hundred and thirty-five prohibited zones were announced for restriction of enemy aliens³⁰.

Daisuke Kitagawa, a Japanese national and visiting minister, had the opportunity to intimately know the Japanese community in America. Kitagawa came to the United

²⁷ Frank Miyamoto, “War Places Second Generation in Lead Once Taken by Elders,” Japanese American Courier, 1 January 1942, 9. <www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/UW-new/jac.html> 3 September 2003.

²⁸ Executive Office of the President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Executive Order 9066, quoted in Roger Daniels, The Decision to Relocate the Japanese Americans (Malabar, Florida: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Co., 1990), 113-114.

²⁹ Elizabeth Haller and M. Mark Stolarik, eds. “The Japanese American Experience,” n.d., <<http://www.balchinstitute.org/museum/japanese/japam.html>> (20 April 2003).

³⁰ All Issei were considered aliens as they were barred from citizenship. The term enemy comes in during WWII for these people because Japan was an enemy country. This has its’ roots in the Alien and Seditious Acts.

States to study theology and was to return to Japan to be a leader in the Christian Church there. The bombing of Pearl Harbor drastically changed those plans as Kitagawa was swept into the fervor of evacuation and relocation.³¹ At the Pinedale Assembly Center, Kitagawa was able to chronicle the personal lives of those with whom he was interned.³²

Pinedale, as well as the Tule Lake Relocation Center in Northern California, are revealed in detail through Kitagawa's war memoir, *Issei and Nisei: The Internment Years*. In the beginning of internment, there was a discrepancy as to how the administration and the internees defined family. The internees felt their nuclear family as well as their extended family should be housed as close to each other as possible. The administration had only considered the nuclear family while assigning barracks, which created confusion in the beginning.³³ This is one example of how the two cultures, Japanese and American, clashed and the failure of the government to understand the values and behaviors of the Japanese.

"I have never seen as clearly as I did at Tule Lake how tremendously important the family is for the healthy growth of every human being."³⁴ Tule Lake became the permanent camp many of the souls from Pinedale would inhabit, including Kitagawa, for the duration of the war. Once again, nuclear families were assigned one apartment in each barrack; regardless of age, sex, or number of members. Meals were taken in mess halls, as no private kitchens were available or allowed. Bells regulated life in Tule Lake and as soon as children heard the bell for a meal, they typically raced to the mess halls.

³¹ The camps were in areas deemed a safe distance from sensitive military areas and built on federal and private property. In all, there were fifteen Assembly Centers (temporary housing) and ten Relocation Centers (permanent housing, for the duration of the war). These camps were in isolated areas throughout the West, Rocky Mountains and Southeast.

³² Kitagawa, 1, 64.

³³ Kitagawa, 64, 66.

³⁴ Kitagawa, 88.

Children were able to eat with their friends and were often out of the mess area before their parents had a chance to sit.³⁵

There are different explanations as to the reasons why these children were able to freely run about the camps. One theory on the loss of control of the children was because of the sheer number of them in the enclosed camps in addition to they had numerous opportunities to be with their peers. The forced communal living situation, never encountered before for these people, made family solidarity difficult to maintain. Family mealtime rituals were abandoned because there was not enough room for each family to have a table to themselves, also multiple families and their differing standards merged to form a common mess hall behavior.³⁶ An important tradition of socialization and parental care and instruction was lost during the internment experience.³⁷

Furthermore, it is possible that some children behaved badly due to the absence of their fathers and/or older siblings. These familial ties would normally regulate the behavior of the younger members of the family. As stated before, internment was a very new and strange experience, one that did not come with a manual.

Parents recognized the cultural and emotional distance between them and their children, however because this rebelliousness was not something the Issei had ever encountered, they had no way of combating it. These tensions reduced the effectiveness of traditional community institutions in controlling adolescents.³⁸ An important tradition

³⁵ Kitagawa, 75, 84-85.

³⁶ Spicer, 104-105.

