

A Happier New Year from Poston

Jeffrey C. Barg

Terminology and Definitions

For the sake of consistency and conformity with the "Resolution Regarding Terminology" adopted by the Civil Liberties Public Education Fund (CLPEF), this research paper uses the term "incarceration" rather than "internment" to describe the confinement in the U.S. of Japanese Americans during World War II. As noted on the "Terminology and Glossary" page of the Densho website,

the term "internment" is problematic when applied to American citizens. Technically, internment refers to the detention of enemy aliens during time of war, and two-thirds of the Japanese Americans incarcerated were U.S. citizens. Although it is a recognized and generally used term even today, we prefer "incarceration" as more accurate except in the specific case of aliens. (n.p.)

As acknowledged above, it should be noted that due to the varying attitudes and lack of consensus on the need for and administration of the mass incarceration/internment, many observers (including Japanese Americans) use the term "internment" ("internee", "interned", etc.) and not "incarceration" ("incarcerated"). It should be further noted that some observers prefer the term "concentration" to describe the camps. In fact, in a 1944 press conference and a 1962 interview on the subject, Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, respectively, employed the term "concentration camp". (Densho)

Some terms used in this paper are defined as follows (Source: "Terminology and Glossary" page of the Densho website)

Issei: the first generation of immigrant Japanese Americans, most of whom came to the United States between 1885 and 1924. The Issei were ineligible for U.S. citizenship and considered "enemy aliens" during World War II.

At the time of incarceration, most Issei were in their 50s and 60s (Rogow 4).

Japanese American: two-thirds of those imprisoned during World War II were Nisei born in the United States and thus U.S. citizens. The proper term for them is "Japanese American," rather than "Japanese." Their parents, the Issei, were immigrants who were legally forbidden from becoming naturalized citizens. While they were technically aliens, the Issei had lived in the U.S. for decades by the time of World War II and raised their children in this country. Many of them considered themselves to be culturally Japanese, but were committed to the United States as their home. Calling the Issei "Japanese American" as opposed to "Japanese" is a way to recognize that fact.

Japanese American Citizens League (JACL): a Japanese American civil rights organization that has emphasized assimilation and Americanization. The JACL is the largest and most influential Japanese American political organization, and has been controversial, particularly during World War II.

Kibei: American-born person of Japanese ancestry sent to Japan for formal education and socialization when young and later returned to the United States.

Nikkei: a person of Japanese ancestry.

Nisei: American-born children of Japanese immigrants; second generation Japanese Americans. Most mainland Nisei were born between 1915 and 1935; in Hawaii, large numbers were born about a decade earlier. Many Nisei share a common background. Many grew up in a rural setting; were part of a large family; attended both a regular public school and private Japanese language schools; and had their lives dramatically changed by events stemming from World War II (which nearly all see as a key turning point in their lives).

Poston: a city in Arizona near the California border and, as a mass incarceration camp, known formally as the "Colorado River War Relocation Center" and composed of three units operating from May 8, 1942 to November 28, 1945.

War Relocation Authority (WRA): the U.S. government agency charged with administering the incarceration camps in which Japanese Americans from the West Coast were imprisoned during World War II.

Introduction

“If by the mere force of numbers a majority should deprive a minority of any Constitutional right, it might in a moral point of view justify a revolution.” – Abraham Lincoln, as quoted in *Exhibit A* of the *Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee Resolution*

Until one Saturday in March of 2002 I had never heard of Poston, Arizona. And until that Saturday I had never given much thought to World War II Japanese-American incarceration camps in the United States. What began as another enjoyable sunny day snooping around vendor stalls at a flea market in Orange County, California evolved into an unexpected educational experience, one that compelled me to delve into one of the most controversial events in modern U.S. history, that of the establishment and administration of incarceration camps to house Japanese Americans during World War II.

My wife and I frequented weekend flea markets; it was a fun hobby, with the anticipation of unearthing a “treasure”. Of course, treasures are subjective, and there are different ways to determine whether an item can be considered a treasure. In this case, the treasure was not one of monetary worth, but of historical value. This particular flea market had both new and used items for sale, and the anticipation of what might show up on any given day was part of the enjoyment. On the ground in one vendor’s stall this day was a cardboard box filled mainly with black and white photographs. I am always curious to see the subjects in old photographs; unfortunately, family memories as documented in photographs often get relegated to flea markets and other secondary markets through various circumstances. As I rummaged through the pictures I could see that the subjects were members of an Asian family, something one doesn’t often encounter at the flea markets in my experience. I called to my wife and as we dug deeper into the box we began to see images of people standing outside what appeared to be wooden cabins covered in and surrounded by snow. Once I spotted a long shot of a group of such cabins ringed by barbed wire fencing I was fairly certain of what I was seeing. The vendor gave us one price for the entire box and we carried it away.

