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Community Analysis Section

SOME REACTIONS TO SELECTIVE SERVICE: TULE LAKE

Introduction

In a report on March 20th concerning motivations lying behind expatriation and repatriation requests, we indicated that the Army draft was a less important cause of the upswing here at Tule Lake than was the case at other centers. The desire of families to close their ranks and face a future in Japan, the reactions "against America" occasioned by the recent incident, the vague hopes of returning early on the exchange boat, the talk current about the further need for resegregation, the alleged perfidy and treachery of unauthorized Tulean residents, -- the total swing toward a Japanese community, -- conspired to leave the people of Tule Lake with the firm conviction that America and its affairs lay behind them and that their future lay elsewhere. From a large group of unauthorized residents of the Tule Lake community came numerous repatriation and expatriation requests which whittled their number down to 106 families composed only of 238 individuals. Japanese language schools doubled the enrollment of English schools, getas replaced shoes, haircuts became Japanese, kibe boys objected strongly to ballroom dancing and kibe girls

toyed with their teacups in messhall in the approved fashion of etiquette; cooking schools and etiquette classes sprang up in the blocks; the Seinen-dan, "studying their future", went to town; a Japanese library was founded; Boy's Day approached and the carp flew from poles in every block; the evacuee Chief of the Wardens announced in the highschool paper -- in good traditional fashion -- "at the Police Station, we know all about you, we know what you are doing every day and night". In sum, America was being left rapidly behind. Some nisei, jarred by the impact of an alien culture, tried the door for Leave Clearance; most of them, in a family setting, attempted an adjustment "for Dad, who did so much for me". Thus, when Selective Service was re-instituted among American citizens of Japanese descent, plenty of water was already coursing under the bridge. The prevailing climate of opinion had fixed the community in people's minds as a "Japanese" community. The feeling in Tule Lake was that Selective Service would probably not bother with the so-called "self-avowed enemies of the United States". "After all", said one kibe, "look at what we are and how we act".

This feeling that Selective Service knew better than to come to Tule Lake was re-inforced by the knowledge that pre-induction processing had begun at other centers, but did not seem to be applied here. When pick-ups occurred elsewhere and boys landed in jail, there were mixed reactions:

"They were excluded from the Army before, later segregated and kept from certain branches of service. Do people think they will swallow their pride after years behind a fence?"

"Those nisei who refused and went to jail are gutless wonders. I'm a 'Jap' now, but I respect others who make up

their minds. You have to say 'yes' or 'no' in this game. There's no 'maybe'. They said 'yes' and now they're trying to worm their way out of it. Even the kibeï would prefer Sgt. Ben Kuroki to the fence-straddlers."

"There's one handicap the Japanese kid has that no Caucasian boy has. He's been treated like an unclean animal who couldn't live among them on the west coast. A nisei is a citizen, but who would know it; to Caucasians, he's just another sneaky slant-eye. Do you think any decent kid with any pride is going to take that and then feel in a fighting mood? The farmers lost their land, the Japanese business-men their fixed assets. We not only had things taken away from us, but we got a slap in the face and a kick in the slats besides. After that we got a barrack in some God-forsaken place behind a fence. Then we got beans. That is what the nisei's hopes and plans came to. That's why I'm going back. I'm not sure it would be better in Japan, though you can't admit it around here. All I'm sure is that it couldn't be any worse here."

(Later) "The nisei has another problem: his old-age parents. Our fathers had to work a long time in this country before they got married. They built for us and then the younger generation followed, much later. A Caucasian kid's parents are just a step above him in age. They have the same background and ideas as their kids have. Our fathers worked and slaved and grew old when we were just young sprouts. Now they have everything wiped out. They're coming closer to the grave each day. They're still just an enemy alien after all those years. They need a support and that's where we must come in and help. They don't want the same thing to happen to us here, so they're taking us back -- for their sake and ours, too."

"It's alright to take the guys who haven't made up their minds into the Army. Some didn't, you know, and they are still here in camp. But when a fellow said 'no' and said it plain at registration time, they have no right to grab him. If they do it, I can't understand. We went right up to the Army men at registration and said 'No!'. I, for one, meant what I said. People who don't think we meant what we said, should have asked us then. If they wanted to prison us, they could have done it then, too. I hate to be called a liar".