³⁷ Kitagawa, 86.

³⁸ James, 140.

of socialization and parental care and instruction was lost during the internment experience.³⁹

Mealtime may seem like an insignificant event unable to facilitate the breakdown of the family unit; however for the Japanese meals were an extremely important event. The activity of sitting down with the family for a meal was a central aspect of creating unity among family members. Meals were the times the Issei could share with their children their heritage and converse about the day. Although the children and young adults were exposed to American culture all day long, the meals were a chance to re-affirm their Japanese identity.⁴⁰ Traditionally, the Japanese prepared and arranged their food so it would be pleasing to the eye as well as the palate. However, in the camps the food, scooped out of large garbage cans, which while clean, was not very appetizing. To add insult on top of this, the food was heaped on the plates so it all ran together and sometimes there simply was not enough for everyone.⁴¹

The experiences Kitagawa shares of his time in Tule Lake are insightful as well as disturbing at times. He writes of the Tule Lake inmates as striving to be one big family, but in this forced atmosphere of family, the individual families had to give up some of their autonomy. The Issei generation, refused the benefit of citizenship and therefore unable to participate in the self-governing aspects of camp life. For these reasons, many of the younger children in the family lost confidence in and respect for the Issei. Their younger children saw their older siblings among the Nisei generation, who were American citizens and allowed electoral rights to the camp organizations, as superior to

³⁹ Kitagawa, 86.

⁴⁰ Kitagawa, 84-86.

⁴¹ Girdner and Loftis, 161.

their Issei parents.⁴² As the Nisei gained official authority, this created a conflict between the generations as this type of structure was in direct opposition to Japanese values. The Issei were stunned and felt their principles of filial piety and respect for one's elders excluded in this new way of life.⁴³ The Issei, as the older and therefore wise generation, expected to be in control of their lives as well as the lives of their Nisei children. Camp regulations were in opposition to the formal and informal ways the Issei asserted their authority over the Nisei; the tables had turned and it was the Issei who were left out.

Within this familial confusion, Issei wives and mothers were experiencing a newfound freedom in their daily lives. Here was the chance to get away from the confines of the home, commiserate with other women and take classes in English or flower arranging, a traditional Japanese activity. On the other hand, the Issei men floundered without any real purpose or motive to do much of anything. These men were too proud to take classes in English from their children and were adrift in the camps, barred from assuming their usual role as leaders in the new communities.⁴⁴ The experience of the Issei men is particularly important in understanding the traditional Japanese family. As the head of the house, the men had always taken the reigns of authority in the home and the community. This was, in part, due to the strict patriarchal stance of the male in the Japanese family.

The environment within the centers encouraged the Nisei's emancipation from their Issei elders and family in two ways. The first was economic independence from the family given that the Nisei now could hold jobs within the camps and make their own money. Before internment, school was their full-time job due to the emphasis placed on

⁴² Kitagawa, 88.

⁴³ Nagata, 11.

⁴⁴ Kitagawa, 90-97.

education. Peer group participation was the second way the camp administration tried to separate the generations. These associations, such as the preferential treatment awarded to the Nisei, helped to foster the declining importance of the family.⁴⁵ The Nisei, therefore, seemed to be stranded between two worlds; that of the white majority and the traditional ways of the Issei.⁴⁶ The Nisei were put in a difficult position for their traditional upbringing demanded they adhere to their parents' wishes, yet the camp administration now held much more physical power over them.

In the fall of 1942, camp schools opened with Caucasian teachers bussed in from adjoining communities. Some camps had internees who were teachers; however they were rare and paid substantially less than their Caucasian counterparts. In the camps, one in four of the internees was children who had to go to school where the teacher to student ratio was almost double the national average⁴⁷. When the children arrived for the first day of school, they found nothing familiar, there were no blackboards or desks and some schools had to operate out of the mess halls. It was also shocking for some of the students to be surrounded by so many other Japanese kids; they had always mingled with Caucasians and other races.⁴⁸

There were also opportunities in the camps to work⁴⁹; in the beginning workers earned \$8/month for unskilled labor, \$12/month for skilled labor and \$16/month for professional and technical labor. The jobs in the camps ranged from gardeners to

⁴⁵ Broom-Kitsue, 40.