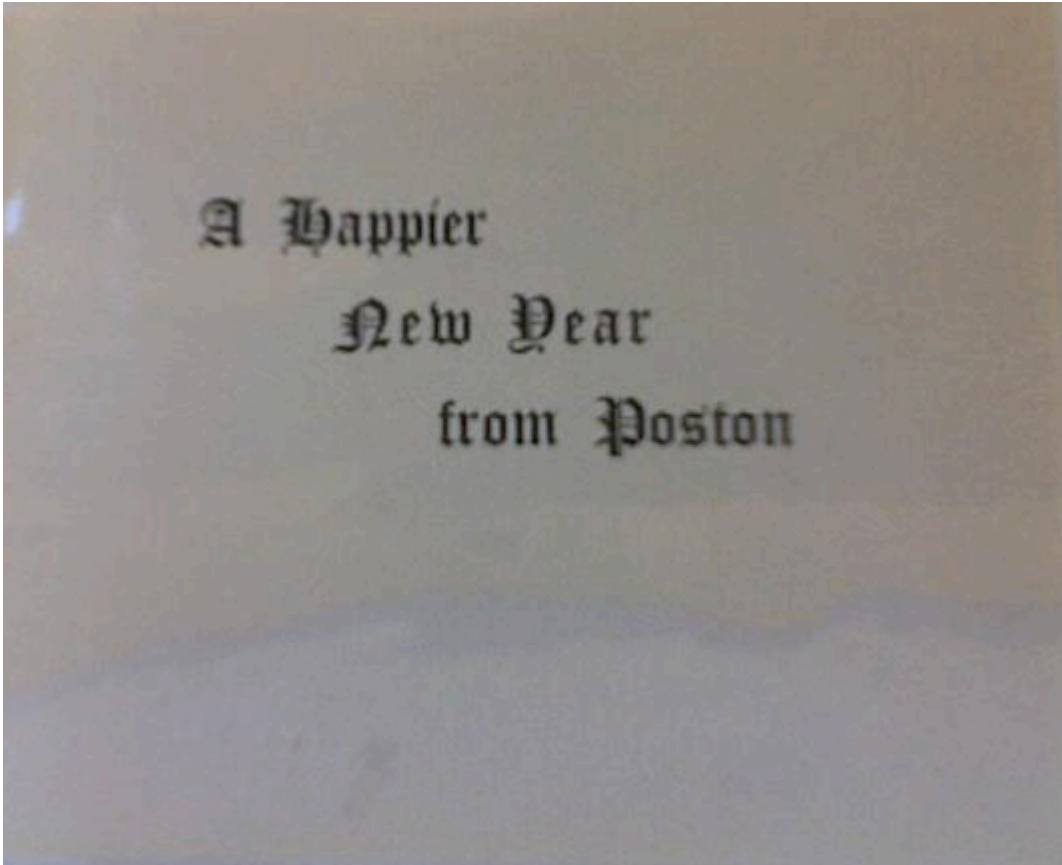
Once we arrived home we began to review the contents of the box: equal quantity of still photographs and negatives, and a few pieces of paper ephemera. We had no way of

identifying the location of the photos except for a lone envelope at the bottom of the box. The blank envelope contained what appeared to be a hand-made greeting card, printed on flimsy paper using a woodblock technique. Here is an image of the front cover of that greeting card:



Source: writer's private collection.

Upon unfolding, here is the message printed inside:



Source: writer's private collection.

The sheer sadness emanating from that card was moving. The sense of loneliness and isolation conveyed by the image and text was palpable. I knew very little about the entire Japanese-American incarceration experience. If the topic was taught to me in elementary or high school or even in a college history course it was covered only briefly, as I have no recollection of it. Even among my father, a WWII veteran who served in the South Pacific, and my Uncle Don, a career Navy mechanic who was stationed at Pearl Harbor on December 7 1941, the issue of incarceration was rarely discussed and never dissected. When it was mentioned, the only conclusion I remember hearing was that it was "necessary". Soon after we acquired the Poston material we learned that the husband of a friend of my wife was born in an incarceration camp, but before we could arrange to meet and discuss the experience with him he passed away quite unexpectedly.

The acquisition of this material now afforded me an opportunity to learn not only more about the experience generally but about Poston Arizona particularly. Were incarceration camps really located in Arizona? I thought they were only in California. What sort of place was Poston that it had so much snow? Were prisoners really allowed to create greeting cards? Wasn't picture taking banned? How did anybody have the opportunity to take photographs from inside the camp?

As I began a concerted effort to research the topic of mass Japanese American incarceration as an example of unequal power relations I immediately found that, without specific focus, this issue would be too unwieldy to grapple with for this paper. Certainly volumes of nonfiction books and novels, videos, scholarly articles, and research papers have been produced over many decades covering myriad aspects of the subject. To scope back my research topic, I recalled something intriguing that I saw in one of the sleeves of negatives in the box. The image is of a protest or strike of some sort. I cannot tell exactly what is being protested; it merely shows a disorderly line of people with arms and hands outstretched. What struck me was the fact that a photograph was apparently allowed to be taken of it (or of any people or events in the camp). What could the incarcerated possibly be protesting, other than the obvious fact that they were imprisoned involuntarily?

Photographing an Organized Dispute in an Incarceration Camp

One of the most visible and obvious ways for protests to be chronicled is through the use of photography. But as I ask above, wasn't picturing taking banned in incarceration camps? According to J. Beckwith of the Topaz incarceration camp Museum (personal communication, July 10, 2009), established to preserve the memory of those incarcerated there, cameras as well as radios and weapons were confiscated prior to the Japanese-Americans arriving at the Utah camp. "Also, people destroyed their own photographs of family members if they had been taken in Japan, just to distance themselves from that country."

According to D. Kiyomoto, RD, Board Member/Archivist of the Poston Restoration Project (personal communication, July 10, 2009), while cameras were on the "contraband" list for entering the camps,

visitors were not searched for contraband, including cameras. For example, if one of the internees had a family member in the military visiting on furlough, they might have taken photos. I personally know of several who had Poston family photos taken by visitors. Some of them are posted on the Poston blog: <http://postonupdates.blogspot.com/>. I was told that towards the end of the camps, cameras were no longer considered contraband.

According to The Family Album Project on the Masumi Hayashi website,

photographers who were taking pictures of relocation camp life were either:

- from media organizations, like Life Magazine and newspapers,
- an official camp photographer who also worked for the government,
- a WRA photographer who was not an internee and who worked for the government, or
- an "amateur", which included both the visitors to the camps, and the internees who managed to get cameras into the camp (which was difficult since it was considered contraband). (n.p.)

While the content of photographs for mass distribution was restricted to what the media or government wanted the public to see (for example, newspaper accounts of camp protests against administrator corruption describing the protests as “a celebration of Pearl Harbor”) (Rogow 9), many incarcerated photographers with smuggled cameras documented events in their personal lives. According to Hayashi, “With the camp regulations on contraband this idea of the family photograph had become (sic) illegal at most camps. This repression of the camera and the family photograph helped keep and maintain this family secret of internment life and created a caste of shame and guilt on this passage.”