"They wouldn't want 'disloyals' in the Army in the first place. It's too tricky. Why, a person just couldn't fight if he felt that way. In the Relocation Centers, it's O.K., and they should take them. They didn't give up citizenship; they didn't repatriate."

"Those boys they put in jail-sentence are just Japanese like us. They can't fight their relatives. If they felt that way, they belong here and not in penitentiary."

Thus, the mental climate was clear on the Japanese character of this center; people were decidedly less clear about the legal status of nisei in this center as regards Selective Service. There was some wishful thinking that the program would not apply here. The feeling of a gap between this center and the Relocation Centers was strong. The fact that other centers instituted their programs far in advance was taken as a token of this difference. That Manzanar, with its perfect record of 117 called and processed, immediately proceeded the announcement at Tule Lake of 82 called, was accepted as logical since Manzanar was in the military zone.

Announcement of Selective Service and Events Following

This complacency turned to slight uncertainty when three men were called for pre-induction physicals about a month ago. However, this event was shrugged off with the explanation that these three were probably former Tuleans who had answered 'yes' at registration time, and were waiting to leave camp anyway.

Selective Service really hit the Center with a resounding blow when some 82 were called. Complacency and uncertainty began to disappear. From an unimportant topic for conversation, the issue became a major local problem. There are now two major questions in the Center:

- (1) The release of the detainees to the resident area of the center;

- (2) The hope that Selective Service will not apply here.

It is widely claimed that if either type of penalty or sanction is invoked, the removal of detainees to Leupp, or the legal prosecution of 'no-no' answerers and repatriates who fail to report, then an incident may follow which will set back the progress

attained in the Center to date.

Complacency and uncertainty did not, however, disappear suddenly. The first reaction in the community was to "wait and see" what the first inductees might do. The Center populace had come through a harrowing experience, and following the resignation of the Co-ordinating Committee, saw only the stockade as a barrier to community organization and further progress. The two factions still existed, pro status quo and anti status quo, but sincere elements in either camp were now thinking more in terms of unity, community organization and a clean slate for future gains in the direction of normalcy. In short, people had had "enough incident". The continuing presence of the Army bespoke force and authority. On the Emperor's Birthday (April 29th), the inauguration of a baseball competition became the occasion for the Project Director to throw in the first ball, which broke the ice. Mess Management, through carefully guided improvements in operation, likewise made gains for administration. The excellent reputation of the Hospital's Chief Medical Officer had spread from Gila and through Gilans in the Tule Lake Center. Improvements were made in roads; block baseball lots were constructed in the firebreaks. The close collaboration between the Public School system and the Language School Board had borne fruit. Perhaps next in order to the direct gains accrued by administration was the fact that the residents not only had a taste of peace and relative normalcy, but were, so far as the majority group of newcomers were concerned, now settled down and used to their new center.

The "wait and see" attitude put the burden of decision on the first registrants called:

"All the people are saying they are going to see what the first ones will do. There's no sense in making a loud noise if the ones called are 'loyals' who should go in if they mean it anyway. The issei aren't talking about this call for 82 men; it's the nisei who seem most worried and do the talking. If an older man has a son here, he's more concerned about it, naturally. But if that son is a repatriate or a no-no, he feels he's on safe ground and made the best decision for that boy to come here. There's little argument because no one wants to argue for giving his son, his main support in old-age, to the army. Everybody's agreed this is a different kind of camp, and no one but voluntary segregants who don't 'belong' are going to answer the call".

Issei with sons thus felt 'safe' and acted as if there were no issue at all since 'disloyals' at Tule Lake had said 'no' once at registration time or had since repatriated.

The 82 called, it turned out, were actually 73 in number. The grapevine disclosed, further, that the voluntary segregants and 'no-yes' categories were not the only ones involved. Double negatives and repatriates were included in this pre-induction call.