⁴⁶ James, 21.

⁴⁷ The national ratio at the time was 28 students to 1 teacher. In the camps, the ratio was 48:1 in the elementary schools and 35:1 in the secondary schools. (James, 43).

⁴⁸ James, 42-44.

⁴⁹ The WRA employed internees at the camps to help with administrative work as well as in jobs that pertained to the daily running of the camps. There were also ways to leave the camps and work as laborers on private farms. All of these jobs paid considerably less to the internees than their Caucasian counterparts

doctors, with their pay awarded accordingly. There were no provisions made for accidents on the job and in publicity releases, these facts were often cited with pride rather than embarrassment.⁵⁰ In a memorandum for the Assistant Secretary of War, General DeWitt spelled out these wages in addition to an “allowance” the Army gave the evacuees for clothing and toiletries, not to exceed \$7.50 per month, per family.⁵¹

Many Nisei took advantage of the different ways to leave the camps. Some enrolled in universities in the Midwest or on the East Coast. The internees had to prove they were welcome in their new community and had a job or a school to attend, in order to leave the camps.⁵² Many sympathetic church groups⁵³ and private citizens sponsored Nisei students and workers so they could leave the camps.⁵⁴ It was difficult for the parents to let the Nisei leave, however. Rumors were constantly floating around the camps and many Issei were worried their children would encounter hostility and even violence because of community backlash.⁵⁵

In January of 1943, the secretary of war reopened the military to Japanese Americans who wished to prove their loyalty. The units were segregated and any Nisei who wished to be a part had to answer a loyalty questionnaire.⁵⁶ The representatives of

⁵⁰ Girdner and Loftis, 170.

⁵¹ “Wages, pay, and maintenance of Japanese evacuees,” 1942. <<http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/Documents/wcca.html>> (5 September 2003).

⁵² It was not until 1943 that anyone requesting leave from the camps to sign a loyalty oath to the United States.

⁵³ The Quakers were one such group that tirelessly worked for the Nisei college students. The Student Relocation Committee was also instrumental in helping the Nisei with their paperwork and leave clearances. For more information, see the University of Washington’s Camp Harmony website, <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony>

⁵⁴ Jack Sutters, “American Refugees: The Japanese-American Relocation,” n.d., <<http://www.afsc.org/hist/2002/japanam.hym>> (20 April 2003).

⁵⁵ Kitagawa, 104-105.

⁵⁶ The loyalty question that infuriated many of the Issei had to do with them having to choose sides. For the Issei, this was difficult due to their status as unable to be naturalized.

the army arrived without much notice and the War Relocation Authority (WRA)⁵⁷ staff helped distribute and collect these questionnaires. The questionnaire was instrumental in creating an all-Japanese combat team. The two units that eventually encompassed the Nisei, the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, were the most decorated units in American military history. Nicknamed the “Christmas Tree Regiment,” because of their medals, these two units demonstrated their loyalty for the United States by their participation in the war effort.⁵⁸

The Issei were shocked and upset at the notion of their children fighting in the Pacific. It was one thing to ask them to fight the Germans, but to fight the Japanese was another matter entirely. Once the war was over, the Issei felt they would not be able to face their families in Japan or their ancestors in the hereafter. This was too much for many of the older generation and bitter arguments ensued. Opposing attitudes towards the draft often split families, many Nisei felt it was their duty to fight and most Issei did not agree. The Nisei looked at this as an opportunity to prove their loyalty and assert their independence. Unfortunately for the Issei, they could not interfere with their grown child’s decision that, as an American citizen, he had every right to make on his own.⁵⁹ Ironically, the heritage of the Nisei had situated them in the camps, yet they still held the status of American citizens and all the rights and responsibilities that went along with that honor.

