

C H A P T E R X I I

"ATTITUDES TOWARDS SOCIETY AND SCHOOL"

Introduction to Chapter XII

A small high school class was asked to write on the subject of "Attitudes Toward Society and School." This assignment was generally interpreted by the students as requiring them to discuss other people's attitudes, other students' and parents'. Their own attitudes are revealed largely as set in contrast to the others' attitudes.

In this small group of short essays, one finds many of the same themes and observations relating to schools and education at Tule Lake that appear more abundantly in brief references scattered throughout the collection of essays and compositions on other subjects.

Community divisions among groups and the spirit of divisiveness are reflected in the schools and educational processes.

The evacuation has created an atmosphere in which educational problems arise and become critical.

But the effects of the environment can be constructively countered.

Parents and students bear the main responsibility for the atmosphere in which the school now functions.

The quality of the teachers is high although some are more liked and esteemed than others.

The standards of education are high and the level of instruction compares with schools they remember at home.

If the schools are not appropriately valued in the community, it is an unfortunate circumstance for which the people in the community are largely responsible.

Many students, they lament, are without serious educational purposes; some attend because attendance is compulsory; other do not attend at all because they can escape notice in this community.

There are many problems which impede learning: no place to study at home, no library, limited facilities in the school and home for their work.

Parents are responsible for directing and motivating their children--never more so than in such a community as a relocation center.

Parents also bear the responsibility for teaching their children to have respect for teachers and for the regulations governing the administration of the schools.

Normally, one writer notes in an earlier chapter, high school students *in their homes in schools in their former homes,* "would be having the best time of their lives." Here, however, there is a restlessness, a feeling "that they are missing everything."² They regret that some have allowed themselves to suffer a "collapse of ambition" or fail to use the alternatives they have available to study at Tule Lake or make an attempt to continue their education elsewhere. The writers are generally much more positive in the attitudes they profess to have *as contrasted to* than the "others" whom they describe. The way in which the assignment was formulated encouraged the response. But there were attitudes among students and people in the community which they observed and decried. One writer noted among the negative attitudes toward the school was the view, unjust view, that the teachers hired at Tule Lake could not get jobs elsewhere. Three decades later an 81 year-old American educated Issei commented critically upon the education system of his relocation center (as he remembered it) echoing such criticisms:

We had much better treatment than we expected in camp. We didn't know what was going to happen. . . . Especially the education was very, very poor. Finally, we found out that the government doesn't want a very good education system there because then the people wouldn't want to fly away from the camp [i.e., resettle].³

¹ See chapters above.

² See essay f4 in chapter VI.

³ Kiefer, op. cit., 61.

The incongruity of teaching democratic political values and learning about democratic institutions in high school classes to Nisei citizens--interned for reasons of racial identity--was not lost to the youth, their parents, teachers, or administrators. Mrs. Eleanor Shirrell, teacher and wife of the first Project director, asked her husband rhetorically the bitter question many other teachers were asking, "What do I tell them when they ask me why I am here?"¹

One of the block managers wrote a weekly report in which he states poignantly his concern about the broad interest of his children or all school children at Tule Lake (rather than reporting on the problems and activities of his office). Here criticism is not aimed directly against the school as such but at the environment in which education had to take place in a relocation center. This was written as schools opened in autumn.

September 19, 1942

TO: Don Elberson
FROM: Block Manager 51
SUBJECT: Weekly Activities Report

For the past two weeks I have not made any weekly activities report--just two blank papers. There are many, many things which prompted me to take such an action, not for malice or for sarcasm. If you were to misinterpret my action as nothing but sarcasm for the purpose of making fun of the administration and the staff, I am very, very painfully hurt; indeed, I am.

¹Conversations with Elmer Shirrell.

There are times in life when a person is in a trance. Some of you who may take this sheet and read such a statement might be led to believe such nonsense. He must be a little "tetched in the haid." Sure, you are at liberty to draw your own conclusions. Why not? Freedom of thought, freedom of speech, etc. More power to you if you can think up more.

School has started. What a school Yes, I can appreciate the efforts made by the WRA, but--I oftentimes wonder. Do you know the real existing conditions? How, I wonder, how are we going to make real Americans out of these innocent young children. Teaching them the principles of Democracy, "I pledge allegiance to the flag. One nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice to all," while ----they are penned up. Barbed wire fences, guard towers all around playing their search lights on us at night, guards with tommy guns, pistols, and other contraptions and weapons standing over us. I open my arms and cry out in despair--God! Oh, what is this? We who were born here, reared here, educated here, we are bewildered. Can you give me an answer. It can't hurt me much more than what it has. It's similar to the case of a small child who loves and in return is loved by his mother. The child is given a dose of good whipping and is placed in a closet. For what? He does not know; all he hears is that he is bad. Bad, why? What did he do?