This repression was made official by Lieutenant General J.L. DeWitt of the U.S. Army. According to a September 13, 1942 communiqué from the Western Defense Command & Fourth Army Headquarters, Office of the Commanding General, Presidio of San Francisco, California with the subject line “Parcel Inspection at Certain War Relocation Authority Projects”, the use, possession or operation of a camera was prohibited by

paragraph 6, Proclamation No. 3 of that headquarters. Classified as contraband, this lumped cameras in with other items such as firearms, bombs, short-wave radios, and signal devices. (Poston Camp Updates)

For that matter, this communiqué on parcel inspection also cites Public Proclamation No. 2525, promulgated by the President of the United States on December 7, 1941 which states in part that “photographs, sketches, pictures, drawings, maps, or graphical representation of any military or naval installation equipment or of any arms ammunition” is prohibited. (Poston Camp Updates)

Therefore, the fact that photographs of some sort of protest or display of anger at Poston were taken and kept is, while perhaps uncommon, evidence of the strong desire of some incarcerated (or visitors) to record such events. Based on the above, if it had been discovered that such photographs were taken, they (and the camera) would likely have been confiscated.

Varying Attitudes on Incarceration...and the Draft

For those individuals already outraged by their incarceration, any instance of mismanagement or insensitivity by camp administrators, which was seen as frequent and considerable, inflamed the anger and resentment, whether it related to housing, food, clothing, or security. “Each incident added to the cumulative store of anger and frustration” (Inouye 151). Although there were various strikes and protests in the camps over the course of their existence, the most vocal and encompassing (in terms of number of participants and duration) protests were over the issue of the draft.

One of the many complications in understanding the attitude of the incarcerated toward a draft is that there was no single consensus about many of the issues and consequences of the incarceration itself. According to Jinqi Ling, there pre-existed generational conflict between Issei (first generation Japanese Americans) and Nisei (second generation) before the war that was “largely shaped by the issue of citizenship” (380). A discrepancy between Japanese and American citizenship laws exacerbated the generational conflicts and identity crises and accounted for many of the differences in the reactions to the incarceration. However, disparate reactions to incarceration were not

just between older and younger Nikkei (persons of Japanese ancestry). Those of the same generation often saw things differently also. According to Austin,

Nikkei continued to disagree about how best to respond to incarceration after arriving in the concentration camps. Some continued actively to resist government policies. A riot at the Manzanar facility in late 1942, generated in part by local JACL members' insistence on Americanization, ended with U.S. soldiers firing into an unarmed crowd, killing two and wounding at least ten. (60)

Resist government policies, or cooperate with U.S. government officials? And to what degree? Opinions varied, states Austin:

Mike Masaoka contends that what some have pejoratively labeled "informing" essentially constituted cooperating with law enforcement officials as any citizen should. Other Nikkei believed such cooperation to have amounted to betrayal and referred to such collaborators as *inu*, or "dogs." The issue remains a contested one today. See Mike Masaoka with Bill Hosokawa, *They Call Me Moses Masaoka* (New York, 1987), 73; Thomas, *The Salvage*, 168. (80)

The "Japanese Problem"

The decision to resist or to cooperate with government policies was an individual one, undoubtedly arrived at based to some extent on past treatment received at the hands of the U.S. government and the majority population. The U.S. government decision after the bombing of Pearl Harbor to disenfranchise a minority group by detaining and incarcerating it was likely made easier because this was an already disenfranchised minority. Both Japanese Americans and non-Japanese Americans acknowledged that discrimination was prevalent long before World War II in both word and deed. A limiting "bamboo ceiling" of discrimination existed by the end of the 19th century.

An example of that acknowledgement was the finding of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC), a bipartisan panel established by the U.S. government in 1980 and tasked with reviewing the precipitating factors behind the issuance of Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, the order to incarcerate. The

resulting unanimous report in 1983, titled “Personal Justice Denied” and “Personal Justice Denied, Part II: Recommendations”, found that the incarceration came about for three main reasons: 1) race prejudice; 2) war hysteria; 3) failure of leadership. It recognized that a “grave injustice” had been done, and offered a national apology in the form of compensation for the internees and a fund for the purpose of educating the public on this period of history. The report also cited a “widespread ignorance about Americans of Japanese descent” (Civil Liberties Public Education Fund n.p.).

Pre-war race ignorance was found in a number of areas of Japanese American public life.

Most Caucasian employers refused to hire Japanese Americans, and major labor unions denied them membership. In his *The Economics and Politics of Racial Accommodation: The Japanese of Los Angeles, 1900-1942*, John Modell, as cited by Kurashige, states that the low rate of unemployment for Japanese Americans in the retail and sales trade reported by the 1940 census was deceptive. Only two-thirds of these workers were employed for the full year in 1939, and many unskilled Japanese Americans found no work at all. Based on the War Relocation Authority’s Census Form 26, the four most common occupations for Issei in 1941 were gardener, retail manager, truck farmer, and farm hand; for Nisei they were sales clerk, farm hand, retail manager, and gardener. Teaching positions were not just uncommon; they were forbidden to Japanese Americans before 1949.

This “bamboo ceiling” also restricted rights of property. During the first week of 1943 the Real Estate Board of Little Rock, Arkansas announced that it would seek measures to prohibit the sale of real estate to Japanese Americans, following the lead of California, Arizona, and Nebraska, which already had statutes that prevented certain races, including Japanese, from owning land. On January 12 1943 Arkansas state senator Frank Williams introduced a land restriction bill to ensure “that no Japs can stay in this state” after the war (Ward n.p.).

Other denials of equality were in the area of education. Arkansas governor Adkins consistently refused federal requests from the National Japanese Student Relocation Council to allow Japanese American students to enroll in his state’s universities. A

staunch segregationist, Adkins argued that allowing Nisei to enroll at Arkansas colleges and universities would provide an "entering wedge" for African Americans. The racially charged nature of this education controversy was made plain when the University of Arkansas offered correspondence courses to German and Italian war prisoners incarcerated in the state.