The part of the questionnaire that was problematic for the Issei was, “. . .and foreswear any allegiance or obedience to the Japanese Emperor, or any other foreign

⁵⁷ The WRA was created in 1942 to oversee the evacuation and relocation of the Japanese. It was created by Executive Order 9102 and established as a civilian agency under the Department of the Interior.

⁵⁸ James, 83-85.

⁵⁹ Kitagawa, 110.

government, power, or organization?”⁶⁰ Although the US was their home and certainly the home of their children, answering ‘yes’ to this question would make the Issei citizens without a country. However, answering ‘no’ to the question would put their loyalty into question. Many of the internees refused to answer the question at all because of uncertainty as to the context their answers would be used.⁶¹

Kenji Okuda, a college student at the outbreak of World War II, is immortalized on the University of Washington’s (UW) “Camp Harmony” online exhibit. Camp Harmony is the euphemism used for the Puyallup Assembly Center. Okuda was born in Seattle in 1922, the first son of Issei immigrants. Numerous letters Okuda wrote to friends, federal documents naming him as a subversive individual and an interview conducted in 1995 by Louis Fiset are included in the exhibit. The interview begins with Okuda’s life before Pearl Harbor; graduating from high school in 1939, a visit to Japan for a year and finally enrolling at UW in the fall of 1940. He began his studies in Engineering because his parents wanted him to be able to get a marketable degree. The rationale was that if he could not find work in the United States he could always try in his parents’ homeland of Japan.⁶² Okuda’s internment story is representative for those of his age and educational achievement; however, it is one that has not been explored. In a way, Okuda could be considered an elite inmate, yet there were countless Nisei in his position.

From Okuda’s personal correspondence and other documents, he obviously struggled with the notion of his own identity, which due to the internment was called into question. He also worried about where and how he and his family would continue after

⁶⁰ “Loyalty Question #28” quoted in Ng, 57.

⁶¹ Ng, 57.

⁶² Kenji Okuda, interview by Louis Fiset, 9 August 1995. see UW website.

the internment. The night Pearl Harbor was bombed, two FBI agents initially came to the Okuda home. They had come to speak to Henry Okuda, Kenji's father, a respected leader in the community. Many documents written in Japanese were seized from the home and Henry was forced to go with the FBI downtown to the Immigration center and was later transferred to Fort Missoula⁶³ in Montana.⁶⁴ A memorandum written in the fall of 1942, named Henry Okuda as an individual "...considered by the FBI to have been the most dangerous Japanese propagandist in the Seattle Area."⁶⁵

Kenji Okuda wrote most of the letters in the collection to a Nisei friend, Norio Higano, who was attending the University of Chicago. In these letters, he shares details of life behind barbed wire, his hopes and his fears for the Nisei and Issei population. Okuda's first 'camp' letter to Higano dated May 12, 1942, just two weeks after his internment at the Puyallup Assembly Center, includes his description of the fence surrounding the camp, the guard towers having sub-machine guns and the guards who patrolled the area.⁶⁶ These people were imprisoned, behind barbed wire, not allowed to come and go freely as they had done all their lives. The reality of this new way of life was extremely harsh and unknown to those interned.

Although this camp existence is new to all the internees, they still tried to do things as they had when they were free people. A month after being interned, Okuda describes a Memorial Day celebration as follows; "...a quiet service planned for those Japanese pioneers who have died striving that we, their children, might inherit something

⁶³ Fort Missoula was converted into a detention center to house all suspect enemy aliens. Japanese as well as Italian and German aliens were housed there during the war.

⁶⁴ Kenji Okuda, interview by Louis Fiset, 9 August 1995, see UW website.

⁶⁵ "American Friends Service Committee." 3 September 1942. Accessed at: <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/UW-new/five/govt/fbi.html> > (5 October 2003).