My dear sir, my vocabulary is so limited that I cannot reveal more fully my feelings and thoughts. I am only sorry. Another thing too which hurts me and it hurts me like something awful, and I sincerely believe it is the same with other parents, is that my children ask me: "Daddy, why can't we go home? Why do

we have to stay here? I don't like it at all; I'd rather go back to that little schoolhouse even if it is small and broken down. Daddy, why can't we?" What can I tell them--tell them because we are Americans but of Japanese ancestry. No, heavens, no! Then what are we to tell them? Their replies would be: I didn't learn anything like that in school, where one type of Americans should be put into a camp. Minister didn't preach such sermons. Where God made such distinction-- I honestly don't know what to say, Don, so help me.

Keep our respect, be honorable--sure, more easily said than done. But remember, it takes cooperation on both sides. Here we colonists look upon you staff members as our leaders. We want them to be capacious, possess compassion, mercy, not give us answers in figures of dollars and cents. What in the hell is \$12, \$16, \$19 worth to an individual when thousands of people are earning that much in one day? I personally detest this elusive type of reply. For God's sake, are you not man enough to come out with a reply becoming a gentleman?

By golly, I am here going to state frankly that I will fight for what is ours. Remember, dear Don, I also learned in school the principles of democracy, the Americans' Creed, the Preamble--learned them, do love them, cherish them and by thunder, I am not going to stand idly by, so help me God. Do you think I am afraid to be put behind a bar. No, Don. I have not made one statement here against the country of my birth, but put me in if you wish, if it will satiate your mind.

Do you remember what I said one day as I returned from a hike? Sir, we want a person with love. You know sir, there is an old

saying, "Hate is not overcome by hate, by love alone 'tis quelled."
How true; do you agree? I believe I further stated that we want
a leader who will sacrifice his body and soul--a person who can
detach himself from petty politics, material gains and big black
headlines.

I have made many suggestions in the last three reports; I am
still waiting

First Aid Kit--when??????
Mops--when??????????

Brooms, 60 apiece were give to us block managers, but remember that
we have 77 apts in a block, at leas 66 families or more to a block.
Where is that extra 6 or 8 is going to come from? Take a saw and
cut the brooms in half. I, as Ward Chairman, owe to other block
managers in other wards 120 brooms. I only have 60. ????

Very respectfully submitted,

L. M. O__

The incongruities that were causing so much anguish had to
be recognized and dealt with; but in important measure they had
to be set aside sufficiently to let the main business of teaching
to go on. Although the derivative sensitivities and the problems
of student disintrest and listlessness had to be responded to in-
telligently, they did not seem to be present in Tri-State High
School in dimensions beyond those with which the teachers who had
taught elsewhere had experienced previously.

A major goal most teachers early came to define for themselves was to do everything that might be done to prepare Nisei youths for re-entry into the mainstream of American society; this meant to promote their acculturation into American society and to counter tendencies for the reversal of acculturation that might arise from living in a virtually all-Japanese community, and finally to strengthen their sense of identity as American citizens of Japanese origin. These were goals which were readily integrated into the basic academic purposes of the High School curriculum.

The school administrators and teachers accepted the need for the schools of the relocation center to address themselves as fully as possible to the interests of the community. This was not easily managed. Even in terms of their concerns with the educational needs of the youths, the teachers could not always rely on parents understanding school programs and curricula despite general community support of education as something good and necessary. For the teachers, inevitably in the Project, the main focus of the educational apparatus was to meet the needs of the students as far as the teachers and administrators could perceive them.

There was, as indicated earlier, an extensive measure of adaptation to the vicissitudes of school life in the early months of the Project's history. There was a good deal of constructive adaptation between students and teachers. The teachers were competent but what was fully as important was that they were convincingly concerned and compassionate. Students responded to this and their response heightened the mutuality of affect. Both male and female high school students seemed to take the professional and personal concern of the teachers less for granted; whether this was because

of the circumstances of life at Tule Lake or because of other factor, the teachers appreciated the many thoughtful and grateful expressions they received. These were both in warmth and gratitude beyond the measure that the experienced teachers had known before. The attachments were mutual and were important to both; there were obligations flowing out of affection and concern. When teachers left the Relocation Center they frequently made sure that those who took their places were aware of individual needs, but more than that, that the sense of loss in the interruption of the direct relationship would not have serious consequences. Teachers were concerned that the Nisei friends they had made would not be made more vulnerable by their departure. Letters from class members provided sources of information that made it easier to respond helpfully.

Remember [I.] and [J.] and [K.] when they went to see you leave? Well, when we were on our way back from your departure [I.] started to kick the rock and everything else and Miss Miagawa asked what was the matter and he said "I loose fight." "I don't want to go school any more."