If these inequalities seem to resemble Jim Crow laws, they do. "The anti-Japanese fervor of the Pacific states complemented the segregationist mores of the Jim Crow South. Anti-Japanese politicians from the West Coast found many eager allies among southern segregationists." (Ward). Tennessee senator Arthur Thomas Stewart maintained that Japanese Americans were "utterly unassimilable, utterly different in every respect from Americans", raged against traitorous "yellow devils", and urged Congress to strip away their civil rights. "I say that wherever there is one drop of Japanese blood that there is absolute Japanese treachery," declared Stewart. "I do not believe there stands today on the face of the free soil of the United States of America one single solitary Jap, one single solitary person with Japanese blood in his veins, but what there stands a man who will stab you in the back" (Ward(n.p.)).

An example of that racist fervor on the West Coast was shown by Lail Thomas Kane, the self-proclaimed leader of a crusade to exclude Japanese Americans from pursuing a living by commercial fishing. Kane testified to the House Special Committee on Un-American Activities in 1934 that Japanese American fishermen were prepared to lay mines and to torpedo American vessels should United States-Japan relations disintegrate into war. He gained support from the American Legion and drafted state legislation to advance his cause. Although his anti-alien fishing bills never left committee, Kane's campaign placed the Japanese American community in the limelight of suspicion. According to Kane, "If we ever have war with Japan and I have anything to say about it, the first thing I'll do will be intern every one of you" (White 15).

However, injustice was more than institutional; it also occurred in many personal forms.

Socially, Japanese American boys and girls could not date across "color lines" and antimiscegenation legislation prohibited Japanese-Caucasian interracial marriages. Segregated community facilities such as city swimming pools served as constant

reminders to Japanese Americans of their inferior status. According to author David Yoo, as cited by Toyama, “The pattern of racism is clear; it has always been clear” (n.p.).

There are reports of Issei “often beaten up in the streets of California towns back in the 80's and 90's” because the person was “a blankety-blank Jap!” (Tong). In 1909 an impassioned California legislator described the Japanese in his state as “a bandy-legged, bagaboo, miserable, craven, simian, degenerated, rotten little devil!” (White) Therefore, “Most of us Nisei—i.e., the second generation Japanese born roughly between 1920-1940 in the U.S.—I would guess, have dealt with racism and inequality from the time we popped out of the womb” (Nakano n.p.).

A clear example of the devaluation of the person was evidenced by Nisei recruitment for a particularly debasing task. “Months after the Hawaiian Nisei had been rerouted to Camp McCoy in Wisconsin, a small segment of the 100th Battalion headed to Dixie as dog bait. To test their theory that dogs could be trained to detect “Jap” blood, the army sent the Nisei troops to “pollute” an uninhabited Gulf Coast island with their supposedly distinctive racial scent” (Ward n.p.).

Given the past instances of unequal treatment, Japanese Americans were predisposed to suffer psychologically from the incarceration. “Numerous race-related stressors prior to World War II contributed to the cumulative traumas of Japanese Americans. Whereas the bombing of Pearl Harbor fueled public support for the internment, there had been a long history of anti-Asian sentiment before the war (Chuman, 1981; CWRIC, 1997). Prejudice against Japanese Americans was rampant and institutionalized” (Nagata and Cheng 267).

According to researchers Nagata and Cheng, Loo (1993) conceptualized the Japanese American concentration camp experience as a form of race-related trauma. “Race-related trauma may not be pinpointed to a singular stressful event in the traditional sense. Rather, repeated exposure to overt or covert racial discrimination is a lifelong and cumulative experience (Feagin, 1991) that can lead to more interpersonal and psychological difficulties than trauma resulting from natural or accidental design (Loo, 1993)” (Nagata and Cheng 266).

As the general fear of “the yellow peril” and the antagonistic misunderstanding of Japanese culture through the decades increased hate crimes and discrimination against Japanese Americans, racial tension climaxed with the 1942 Executive Order to incarcerate. Given the background of pervasive racism described above, it is little wonder that some of the incarcerated chose resistance over cooperation. If the aim of military service was to help preserve a (American) way of life, it could be seen as preserving a way of life that barred certain people from partaking of it, in this case Japanese Americans.

The Draft Problem

Continued insistence by top officials of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) on proving Nisei loyalty to their country led them to petition the government to reinstate the draft for the Nisei, as the right of Japanese Americans to military service had been revoked almost immediately after December 7 1941 (coinciding with the assigning of their citizenship status to 4-C, or “enemy alien”). Yet despite this vocal advocacy by the most prominent national organization of American citizens of Japanese ancestry, it was the impressive combat results of the all-volunteer (and segregated) Japanese American army unit known as the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, consisting mostly of Hawaiians, that led the government to reopen the draft to the Nisei on January 20, 1944.

Disagreement among the incarcerated over the draft at Poston is emblematic of that at all the camps. According to Muller,

the main conflict was intergenerational. Many Issei—probably a majority—did not want their sons to volunteer. They had a number of reasons. Some of them did not want their sons taking up arms against the country in which they still held citizenship and to which they felt loyal. Some felt that the government had so mistreated them, and had left them so vulnerable in camp, that they could not imagine losing the support of a son.

Among the Nisei, views were mixed. A limited number—far fewer than the army had hoped—did volunteer. Their reasons were varied. Some volunteers saw military service in just the way the government and the JACL were presenting it to

them—as an opportunity to prove the loyalty of Japanese Americans. Some thought that a veteran's benefit in a civil service job would be the only way for a Japanese American to get fair treatment in the post-war job market. Some, especially those with a medical or dental background, wanted the good pay and considerable professional experience that the army would provide. Some wanted the financial security that the army offered. Some simply wanted a quick ticket out of camp, to escape boredom or to leave an unhappy relationship. Many of those who did wish to volunteer, however, met intense disapproval from their parents. A rumor circulated in camp that several volunteers had clashed so intensely with their parents that the young men had nervous breakdowns and needed to be briefly hospitalized. (128)

One Issei father of two draft-age Nisei likely echoed the sentiments of many of the incarcerated parents who felt that they were about to lose everything remaining of value once the selective service was reinstated: ""After being evacuated to this relocation center from the outside I have lost everything in worldly goods. All I have left is my family." Because of this, he did not want his "boys to go to the army and give their lives up—whether for this country or any other country after being treated this way. I'd rather have them go to prison," he said, "and know that they will come back alive someday"" (Muller 134).