⁶⁶ Kenji Okuda, letter to Norio Higano, 12 May 1942, see UW website.

of that Great American ideal, Democracy.”⁶⁷ The bitterness that many of the internees eventually felt comes out in his next statement of the futility of internment because so many resembled the enemy nation in “facial and racial characteristics” alone.⁶⁸ These statements allude to the fact that the Nisei population might have been identifying more with their American, rather than Japanese characteristics.

Throughout the letters, Okuda seems resolved to leave the camp for whatever university that will accept him. He settled in to camp life with his family, constantly unsure as to what the future will bring for his educational aspirations. He drew a line in the sand between the working Nisei and the college Nisei as to their willingness to get out of the camp. Many of the working Nisei had families to think of and support while the college Nisei simply wanted to continue with their studies. Okuda portrays the working Nisei as complacent and not wanting to leave the camps, satisfied for the time being with their circumstances. This is obviously unfair to those who may have had no other choice but to stay in the camps. The college Nisei had to find a university and community⁶⁹ that would accept them which became more difficult as many universities put a cap on how many Nisei they would admit.⁷⁰

June came at Puyallup and classes in creative writing, first aid, German, English and other topics began. Lack of privacy, a constant subject in almost all of Okuda’s correspondence can be illustrated by this quote, “...life we lead in camp limited by the fences into a 19 acre area which has no more privacy than a zoo.”⁷¹ The lack of privacy

⁶⁷ Kenji Okuda, letter to Norio Higano, 30 May 1942, see UW website.

⁶⁸ Kenji Okuda, letter to Norio Higano, 30 May 1942, see UW website.

⁶⁹ The placement had to be outside the prohibited zones and in areas the FBI had cleared to accept the Japanese.

⁷⁰ Kenji Okuda, letter to Norio Higano, 30 May 1942, see UW website.

⁷¹ Kenji Okuda, letter to Eleanor Ring, 2 June 1942, see UW website.

in the camps is an obvious problem for the internees. These people, just months before, were living in their own private homes living their lives as they saw fit. These forced living arrangement and confining behaviors were new to the Japanese.

Okuda wrote concerning the double standard of being an American of Japanese ancestry. He gave the example of a Nisei soldier who enlisted to fight for his country, yet cannot move freely around and whose civil rights will be taken away if he crosses into any of the prohibited zones on the West Coast.⁷² As a conscientious objector to war (C.O.), Okuda's future is uncertain as highlighted in this confidential memorandum of the war department, "KENJI OKUDA is further reliably reported to have stated before the War, 'I'll be damn'd if I'll serve Uncle Sam.'" Whether or not Okuda made this statement is unknown but it is clear that from this and in light of the status of his father, may be an explanation as to why he had not been given leave clearance for school.⁷³

Okuda, as a Nisei, was involved in the camps; he gave talks to high school students, attended dances and worked in the administration building in the camp. He wrote of the bitterness and lack of faith among the internees because of the concentration camps, "US style."⁷⁴ By June of 1942, Henry Okuda paroled from Fort Missoula and living in Spokane, Washington, was unable to join his family.⁷⁵ Abruptly, Okuda and his family were moved to the Merced Assembly Center⁷⁶, given only four hours notice in which to collect belongings and prepare for the train ride. It seems that by the time the family transferred camps; Henry was able to join them. In addition to this rush, Okuda

⁷² Kenji Okuda, letter to Norio Higano, 10 July 1942, see UW website.

⁷³ "Conditions existing at Japanese Evacuation Center, Puyallup, Washington." 14 September 1942. Accessed at: <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/Documents/wcca.html> (5 October 2003).

⁷⁴ Kenji Okuda, letter to Eleanor Ring, 26 July 1942, see UW website.

⁷⁵ Kenji Okuda, letter to Norio Higano, 24 June 1942, see UW website.