The tack quickly changed. People asked, "Would this calling of repatriates and double negatives indicate an admission of the failure of the segregation program? Why else would repatriates and the 'disloyal' be called? What good did segregation do? The Army must be hard up for men if they go after us." Most tellingly, one person stated:

"Doesn't the WRA see the quotation marks are around the word, 'disloyal'. There are some fanatics here, but most wouldn't commit sabotage, probably no one here would. They are here because they are fed up with the way they've been treated. They're even willing to go back and go to school to learn a language they never thought they'd have to use after parents had passed on. They're going 'native' just because they don't see a place here for them in America.

The niseis aren't even sure they'll be accepted in Japan. Maybe there's no place for them there either. But why do you think they came to this camp? Do you think they want to fight the war for neighbors who spit in their face? Do you think they welcome someone to say, 'Alright, my dear Jap, you're all wrong and we don't like you, but we're going to be big-hearted. Even if you said 'no', a thousand times 'no', we're going to give you another great big chance.' Personally, I think it's too late.

"You say it's one-sided. Ben Kuroki had a different answer. Or you say it's short-sighted. The future is longer than the past. Maybe you're right, but I don't think so. It's not short-sighted to look down the whole past you've lived and see it built up on the rotten lie that 'we belong'. It's not one-sided either, when you've been kicked inside a fence and left to rot there as if you were in a zoo. Now the word is out we're disloyal. All we want to be is human beings, given a chance and we don't think we'll ever get an even break here".

As the days went by, rumor had it that most said they would not report for examination. The Project Attorney was asked to notarize letters to this effect and refused. A number of young fellows called, or expecting to be called, approached the attorney to learn whether Selective Service would apply to this Center, a few asking whether it would apply to a repatriate or no-answerrer. It was consistently explained that the law applied to citizens regardless of place of residence or the answer given at registration.

With this news back in the Center, more than a few said a jail term would be preferable to serving the U.S. Army. Of the group called, only one evacuee is said to have been anxious to serve. Perhaps part of this feeling was due to the fact that rumors concerning the nisei combat units were flying thick and fast. The favorite story had it that all draftees would go into the all-Nisei battalion or combat unit and that the original 100th Battalion had been wiped out almost to a man. Chances of coming through were said to be very thin. And then, many had signed

repatriation papers with the idea of making Japan their future home. Few nisei who expatriated realized that they technically retained their U.S. citizenship and were subject to the laws binding upon citizens. Consequently, the idea of fighting Japan seemed dangerous to their future plans. Said one nisei:

"After all, the U.S. is supposed to be the enemy, even if we aren't the saboteur type. It all seems incomprehensible that the 'disloyals' are to be taken to the U.S. Army, when they got it on their record that they failed to swear America allegiance. Does the U.S. think the nisei are here on the sole purpose of draft evasion? By how many programs and different government agencies are we going to be controlled and justly judged? It would have been far simpler for nisei if the Army did take over this camp! Guarded by soldiers as dangerous, and then asked to be one! Kicked off the west coast farms because you're a Jap, and then told to join the home guard because you're a citizen!"

The growth of this reaction can be seen by the refusal of those called to appear for X-rays which preceded the ~~the~~ pre-induction physicals. Of 73 notified, 11 reported. Later, when the 73 were called for the actual physical, the same 11 re-appeared. The breakdown of response was as follows:

73 - Notified
24 - Failed to Report
31 - Had been out of the Center on Indefinite Leave
prior to the institution of the Segregation
program (a 'loyal' group)
7 - Unidentified, undoubtedly because of the possible
mistakes in spelling, or addressing, of the Local
Board
11 - Reported
73 - Total no. of cases

Of the 11 who reported, 2 were accepted according to early reports while 9 were rejected. A tentative report has it that 6 were active TB cases (one reported in the colony as something "the matter" with his arm), and two had had extensive hospitalization elsewhere; one of ~~the~~ ~~se~~, according to center rumor, was a virtual cripple, while the other was covered with operation scars.

It is felt that the precedent set by these first will probably be followed by those to come unless drastic measures are taken by the authorities to discourage this sort of thing. The opinion forming process is now virtually completed in the Center. The "not wanting to show up" attitude, I am told, is easily understood. The root of the feeling is expressed in the phrase:

"The United States once refused to stand by us, so why should we stand by this country now".

