
Protest and Disaffection

The loyalty questionnaire brought each evacuee a choice: would he believe the country's rhetoric and hope for his own future in the United States, or protest the squalid injustice of camp life and the betrayal of American promises? Rage and protest were deeply human reactions to circumstances that often allowed no dignified response. But, inside the camp, bitterness offered little on which to build a new and satisfying life. As 1944 began, the energetic and optimistic were rapidly relocating, leaving behind in camp the old and hostile. Tule Lake was a nightmare of strikes and Army occupation, for any progress toward ending the exclusion had not touched these evacuees. They had lost almost everything, even modest control of their own lives. And their deepening sense of loss and frustration had virtually no outlet.

When the government forced choices upon them, by restoring the draft and making it possible to renounce citizenship, many evacuees, particularly those swayed by strong leaders, reacted with predictable outrage. They would reject decisively the country that had rejected them. Even those whose character forbade angry outbursts could vent their anger in a quiet way—by asking to go to Japan. Draft resistance and renunciation illuminated the darkest shadows of exclusion and detention, showing losses as painful as losing home or business: the loss of confidence in American society and its moral values. Resistance and renunciation were all the more poignant because they often seemed the only way to maintain one's dignity and self-respect.

THE DRAFT

In December 1943, the government announced that Selective Service would begin to induct Nisei. The idea of drafting the Nisei was not new. It had been discussed at least as early as October 1942, when Elmer Davis argued to the President that "it would hardly be fair to evacuate people and then impose normal draft procedures."¹ At that time, Davis's view had prevailed. Now the War Department was changing its mind, which Secretary Stimson attributed to the fine record of Nisei volunteers.² The need for manpower and the small number of volunteers from the camps were undoubtedly factors as well.³ Supporting the decision as a return to normal nondiscriminatory citizenship were the JACL and WRA, which had long been on record supporting the draft.⁴

Not until January 14, 1944, however, did Selective Service local board regulations permit Nisei eligibility for the draft, subject to War Department acceptability, principally a review of loyalty.⁵ Acceptable registrants were reclassified I-A, the status of other eligible citizens. Many of the 2,800 Nisei inductees from the camps welcomed the draft. It reinstated their rights, offered a means to evade their parents' objection to voluntary enlistment and produced a job as well as escape from the debilitating idleness and confinement of camp. The draft successfully solicited replacements for the 100th Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team.

For others, however, the draft was yet another humiliation. The government that had already behaved so shabbily now was forcing its prisoners to fight the war. About 300 refused to report for physicals or induction⁶ on the grounds that their citizenship rights should be fully restored before they were compelled to serve in the armed forces. The most organized resistance came from Heart Mountain, although Poston had a greater number of refusals.⁷ In early 1944, *Rocky Shimpo*, a Denver newspaper, ran a series of articles against the draft, and at Heart Mountain, a "Fair Play Committee" took over the resistance. Although the newspaper was silenced, the Committee dissolved and its leaders sent to Tule Lake, their work had effect: sixty-three Nisei at Heart Mountain resisted the draft, fifty-one of whom said they would serve if their citizenship rights were restored.⁸ The resisters argued that their cases were test cases to clarify their citizenship rights. They were tried, convicted, and sentenced to three years in federal prison; appeals failed.⁹

Three hundred fifteen young men refused to be inducted. Of

these, 263 were convicted. The rest were released, or volunteered, or were in process at the time these statistics were compiled.¹⁰ In 1947, a Presidential pardon was granted to those who had been convicted.¹¹

RENUNCIATION

I think this was a program in the Department of Justice which failed.
—*Edward Ennis*¹²

By mid-1944, relations between the administration and the evacuees were at a low ebb. Evacuees had been confined for two years and their loyalty had been questioned while their sons were drafted. The mood was particularly bleak at Tule Lake. The first six months of 1944 were highly emotional as the accommodationists struggled for power in camp with more extreme pro-Japan forces. The extremists had poor conditions on their side. Although the Army fully withdrew from the camp in May, the stockade—the prison within a prison—established after the November “riot” remained. Sanitation was primitive and food inadequate. Mail was censored and visitors prohibited.¹³ Tokio Yamane described conditions in the stockade’s “bull pen:”

Prisoners in the stockade lived in wooden buildings which, although flimsy, still offered some protection from the severe winters of Tule Lake. However, prisoners in the “bull pen” were housed outdoors in tents without heat and with no protection against the bitter cold. The bunks were placed directly on the cold ground, and the prisoners had only one or two blankets and no extra clothing to ward off the winter chill. And, for the first time in our lives, those of us confined to the “bull pen” experienced a life and death struggle for survival, the unbearable pain from our unattended and infected wounds, and the penetrating December cold of Tule Lake, a God Forsaken concentration camp lying near the Oregon border, and I shall never forget that horrible experience.¹⁴

Appeals to the Spanish consul, acting as intermediary for the government of Japan, had been largely unsuccessful.¹⁵ Although the stockade was quickly abolished after ACLU Attorney Wayne Collins threatened suit in August 1944,¹⁶ in June, after eight months of existence, it appeared permanent.