Even though some of the incarcerated of draft age agreed with the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) philosophy and saw the draft as an opportunity to prove their loyalty, due to the degree of general resentment and feelings of bitterness in the camps the War Relocation Authority (WRA) decided that it needed a definitive way to determine which individuals could safely work outside the camp (the "patriots") and which ones could not be trusted ("traitors" or "rotten apples", terms used by Secretary of War Stimson). An official questionnaire was created to make just such a determination.

Patriot or Traitor? Determining Loyalty via the "Loyalty Oath"

According to National Archives documents, one of the basic conditions to the formation of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was that each male of military age who desired

to make application for voluntary induction would be required to sign DSS Form 304A. (Tsukiyama)

Known colloquially as the “Loyalty Oath”, this form was officially titled “Statement of United States Citizen of Japanese Ancestry” and consisted of 28 questions related to genealogy, family relations, religion, employment, affiliations, hobbies, activities, and connections with Japan. It culminated with two controversial questions, #27 and #28:

#27. Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?

#28. Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power, or organization?

According to Tsukiyama,

Issei and women who were ineligible for military service were required to answer question 27 regarding their willingness to go to combat with the U.S. armed forces. If the non-citizen Issei who was legally barred from U.S. citizenship answered question 28 affirmatively forswearing any allegiance to the Emperor, would they then be left stateless, without citizenship of either Japan or the United States? Families feared or would be threatened with separation or breakup if the Nisei responded affirmatively as against the negative response of their Issei parents, forcing many Nisei to unwillingly respond “no” – “no” to the questionnaire. (n.p.)

This pair of consecutive negative answers for the two final questions was used as the title of an acclaimed 1957 novel by author John Okada, “The No-No Boy”, in which the protagonist Ichiro Yamada refuses to answer those two questions in the affirmative.

According to Jinqi Ling,

the grounds of Ichiro’s refusal are similar to those of other no-no boys standing before the judge: the U.S. government’s differing treatments of the Japanese,

German, and Italian nationals living in America; young Nisei's unwillingness to fight against their brothers from Japan because of parental prohibitions; suspicion of the U.S. Army's profiteering motives in carrying out the relocation; and anger at the U.S. government for depriving Japanese Americans of their possessions and their American citizenship. In the words of one no-no boy, "if you think we're the same kind of rotten Japanese that dropped the bombs on Pearl Harbor...[then that is] why it is that I won't go and protect son-of-bitches like you". (366)

Tsukiyama further states:

Many Nisei suspiciously viewed question 27 as an involuntary draft into military service if they answered "yes" and with question 28 they hesitated to "forswear allegiance to the Japanese Emperor" to whom they never held any loyalty or allegiance to in the first place and thought this was a trap question. Conditional or qualified answers ("Yes" if you release my family from camp) were disregarded or treated as "No" responses. And finally, there were many basically loyal Nisei who answered "no" – "no" to both questions out of sheer anger, bitterness and protest against the deprivation and violation of their civil rights. (n.p.)

In terms of scoring these two final questions of the questionnaire by government officials, Rogow reports that for question 27,

if you answered with an unqualified yes, score 3. If you answered "yes, if drafted", score 2. If you answered no because of loyalty to or fear of having to fight relatives in another country or if you refused to answer, your score for the entire questionnaire is 0. If you answered no because of claimed discrimination or doubts about rights, your application will be put on hold until we receive more information. (12)

Similarly, for question 28, "If you answered with an unqualified yes, score 3. If "no" or if you qualified your answer in any way, your score for the entire questionnaire is 0" (Rogow 12).

In terms of numbers, of the 21,000 Nisei males eligible to register for the draft, some 4600 answered the two questions with an explicit “no” or with no response (Jinqui Ling 377). Instead of 1500 volunteers sought, the Army received only 805 from all camps. At the Heart Mountain (Wyoming) incarceration camp, two thousand volunteers were expected, only 38 came forward and 19 eventually inducted. In the process, 800 Nisei in the camp renounced their citizenship (Inouye 155). “In the aftermath of the registration fiasco, repatriation (or expatriation in case of Nisei) requests increased, especially at Tule Lake” (Austin 60) (note that the government elected to treat all expatriation requests filed after the date of the announcement of the reinstatement of selective service as invalid efforts at draft evasion. Some who asked for expatriation were placed on a “stop list”, Poston’s list of individuals who were disallowed from leaving camp for any reason). At Poston, only 228 volunteered, representing half of what the Army expected; at Heart Mountain, strong draft resistance began as well.

According to Muller,

between January of 1944 and mid-1945, when the camps closed, just over three hundred Nisei from nine of the ten War Relocation Authority (WRA) camps chose to defy military orders to report for induction or for the physical examination that preceded induction. Of these three hundred resisters, fully one-third were from Poston. The disproportionate disobedience at Poston was a product both of the camp's general receptivity to resistance and of its own unique history of conflict specifically about military service. (123)

This predisposition was based on a number of factors, including the fact that Poston was the largest in population of the camps (in fact, at its peak population of nearly 18,000 it was the third largest city in Arizona). Adding to this was the brutal climate the incarcerated endured (Poston was nicknamed “Roaston, Toaston and Duston” by some in describing the summer heat of 110 degrees in the shade and the choking sand storms (Tajiri 95)) as well as the circumstances under which the camp was established: as one of the first camps, the WRA did not have clear policies in place, leading to disorganization and feelings of uncertainty and confusion. In addition, the incarcerated were taken from their homes directly to Poston, rather than spending time at an interim assembly center, thus increasing the sense of suddenness, shock, and dissatisfaction.