⁷⁶ Merced Assembly Center was located in the Western part of California, outside Sacramento.

experienced anxiety that his status as a C.O. had forced his family into a precarious position.⁷⁷ “I am so sorry that the family was made to undergo the suffering- but I feel that I cannot have taken another path...-my duty now to the family, my conscience, and to God is to make the best- to do what I can- in these circumstances.”⁷⁸

As permission to leave the camp lingered over Okuda’s head, he and his family are once again moved, this time to the Granada Relocation Center in Colorado. He wrote to Higano about the surprising number of marriages taking place, “Of course, the evacuation has brought about a lot of evacuation marriages.”⁷⁹ Although the thought of post-War normalcy is fading, there is still hope in the marriages and newborns at the camps among the internees.

Granada turned out to be Okuda’s last stop before Oberlin College in Ohio accepts him and his leave clearance granted. Unfortunately, his parents and two younger sisters have to stay behind in the camp. In his last camp letter to Higano, Okuda describes the inferiority complex that seems to be sweeping the camp. Many feel ostracized and persecuted; truly hated by other Americans. Self-pity as well is a by-product of the internment experience, in Okuda’s opinion. He goes on to state that these points may cause irreparable damage once the war is over.⁸⁰

A little over a year later, after Okuda has been at Oberlin College for three semesters, he writes about the Granada camp in this manner, “...going **home** to camp between semesters...”⁸¹ (emphasis is mine), implying that the camp, where his parents are, is now his “home”. Internees and former internees seem to have internalized the

⁷⁷ Kenji Okuda, letter to Norio Higano, 30 August 1942, 14 September 1942, see UW website.

⁷⁸ Kenji Okuda, letter to Norio Higano, 14 September 1942, see UW website.

⁷⁹ Kenji Okuda, letter to Norio Higano, 14 September 1942, see UW website.

⁸⁰ Kenji Okuda, letter to Norio Higano, 11 December 1942, see UW website.

⁸¹ Kenji Okuda, letter to Norio Higano, 28 December 1943, see UW website.

notion that these government-run facilities substituted for their true homes on the West Coast. The government exacerbated this notion by not releasing anyone who answered no to the loyalty question or those who did not answer at all. As this loyalty question affected the Issei the most, they were the ones to stay behind in the camps.

Okuda described life in a relocation center in a talk given at Oberlin College in March of 1943. He commented in the speech illustrate how the internees dealt with the forced removal in this way, “The Nisei are uncertain of themselves and their future. They wonder whether they are Americans in fact or in name only. They do not know what the outside world really thinks of them.”⁸² Their identities as true Americans are superseded by this notion of imprisonment because they were forcibly removed from their homes and normal lives because of their ancestry.

Okuda’s life and the fact that it is a topic in the Camp Harmony exhibit does place him in a category that not many Nisei share. However, his experiences as a Nisei struggling with the internment, his identity and trying to leave the camps place him in a position that most Nisei did share. The realization that he and his family were scattered throughout the United States is typical of the Japanese family during and directly after internment. As the internment ended, family members were often no longer near each other. This proved difficult to enhance the solidarity of the family and ensure the healthy understanding and coping with the internment. Inevitably, the family was affected by this distribution, as the family was typically a close-knit unit.

Luther’s article on the “newfound” identity the Japanese Americans supposedly formed is in direct contrast to the information of the Sansei Research Project as well as the personal experience of Deborah C. Ahn. The Sansei Research Project (SRP)

⁸² Kenji Okuda, “Living in a Relocation Center,” see UW website.

highlights the family and the cross-generational impact of internment on the Sansei generation as they experienced the internment as a residual effect in their parent's lives. Most of the Sansei were born in the post-war "baby boom" era and therefore were never subject to the camps directly. The effects of the camps were felt in different ways as the Nisei struggled to raise their children in a country that had denied them their basic civil rights. Education was still emphasized in this new generation, but for a much different reason, primarily security in a career was still important but not paramount; the Nisei raised their children with this emphasis because knowledge was one thing no one could take away.⁸³

Sansei children were encouraged to do and be everything American and assimilate in to the dominant Anglo society. Identified as a major impact of internment, the Sansei believed, was their parents' pressure to conform and minimize any behavior stereotypically associated with a Japanese ethnicity. The Sansei further felt the effects of internment as an accelerated loss of their Japanese culture and language. As one respondent noted, "...the way they raised us very much as non-Japanese...We didn't do any judo. We didn't do kendo. We didn't do anything Japanese."⁸⁴ Other responses agreed with this example stressing their parents' conscious effort to raise them as though they were not Japanese.