Outside the camps, repercussions from the “riot” of the previous November continued. The old idea of stripping the Nisei of their citizenship revived. Under Congressional pressure, Attorney General

Biddle finally agreed to compromise; he would support a new option—a statute permitting voluntary renunciation of citizenship.¹⁷ A bill was passed and signed into law on July 1, 1944,¹⁸ designed primarily to get the extremist group who demanded return to Japan out of Tule Lake and into Justice Department internment camps.¹⁹

After conferences between WRA and the Department of Justice, a procedure to effect renunciation was announced in October 1944.²⁰ The evacuee would make a written request to the Justice Department, followed by a hearing. After the hearing and a formal renunciation, the Attorney General would grant approval.²¹

At Tule Lake, the new renunciation process began just as the strongly militant pro-Japan faction emerged in camp. From the beginning of Tule Lake's existence as a segregation center, some evacuees (dubbed "resegregationists") had asked for a camp composed solely of people who preferred Japan and the Japanese way of life.²² By mid-1944, this group generally dominated the camp, and the WRA seemed unwilling or unable to restore balance to the community. In July a moderate evacuee had been murdered, and the resegregationists were implicated. There had also been a wave of beatings of people who were suspected *inu*—dogs, who collaborated with the authorities.²³ Few were willing to risk falling victim to this terrorist activity.²⁴ The resegregationists had also begun a series of "Japanese" activities—language schools, lectures and athletics,²⁵ which attracted a wide following.²⁶ Soon morning outdoor exercises were added, which gradually grew militaristic, complete with uniforms bearing emblems of the rising sun.²⁷ Taeko Okamura described her childhood experience of this time at Tule Lake:

My sister and I were enrolled in a Japanese school in preparation for our eventual expatriation to Japan. Our teachers were generally pro-Japan and taught us not only how to read and write in Japanese but also to be proud as Japanese. Their goals were to teach us to be good Japanese so that we would not be embarrassed when we got to Japan.

We were often asked to wear red or white headbands and do marching exercises. We were awakened early, hurriedly got dressed and gathered at one end of the block where a leader led us in traditional Japanese calisthenics. As the sun rose, we bowed our heads to the east. This was to show our respect to the Emperor. We were also led in the clean-up of our block area before breakfast.

Our block was located on the southwest corner of the camp grounds. The double barbed wire fence was just beyond the next barrack from our compartment. A guard tower with uniformed men and weapons were in view at all times. Search lights were

beamed onto the camp grounds at night. Uniformed men with weapons driving around in jeeps was a common sight. As a result of this experience, I used to be afraid of any white adult male for a very long time.

Demonstrations in protest of one thing or other were frequent. We very often locked ourselves in our room to avoid participating in these demonstrations. Physical violence and verbal abuses were common at these demonstrations where feelings ran high. And whenever a large demonstration took place, we could always expect the camp authorities to send out soldiers to search our rooms for contraband. These searches were very thorough and everything was ransacked.

Life in Tule Lake Segregation Camp for children was not very pleasant. There was very little to do for entertainment. Toys were scarce. We often played hopscotch using the coal pieces from the pile in front of the bathroom area. Coal was fed into the furnace by a man to make hot water. Our mothers gave us outdated Wards or Sears catalogues so we could cut out the models to use as paper dolls. We also spent a great deal of time looking for tiny shells which our mothers bleached and made into necklaces and pins.²⁸

Other witnesses recalled similar experiences:

It was almost mandatory for all Japanese students to attend Japanese Language School. The pressure of academic excellence was stressed.²⁹

The militant group were the Kibei and they had control of the people by strong arm tactics. They had military marching exercises and attempted to make everybody get out and march around the camp.³⁰

Now the resegregationists added renunciation of citizenship to their program.

As soon as official procedures for renunciation were established, strong pressure was applied by the extremists. The resegregationists stepped up militaristic activity, began to spread news of Japanese victories,³¹ and circulated rumors that those who did not renounce would be drafted or ineligible for repatriation. Despite these tactics, however, by mid-December only about 600 people had filed their applications.³²