After the teacher wrote to the student telling him how important his work was to him and to her, the class mate wrote again:

This morning when [I.] received his letter from you he was happy. He was so happy I saw him read it over and over. He had it in his shirt pocket, and he would always take it out and read it. He comes to school alright but I think he doesn't care to after you left.¹

The teacher wrote to the person who took her place as well as to the student. The student responded:

¹N.M. to Hanny Billigmeier, June 7, 1943.

²N.M. to Hanny Billigmeier, ca June 14, 1943.

Don't worry about me not going to school [regularly] because I am going out possible in a few weeks [to resettle] and if I don't work harder I'm afraid I might not get my credits, and when I start school outside they might make me start ninth grade all over again. So I'll be sure to go to school while I'm here and when I get outside I don't think I will have much trouble at all.

A friend of the student wrote to the same teacher telling the news of the school and giving assurance that all was well with the student.

I go down [to his] place pretty near every day. He is going to study hall. I help him fly planes. We play baseball together. He's becoming a good boy. I hope to make him a fine boy when you come back.²

The important thing in this exchange between the students and their former teacher is the mutuality of love and supportiveness it reveals among all the parties to the correspondence.

Some months later, a student and her family were transferred to Granada and wrote of the pleasure she found in the school there.

The high school building is gorgeous. . . . I am waiting for school to start. I can't bear the idea of waiting much longer. Not only that but since the library is only in the school, I have to wait till it starts; and here I'm just dying to read a book. Any kind of bookAs soon as I get a good grip of the library door, you'll see me there every day. . . .³

This teacher and other teachers had correspondence, especially with some very talented students, which went on for years and

¹I.Y. to Hanny Billigmeier, early June, 1943.
²K.N. to Hanny Billigmeier, early June, 1943.
³F.Y. to Hanny Billigmeier, September 20, 1943.

and ended only when the mobility of the parties to the correspondence erased traces of places and addresses. . . but not remembrances. Students wrote about other teachers, generally in positive terms, sometimes more than that.

Mrs. Gunderson . . . is a lot of help to us--not only because she understand the problems we have--not only as a race (as so many think of us) but as individuals, but because she's one of the few here who have the ability to help us out. Anyway, I think you two are very much alike. . . .

What the talented young man, perhaps, forgets here is that other students were relating in quite different ways to other teachers. For him the teacher who remained in camp almost to the end, as he had to because of his family, provided direction and important stimulation to a very active mind. The teacher who had left the Project and was now in another part of the country traded news and impressions of the world outside for the latest personal and Project news and impressions.

¹R.T. to Hanny Billigmeier, April 10, 1945.

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Attitudes Toward Society and School

The attitudes of some students toward the project school show the dissension of the environment as a whole. The individual, the parents, are all responsible for this attitudes.

The fact that this school is the same in standard as the schools outside does not seem to be understood by the individual and the parents; also, that the teachers are of qualified teachers does not seem to be understood.

There are students who try to escape from things that should be gone through. They are persons who come to school just because of their attendance. The parents only care of this, too. I have known of parents reason this case thus: That his son is too dumb in the first place to get anywhere with education, so he is sending him to school just for attendance. On the other hand there are parents who take the other thought that his son isn't as bright and intelligent as other students. The only way that he could get him into normal society would be for him to have more education than the average people. Then with this additional education he may be able to reason things as a normal person. From this we can see that the parents are really responsible for the attitudes of the children.

These "loafers" would be actually loafers who will go from class to class with no object. Their conducts are uncontrollable.

In extreme cases of these there is little that a school can do. However, for mild cases there may be some ways of alleviating their attitudes. One way may be the education of parents. Suggestive method of parent education would be a formation of a P.T.A. in which the parents learn the true training of children and the feelings of the children.

Barbul
POD

Male

Attitude Toward Society and School

As we have noticed, there are a group or groups of people who have a definite lack of education toward society, in general, in this colony. It is obvious that these groups have no respect toward any persons or things not related to themselves.

The main cause for the organization of such groups is obviously the definite change in environment, which evacuation has made on all of us. The assembling of the same type of people from a wide area has attracted them to go around in groups or "gangs." It is a common tendency for people in "gangs" to show off to each other as well as to the people who by chance are walking by. These little "show-offs" soon develop, I presume, into conceited personalities and the "I-love-me" type; however, individually, they are, as far as I can see, just like you and me, being probably a little self-conscious.

As far as a reforming program toward these groups is concerned, I can think of no personal definite steps toward them, since individuals belonging to such groups are yet still in their teens. However, I do believe that the guardian of each individual should take the first step in trying to develop them into their normal selves again. If the problem become too serious, it is probably wise to send such individuals to institutions.