The effects on the family therefore culminated in a sense of loss of self-esteem and insecurity due to the mass rejection the Nisei felt during the war. Sansei respondents indicated that they too were aware that their feelings of self-worth were affected by their

⁸³ Nagata, 138.

⁸⁴ Nagata, 138.

parents' internment. The Sansei, in this project, experienced a greater insecurity about their own civil liberties and rights, which negatively affected their self-esteem.⁸⁵

Deborah C. Ahn had a much different upbringing than those who participated in the SRP. Ahn, a Sansei raised by her Issei grandparents, experienced the aftermath of the internment through Japanese eyes rather than the Americanized view of the Nisei generation.⁸⁶ The Issei raised their children to bring honor to the family and esteem to the race. The concern for honor is a significant influence in guiding personal behavior and individual wrongdoing would bring shame to the family and all Japanese people.⁸⁷ Her grandparents, in this world of honor, pride and shame, raised Ahn.

“Japanese just do not do those kinds of things.”⁸⁸ This was a common phrase Ahn heard her grandfather repeat throughout his life to her. It was inappropriate for Ahn to do many of the activities her American friends were allowed to by her grandfather's standards. Her lack of self-esteem Ahn attributed to her grandfathers extremely lofty expectations of her, both in school and at home. The internment experience directly affected Ahn in the ways her grandfather treated her. Verbally and physically abusive, her grandfather was a difficult man to get along with, his moods shifting throughout the day. Her grandfather internalized the humiliation of the internment, as he had always been the smart, strong and proud leader of his family prior to the internment.⁸⁹

Ahn believes her own cycle of abuse, as well as others, began with the internment as men in the Issei generation became despondent and alcoholics. Generations that

⁸⁵ Nagata, 139, 204.

⁸⁶ Deborah C. Ahn. “Writing to Terms with My Japanese American Heritage,” *Viewpoints: Speeches/Conference Papers*. 1993. (Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, 1993.)

⁸⁷ Nagata, 32.

⁸⁸ Ahn, 2.

⁸⁹ Ahn, 6-8.

follow will also be negatively affected in this way until the Japanese American community realizes and acknowledges their own history. While Ahn's grandfather lived almost forty years after his release, "...his life ended at Manzanar."⁹⁰ Although the Sansei of the SRP study did not either encounter or report such abuse, it should be remembered that their Nisei parents, not the Issei as in Ahn's case, raised those respondents.

The internment of the Japanese Americans during World War II is now an embarrassment to the United States. Japanese people came to this country to make a better life for themselves and they faced discrimination, prejudice and eventual internment. The experiences of the Japanese, alien and citizen, during the internment are unique to those who suffered through. For the Nisei, the constant challenge to their identity as Americans was a harsh and cruel blow. After educating this group of people in the public school systems to be loyal and upstanding Americans with the ideals of the American way of life, interning them without due process was one of the biggest disappointments.

As we have seen from the SRP, many Nisei passed their own insecurities, as a residual effect of the internment, to their children. The family was affected the most; however by the sheer reality that the way they had lived and conducted their personal family affairs was no longer allowed or acceptable in the internment camps. Splitting families up and spreading them throughout the world by way of student relocation or military service did an injustice to these people that can never be given back.

The full effects of the internment on the family will never be truly known as there is no way to qualify the degree to which the experience affected these people. The

⁹⁰ Ahn, 8.

family, after being scattered and split up had to adjust to a new way of life. As human nature is able to adjust and comply with different demands, it is obvious the Japanese Americans were able to do this.

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