As Muller further notes, “Thus, it is no accident that when protests and violence rocked the camps in the fall of 1942, they struck at Poston, Manzanar, and Tule Lake—the camps that opened early.” (125)

Participating in Resistance

Expectations of a popular draft on the part of incarceration camp administrators were artificially increased by the numbers of volunteers from Hawaii, where Japanese Americans were not incarcerated. The Army had expected 1500 Hawaiian Nisei volunteers but received over 10,000. The reasons for the disparate perceptions of the draft between mainlanders and Hawaiians were twofold: no mass evacuation and incarceration occurred in Hawaii because Hawaii depended on a Japanese American labor force, and the Japanese in Hawaii en masse had community leaders to support them, including the FBI Hawaii Chief, Honolulu Police Captain, and others vouching for their loyalty. According to Tsukiyama, Nisei in Hawaii and the mainland had different perceptions especially of questions 27 and 28. On the mainland the incarcerated found “meanings and implications which were totally overlooked by the Hawaii volunteers” from a document “submitted to them by a government that had taken everything away and deprived them of their liberty, with suspicion, distrust, cynicism and bitterness.” (n.p.)

The optimism on the part of camp administrators, regardless of which camp, for a smooth enlistment process was short lived. George Fujii was a 29 year old Kibei (American-born, educated in Japan) who carefully wrote and then placed around the Poston grounds a notice that basically supported the draft but took the opportunity to urge the restoration of rights and correction of wrongs done to the second-generation Japanese Americans. The target audience for the notice was “the gentlemen of 17 years to 38 years of age” (Muller 136). This circular led to two more increasingly blunt and demanding notices posted around camp by increasingly dissenting young men. After the third circular, FBI agents arrested Fujii, charged him with sedition, and whisked him quickly out of camp to a Phoenix jail. Discussion, debate, and agitation about the draft decreased markedly after this. However, within two or three months draft resistance spiked again, for a variety of reasons, including the fact that Fujii was acquitted of charges which some incarcerated took as vindication and endorsement of

his criticisms. Also, as the number of resisters increased, others were emboldened to join the defiance.

At Heart Mountain Camp a small group of men met to oppose the draft registration process by disrupting a meeting of an Army Registration team. On February 6 1943 they challenged the government's right to recruit volunteers without restoring the Nisei's constitutional rights. The spokesperson for the dissidents, Frank Inouye, read a manifesto which requested, among other things, clarification of Nisei citizenship status by demanding that the government "acknowledge the Nisei's rights as Americans before asking for their military enlistment" (Inouye 154). The dissidents counted among their supporters individuals outside of the camp, including James Omura, editor of a Denver-based bilingual newspaper extremely critical of the draft that was distributed and read inside the camp.

The militancy of this attempted derailment of the registration process at Heart Mountain was received with alarm among camp administrators. When dissidents requested the use of telephones to contact the other nine camps, the request was denied. However, due to dwindling support for volunteer efforts in the camps overall, and camp apathy turning to anger, the Army soon announced that questions 27 and 28 could be answered with "conditional" responses (Inouye 155). In addition, when Secretary of War Stimson decided to reimpose the Selective Service Act on all eligible Nisei males, their previous 4-C, or enemy alien, status was revoked. However, as the draft process continued, so did the organized resistance, now formed into the "Fair Play Committee" (FPC). Among the various goals of the FPC to protest the Selective Service Act, which was seen as inequitable, was to encourage drafted Nisei to not appear for their pre-induction physical examinations. "The militant and uncompromising stand of the FPC brought dividends. By the end of March, seventeen percent of the Nisei males ordered to report for their physicals refused to do so" (Inouye 157).

At this point federal authorities decided that this opposition to the Selective Service Act must be addressed with force. "By May the FPC was defunct. In that same month 63 "draft resisters" from Heart Mountain were indicted by a federal grand jury in Cheyenne, Wyoming" (Inouye 157). All 63 were found guilty of conspiracy and sentenced to federal

prison. Seven FPC officers were also arrested but their sentences were overturned on a technicality.

“The Fair Play Committee members were not alone in contending that the application of the Selective Service Act to the Nisei was hypocritical and prejudiced. A Federal District Court judge presiding over the trial of one hundred draft resisters from the Poston, Arizona camps sentenced the group to a one-penny fine without imprisonment” (Inouye 158).

Punishment for Resistance

The way that punishment was meted out varied considerably between camps and between individuals within camps, with the penny fine cited above a perfect example. At Poston, federal judge David Ling imposed three different sentences at different moments in the same case...including the penny fine. As described by Muller,

when the first group of ten resisters pled guilty in his court in March of 1944, he sentenced them to three years in jail. When three additional resisters came before him for trial in April of 1945, he sentenced them to one year in jail. And in October of 1946, when the cases of around ninety-five additional resisters came before him, he imposed a fine of one cent on each of them. This was not a case of three different judges seeing identical cases three different ways, which would seem objectionable enough: this was a case of one judge seeing identical cases three different ways at three different times. Or perhaps it is worse than that for Judge Ling. He not only saw identical cases three different ways at three different times, but he also saw those cases in two different ways at the same time. Consider carefully the action Judge Ling ultimately took: he convicted the Poston resisters of the crime of willfully failing to report for induction into the army—a felony punishable by up to five years' imprisonment—yet the only punishment he saw fit to impose was a token fine of one cent. This was a criminal judgment at war with itself: the solemn condemnation of a felony conviction coupled with a fine so absurdly low as to imply that the resisters deserved no condemnation. (120)

Muller goes on to try to explain the judge's seemingly inconsistent and inequitable rulings:

Resistance to the draft at Poston was a remarkably diverse and ambiguous phenomenon. Poston's was the largest draft resistance of any of the camps: one hundred and seven young men refused either induction or a preinduction physical. As one might expect, the historical evidence reveals that these young men at Poston resisted the draft for more than just one reason. Some had reasons that struck many as noble. Many others had reasons that some saw as selfish or cowardly. Resistance at Poston was really a muddle of mixed motives. A criminal conviction and a one-penny fine captured the ambiguity of the Poston resistance about as well as any legal judgment could do. (121)

Conclusions

Despite varying responses to the draft, its management, and eventual resistance, what didn't seem to vary was the commendable way in which the incarcerated Japanese Americans confronted and overcame their predicament during the entire three and one half year ordeal at Poston.