On December 17, however, two announcements turned the tide in favor of renunciation: the WDC's rescission of the mass exclusion order and WRA's decision to close the camps within a year.³³ To the segregees, alienated and distrustful, this meant destruction of the refuge of the camps and the synthetic world they had created there.³⁴ Communications from campmates who had left for the West Coast and news reports then convinced the evacuees that their old neighborhoods were more hostile and dangerous than before evacuation.³⁵ Renuncia-

tion seemed the best way to escape resettlement.³⁶ The December 27 Justice Department roundup and removal to internment camps of a number of the first group of renunciants seemed to confirm this.³⁷ Renunciation also seemed a way to keep the family together. Many believed that disloyal Issei would be deported after the war; by renouncing, the Nisei could join them.³⁸ Thus strengthened, resegregationists intensified their coercive tactics,³⁹ including threats to beat up families unless the Nisei renounced,⁴⁰ and WRA continued to allow resegregationists to terrorize the camp. Finally, renunciation was one more way to express resentment. As Edward Ennis described it, renunciants were "obviously a lot of people who were deprived of their liberty and put into camps. This was a perfectly honest expression of what they felt. They just threw back their citizenship at us."⁴¹

By January, renunciation had become a mass movement, as 3,400 applied in that month alone.⁴² Over a thousand applied in February. In March, after four more transfers to internment camps, the WRA finally decided to crack down. They decreed that Japanese nationalistic activities were unlawful and began to step into the internal affairs of the camp.⁴³ At this point, the fervor declined. But by then over 5,000 citizens, including more than 70 percent of the Tule Lake Nisei, had renounced their citizenship.⁴⁴

In the late spring of 1945, thousands of renunciants began to regret their decisions. The success of the Nisei combat team was beginning to turn the tide of public opinion, and relocation went more smoothly. Japan was on the verge of defeat. The Justice Department had decided to use Tule Lake to hold many renunciants while their Issei parents were resettled.⁴⁵

The Justice Department, unmoved by the plight of Nisei who wanted to regain their citizenship and leave camp with the rest of their families, announced on October 8 that it would begin to send renunciants to Japan.⁴⁶ To fight the deportation, a group of renunciants again called upon Wayne Collins, who filed in federal courts to release the renunciants and void the renunciations. The suits charged that these were not free acts and that the government had knowingly allowed the resegregationists to carry out their violent, seditious campaign.⁴⁷ When the judge stayed the deportation, the Justice Department began individual hearings to determine whether internees should be released. All but 449 were allowed to relocate.⁴⁸ On June 30, 1947, the court ruled that none could be held, and remaining renunciants went free. In 1948, the same court ruled that all renunciations were invalid.⁴⁹

In 1950, however, the later judgment was overturned by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, which decided that the District Court's finding of mass coercion was incorrect; coercion had to be shown in each case.⁵⁰ Collins continued the fight, filing over 10,000 affidavits on behalf of the renunciants. Not until 1968 was the last of these finally processed.⁵¹

REPATRIATION AND EXPATRIATION

While the stories of draft resisters and renunciants dramatically reveal the angry disillusion of the camps, a brief account of aliens or citizens who filed for repatriation or expatriation to Japan shows with equal force the disaffection caused by evacuation and prolonged detention. During 1942, the year in which those who felt instinctively loyal to Japan could have been expected to ask to go there, relatively few applications were made. By the end of 1942, the WRA had only 2,255 applications from a possible group of about 120,000.⁵² About 58 percent of these came from aliens; another 23 percent were citizens under 18, many of whom were probably dependents of aliens.⁵³ In short, very few adult American citizens had made an independent effort to express allegiance to Japan by leaving the United States.

By the end of 1943, the situation had changed remarkably. There were 9,028 applications on file, an increase of 6,673.⁵⁴ Furthermore, by more than two to one, applications came from American citizens. What prompted this surge of feeling against the United States? The loyalty registration was clearly one factor. Over 40 percent of the new applications had been filed during approximately ten weeks of registration.⁵⁵ They came from all camps, but Granada and Minidoka, which had little problem with registration, produced fewest applications.⁵⁶ Clearly, a request to leave for Japan had become one of the few outlets whereby imprisoned evacuees could vent their anger about the loyalty questionnaire, and perhaps escape it entirely.⁵⁷

In 1944, the numbers jumped again. The WRA records 19,014 applications in December 1944, an increase of 9,986 over the previous year. Over 75 percent of these came from Tule Lake,⁵⁸ where filing an application made one less likely to face "inu" taunts from resegregationists.⁵⁹ By the end of 1945, over 20,000 requests had been made through the WCCA and WRA—over 16 percent of the total number of evacuees.

Most of the applicants never left for Japan. Only 4,724 travelled directly to Japan from the WRA centers⁶⁰ and, nationwide, only about 8,000 left.⁶¹ When the exclusion order was lifted, many repatriate and expatriate applicants were free to resettle; more were released after their renunciation hearings. Apparently neither the government nor the evacuees actively attempted to follow up after the war.

No other statistics chronicle so clearly as these the decline of evacuees' faith in the United States. In the assembly and relocation centers, applications to go to Japan had been one of the few nonviolent ways to protest degrading treatment. During three years of rising humiliation, 20,000 people chose this means to express their pain, outrage and alienation, in one of the saddest testaments to the injustice of exclusion and detention. The cold statistics fail, even so, to convey the scars of mind and soul that many carried with them from the camps.