Rumor has it that those who refuse to appear for examination will be sent to Leupp or some such camp. Again, in this, the feeling of separation from other centers, the centers for relocation, is apparent. One boy, in statement of the rumor added: "They feel that the only difference would be the absence of the fairer sex and (laughing) is that such a terrible thing?"

On the fringe are those whose reason for a strong stand in refusing to appear for the physical is a vague belief in the protecting function of the Japanese government. This notion is at present gaining ground. People call it "belief in Japan" or say that "Japan will not let them down". The most radical think also that Japan will be in a position after the war "to do something for us".

Administrative Tactics

In addition to my own checking, the Federal Bureau of Investigation interviewed each available boy called, including the 20-odd failures to report. The results of these interviews, informally transmitted to the author, agree with the above survey of opinion. Only one "refusal" is said to have been a kibe; in this case, an attempt was made initially to simulate difficulty in English.

One lad, rankling with a deep feeling of suppressed indignation could hardly manage to speak. All seemed to be willing to take the consequences. When prison was mentioned, the stock reply was, "Well, one prison is the same as another, and this center is a prison". Consciousness of discrimination was prominent in all the attitudes. Going "back to Japan just for Dad's sake" seemed a common motive for being at Tule Lake.

Aside from this interviewing process, there was no administrative action. In contrast to Heart Mountain, as reported by Hansen, where WRA officials delivered notices, and played consciously into the picture of the rift between the Fair Practices committee and the Community Council, Tule Lake officialdom maintained a hands-off policy. In the announcement of the 82 called, it was clearly stated and noted well in the center that this program was, indeed, a Selective Service program and that administration was merely asked to supply space and facilities. The examinations in the Hospital were assisted by WRA staff, but the assignment of staff physician drew little attention. The tactic was a wise one since it deprived the center populace of a convenient symbol of oppression and mitigated against an anti-administration movement. Those to be blamed, -- Selective Service -- lay at a good distance from the center gates.

There has been some response, however, to this tactic, which is not all to the good. People are saying the day of "trouble" is just postponed, and that the real difficulty will come when they come to pick up the boys for Leupp or penitentiary. The

fact that administration has not spoken or acted prevents any criticism from being aimed in our direction.

The Logical Argument

However, a logical argument is in circulation. In a sense it sums up the present paper. Briefly outlined, it runs as follows:

"At the time of evacuation, the Nisei were told to get off the west coast because of military necessity, despite the fact they are citizens now and were then. They were removed as Japanese. The decree appeared to them to be a racial decree, not ~~disimilar~~ similar to earlier legislation aimed at the Oriental on the west coast. They were removed for reasons of expediency and the excuse was: You are Japanese.

"Now that some of them, the nisei here, have sought their futures abroad because of all the discrimination felt in evacuation, they are told a contradictory story. The decree now is to go into the Army. They wonder again if the reasons are not really reasons of expediency, since the excuse is: You are citizens.

"In the meantime, they have burned their bridges behind them and repatriated or refused to be loyal to this nation. They have, in other words, been forced in the direction of a certain type of decision which makes them Japanese like their parents, at least in their own eyes.

"Those in camps are under the WRA. The WRA had a registration program, and a later segregation program to determine whether one wished to be Japanese or American. Those who belong at Tule Lake (repatriates and no-no answers) consider themselves Japanese. By coming here they have certainly shown 'disagreement or disloyalty' to this country. According to WRA or the Spanish Consul, they are repatriates of this process, or disloyals. But according to another government agency, Selective Service, they are 'loyal citizens' all of a sudden. Again it is contradictory. We came here as disloyals. As disloyals, we belong to Tule Lake Center, and the repatriates ultimately to Japan. We are, then, by cruel choice the Japanese Japanese. We segregated, as told. We were sent here as disloyals. If we belong here as disloyals, then we belong least of all in the patriotic forces, designed to defend this nation.

"I know the WRA has nothing to do with this, and wants to keep out of it. So we look to Japan for our help. But you must admit that the fault is this ~~bureaucracy~~ bureaucracy, which contradicts itself and cancels itself out: pigeonholing us as, first, Japanese -- then, citizen; first, ineligible for Army service -- then, subject to draft laws. We realize that the WRA cannot run or interfere with Selective Service. But cannot someone higher up in the Interior explain who we are and why we belong at Tule Lake?"