As stated by Yuji Ichioka in the foreword to *Through Innocent Eyes*,

the passage of time affords us the luxury of asking questions in hindsight. Would we have behaved differently had we known then what we know now? Put another way, would we have been less innocent? Perhaps so. More Nisei might have been more vocal in protesting the violations of their rights. Conceivably, such Nisei would have engaged in more protest demonstrations and instigated more strikes. Some would have answered the so-called loyalty questions differently. Others would have swelled the ranks of those who refused to volunteer for military service, while still others later would have joined the handful of draft resisters. Together, could these people have altered the course of history? (12)

Public opinion today of Japanese American draft resisters in WWII also varies and can be likened to public opinion of draft resisters of other wars. According to Gene Akutsu,

one of the incarcerated, speaking about the resisters, “I think to this day, many of ‘em don’t want to talk about it. They don’t want to be pointed out as a resister...” (Densho “Vilified, Ostracized, Determined: Draft Resisters of Conscience”). Perhaps this in part explains why “the accounts of Japanese resistance within the camps has received very little exposure” (Rogow 8).

Some of the incarcerated in Poston questioned the motives of the resisters: “what some doubted was that the resistance was actually grounded in a defense of Nisei civil liberties as opposed to a simple desire to avoid the dangers of the battlefield” (Muller 146). When representatives of the resisters asked that their legal fees be underwritten by the Unit I council, they were careful to single out only those who had not asked for expatriation to be the recipients of such support. “These differing views showed that the draft resistance at Poston was a mixed and ambiguous phenomenon, encompassing a range of motives” (Muller 147).

Even court judges at varying levels held differing views of the draft resistance. Some expressed outrage at the way the government mistreated the Nisei. Ninth Circuit judge William Denman, before whom some dissenters appeared, referenced a “continued illegal imprisonment by the Federal Government in barbed wire enclosures, guarded by armed soldiers, under conditions of great oppression and humiliation” (Muller 152). Other judges’ rulings changed over time as WWII evolved. In an ethics-tinged response, Judge Louis E. Goodman of the Northern District of California cited the government’s “unconscionable treatment” of resisters that “so thoroughly and coercively pervaded the resisters’ minds as to strip them of their free agency and their responsibility for the choices they made in responding to their calls for induction” (Muller 155).

Many of those who volunteered believe to this day that their decision was the best one. According to incarcerated Mas Watanabe as reported on the Densho website page “Vilified, Ostracized, Determined: Draft Resisters of Conscience”,

...I think we did the right thing in volunteering after being kicked in the butt...Because gee, if you're going to live here, you've got to be a part of society. You've got to do what is expected of you. And I had no problem volunteering. I don't know which was worse: being locked up in camp or going off to war. In my

mind, barbed wires aren't very inviting, being penned up—I guess we were too independent. I just didn't like being cooped up and looking at barbed wires and guard towers. That just wasn't for me. (n.p.)

Does this mean that the resisters were misguided and wrong-headed and should be described in pejorative terms, while the volunteers should be remembered in the opposite way? “The Nisei response to the draft at the Poston Relocation Center simply did not fit into neat dyadic pairings of “loyal” and “disloyal”, “honorable” and “dishonorable”, “courageous” and “cowardly”. They were more richly human than that” (Muller 157).

The concepts of citizenship, loyalty, and indeed identity, of Japanese Americans were brought to a head by two forces: not just the incarceration itself, but the draft order. The situation of the draft resisters was complex and nuanced. Just what “identity” did the draft resisters have?

According to Muller, the identity varied with the motivation of the individual to resist the draft, from those “who saw the draft as a moment to seek judicial redress of the wrongs practiced on the Nisei” to “some who saw the draft as a moment to leave an undoubtedly futile marker of protest in the historical record” to “some who felt duty-bound to care for aging and vulnerable parents in camp” (156). Commenting on the place in history of the draft objectors (specifically those from the Heart Mountain camp) is oral historian Art Hansen as reported on the Densho website page “Vilified, Ostracized, Determined: Draft Resisters of Conscience”, who does not seem to make a distinction between those who resisted for noble reasons and those who were more self-serving:

I think what the Heart Mountain resisters and the Fair Play Committee did was to take such an unpopular sort of action. When you figure this is a reviled ethnic minority who are penned into a concentration camp...the principal perceived enemy being of the same ancestry, this being in the throes of wartime and even having the leadership of their own community enjoining them to cooperate. To then in the face of this amassed power and socialization, to say no. And the important thing they did is the same thing as James Omura, they said no. And they were willing to pay the price that saying no meant. And it's a price that wasn't only paid

in going to a penitentiary, but a price that was paid later on by finding themselves victimized by their own community after the camp experience. Why would they do it? Because there was a higher price and a higher sort of reward. ...And I think this is the thing that reverberates now through not only the Japanese American community but throughout the mainstream community; that these people are well on their way to becoming recognizable American heroes. And I think in some quarters they already are but their heroism will only grow. (n.p.)

On Christmas Eve of 1947, President Truman fully pardoned all several hundred War Relocation Authority (WRA)-detained Japanese American draft resisters. But the Japanese American community did not. For decades the 300 “no-no boys”—and often their extended families—were denounced and ostracized. Only in May 2002, after years of contentious debate, did the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) in a public ceremony finally apologize for their vilification of the resisters during the war and acknowledge the principled stand the resisters took. (Densho “Vilified, Ostracized, Determined: Draft Resisters of Conscience”). For the Nisei draft resisters to be largely condemned, then and today, by their fellow Nisei and perhaps in some cases even themselves, seems an unnecessary and controllable cruelty among other cruelties over which they had no control.

Of the 611 eligible Japanese-American males inducted into the armed forces from Poston, 24 died in combat. A monument stands today at the site of the former camp to commemorate the 24, as well as the rest of the incarcerated. One plaque reads:

This memorial is dedicated to all those men, women and children who suffered countless hardships and indignities at the hands of a nation misguided by wartime hysteria, racial prejudice and fear. May it serve as a constant reminder of our past so that Americans in the future will never again be denied their constitutional rights and may the remembrance of that experience serve to advance the evolution of the human spirit.

This memorial monument is erected in cooperation with the Colorado River Indian Tribes, former internees of Poston, Veterans and Friends of the Fiftieth year observance of the evacuation and internment. (Tsukiyama)

Because my negative is undated, I may never know exactly what protest the images show. But perhaps it doesn't really matter, for it chronicles a sad event within many sad events in the overwhelmingly sad lives of the incarcerated. Despite the positive attitude some of the incarcerated adopted to cope with their plight, the mass incarceration must be regarded as a sad event. How could it not? Whether the protest succeeded or failed, while important at the time to those involved, may ultimately not really matter either. They were at least able to make their voices heard, and their frustration known, and if it didn't end in a positive outcome for the protesters, it at least gave them an outlet for their unhappiness to be known...and fortunately for all of us, chronicled.

Writer's note: In the process of researching this topic for this paper, various individuals working with the Poston Restoration Project whom I have contacted have acknowledged the historical value of the dozens of photographs, negatives, and ephemera in my possession and I have been asked to share these items with them for their archives. I plan to do so. Perhaps in a small way, at this time, this will make for "a happier new year" at Poston. If it does, it is the least I can do, as a fellow American and a fellow human being.

~~~end~~~

## Bibliography

Austin, Allan W. (2007). Eastward Pioneers: Japanese American Resettlement during World War II and the Contested Meaning of Exile and Incarceration. *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Winter 2007, Pages 58 – 84.

Civil Liberties Public Education Fund (CLPEF) Network (1998). *Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians*. Retrieved January 2, 2010, from <http://www.momomedia.com/CLPEF/history.html>

Civil Liberties Public Education Fund (CLPEF) Network (1998). *Resolution Regarding Terminology*. Retrieved July 11, 2009, from <http://www.momomedia.com/CLPEF/backgrnd.html#Link%20to%20terminology>

Densho: The Japanese America Legacy Project (2008). *May 2008 - Vilified, Ostracized, Determined: Draft Resisters of Conscience*. Retrieved June 4, 2009, from <http://www.densho.org/archive/default.asp?path=fromthearchive.asp>

Densho: The Japanese America Legacy Project (2009). *Frontier Colonies or Concentration Camps? Euphemisms for the Incarceration*. Retrieved June 6, 2009, from <http://www.densho.org/archive/default.asp?path=fromthearchive.asp>

Densho: The Japanese America Legacy Project (2009). *Terminology and Glossary*. Retrieved June 6, 2009, from <http://densho.org/default.asp?path=/assets/sharedpages/glossary.asp?section=home>

Hayashi, Masumi (1996). *The Family Album Project*. Retrieved July 11, 2009 from <http://www.masumihayashi.com/html/famalbum.html>

Inouye, Frank T. (1998). Immediate Origins of the Heart Mountain Draft Resistance Movement. *Peace & Change*, Vol. 23, No. 2, April 1998, Pages 148 – 166.

Kurashige, Lon. (2000). The Problem of Biculturalism: Japanese American Identity and Festival before World War II. *The Journal of American History*, March 2000, Pages 1632 – 1654.

Ling, Jinqi. (1995). Race, Power, and Cultural Politics in John Okada's *No-No Boy*. *American Literature*, Volume 67, Number 2, June 1995, Pages 359 – 381.

Muller, Eric L. (2005). A Penny For Their Thoughts: Draft Resistance At The Poston Relocation Center. *Law and Contemporary Problems*, Volume 68:119, Spring 2005, Pages 119 – 157.

Nagata, Donna and Cheng, Wendy. (2003). Intergenerational Communication of Race-Related Trauma by Japanese American Former Internees. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. Volume 73:3, Pages 266 – 278.

Nakano, Mei. (2009). My Nisei Life. Paper written and read as part of a panel at the Emanji Buddhist Temple oral history event, April 18, 2009, Sebastopol, CA. Retrieved November 9, 2009 from <http://panainstitute.org/mei-nakano-my-nisei-life>

Poston Camp Updates: Restoration Project (2009). *Parcel Inspection, Contraband*. Retrieved June 27, 2009, from <http://postonupdates.blogspot.com/2009/06/parcel-inspection-contraband.html>

Rogow, Faith. (1999). *Rabbit in the Moon: A Memoir/Documentary, Facilitator's Guide*. San Francisco: Television Race Initiative, a Project of P.O.V./American Documentary, Inc.

Tajiri, V. (Ed.) (1990). *Through Innocent Eyes: Writings and Art from the Japanese American Internment by Poston I Schoolchildren*. Los Angeles: Keiro Services.

Tong, Benson. (2004). Race, Culture, and Citizenship among Japanese American Children and Adolescents during the Internment Era. *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Spring 2004, Pages 3 – 40.

Toyama, Jean. (2001). Growing Up Nisei (Book). *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, 01624962, Volume 24:3, Summer 2001.

Tsukiyama, Ted. (2007). Different Perceptions Of The Loyalty Oath, Questions 27 And 28. Hawaii Military Governor Displayed Uncommon Courage. *Japanese American Veterans Association Website*, Vol. II No. 38, July 7, 2007. Retrieved June 16, 2009, from <http://www.javadc.org/Press%20release%2007-07-07%20Different%20Perceptions%20of%20the%20Loyalty%20Oath.htm>

Ward, Jason M. (2007). "No Jap Crow": Japanese Americans encounter the World War II south. (Excerpt). *Journal of Southern History*, Volume LXXIII, February 1, 2007. Retrieved November 11, 2009 from [http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi\\_0199-6259522/No-Jap-Crow-Japanese-Americans.html](http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-6259522/No-Jap-Crow-Japanese-Americans.html)

White, Magner. (1939). Between Two Flags. *Saturday Evening Post*, September 30, 1939, Pages 14 – 15, 73 – 75.