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In attempting to study the psychological impact of the wartime relocation and internment of United States citizens, particularly as it affected me personally as one of the 120,000 victims, I began an intensive search of the scientific literature, hoping to gather relevant psychological background material. I started with the present year and traced backwards thirty-nine years to the year of 1942. To my amazement, my search produced very little. There were historical and descriptive writings on the process of relocation; analyses of the political, social and economic roots of the concentration camp debacle; some descriptive accounts of the assembly centers and camps; some accounts of the individual experiences of the internees; but no systematic psychological studies and analyses. The amazement is also tinged with what is amazing to me, however, is the almost unbelievable dearth of material on public opinion polls and surveys.

Prepared for the Japanese American Citizens League
National Committee for Redress
For submission to the Commission on Wartime
Relocation and Internment of Civilians

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by

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In attempting to study the psychological impact of the wartime relocation and internment of United States citizens, particularly as it affected me personally as one of the 120,000 victims, I began an intensive search of the scientific literature, hoping to gather relevant psychological background material. I started with the present year and traced backwards thirty-nine years to the year of 1942. To my amazement, my search produced very little. There were historical and descriptive writings on the process of relocation; analyses of the political, social and economic roots of the concentration camp debacle; some descriptive accounts of the assembly centers and camps; some factual data on the movement out of camps; and voluminous material on public and individual opinions and newspaper accounts. What is amazing to me, however, is the almost unbelievable dearth of psychological studies and analyses. The amazement is also tinged with

chagrin because I had not even known there was a dearth, and had, in fact, contributed to that dearth. Why? Why this vacuum? Why is it that the Japanese American social scientists and their colleagues did not flood the literature with psychological studies and analyses of this convulsive and dark American tragedy? If we were to write a dissertation on the psychological and psychiatric impact of the German death camp, imprisonment, prisoner-of-war detainment, or hostage experiences, one could develop an impressive bibliography. The interest in these processes has been intense. What is it in the American concentration camp experience that has taken it out of the psychological field of both its victims and the scientific community?

D. M. Berger (1977) and Hillman (1981) identify four factors common to the concentration camp, prisoner of war and hostage experiences. These are (1) life-endangering factors, (2) prolonged helplessness, (3) recurrent terrifying episodes, and (4) assaults on self-esteem and self-image. One may argue the relative rank of the American concentration camp on the first three variables. And this may explain why interest in the American concentration camps was not sufficient to warrant studies. The kind of drama that makes good suspense or horror movies was not there. Then what makes me dare to compare the American concentration camp experience with the death camp, prisoner of war, and hostage situations? It is the fourth characteristic, the assault on self-esteem and self-image. And from a psychological perspective, I add a greater assault, the assault of abandonment by one's own country, which may be one of the most pervasive, pernicious and debilitating assault on one's identity. The duration and intensity of this assault, in my understanding of history, has never been more prolonged!

It is my opinion that it was this assault on self-esteem and self-image which launched the Japanese American on a 40-year journey to establish the external accoutrements of self-esteem and self-respect via military sacrifices and the visible signs of success—academic and professional attainments, economic advancement and the like. The focus on the external negated self-analysis and introspection. Hence, the spectacle of the Nisei not telling the Sansei about their 1942-46 experiences and desperately putting it all behind them. Hence, the self-imposed knowledge gap.

But what of our non-Japanese colleagues? They wrote about the social, economic, political and constitutional issues. Why not the psychological issues? Perhaps psychological issues are too personal, too close. To get close is to feel, to understand on a very human basis, thus leading to an uncomfortable feeling of guilt. Or perhaps we played our stoic, untouchable role too well, and fooled everyone, including ourselves.

What we have now, then, are psychological studies locked up in each of the thousands of victims. As the number of survivors decrease with time, the opportunity to unlock those studies is rapidly vanishing. The Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians has the enviable and unique opportunity to hear, to record and to analyze some of these personal studies. In that vein, I would like to present a brief psychological analysis of the anatomy of abandonment and the consequences of that abandonment in terms of my personal case history.

My psychological case history is not unique. Many of my friends can tell even more compelling stories. A brief survey conducted through the Pacific Citizen, the news organ of the JACL, elicited written responses

which provide the framework for my testimony and indicated clearly that my story is indeed not unusual. I realize that the Commission has heard a number of witnesses who have testified on the psychological impact of the concentration camp experience from a personal perspective, as well as testimony from a professional perspective. I would like to package for the Commission both approaches, and shall do so in terms of a series of simple explanatory concepts.

1. The greater the dissonance, the greater the effort required to achieve consonance. The values of loyalty and trustworthiness were at the core of what my parents tried to instill in me, and when these are combined with an almost religious acceptance of the principles underlying the Constitution of the United States, one gets a superpatriot. I remember as youth breaking into "America the Beautiful" or "My Country 'tis of Thee" when I came upon a particularly beautiful scene, or becoming tearful, with shivers running up and down my spine, when the national anthem was sung. In my senior year in high school, I entered a number of oratorical contests where the title of the orations was "Why I am proud to be an American," and truly, I was proud to be an American. I always came in second, even when my competition had come in third or fourth or unplaced on a previous occasion. When my mother suggested that perhaps my second places were determined by my not being white, I rejected that notion, by saying that America was a land of fair play, equality and justice and that sort of discrimination was contrary to the essence of America. This conviction, even in the face of a blantly discriminating situation, was obviously a denial of reality, engendered by an almost juvenile, but fanatical sense of loyalty. I point this out to emphasize that when perception and reality are incongruent, great

energy must be expended to force congruence. Discussion with other Japanese Americans, and the survey present strong evidence that the dissonance situation was not peculiar to me.

2. When dissonance occurs, consonance is pursued via a variety of ego defense mechanisms. When it became clear that the military was determined to move the Japanese out of the critical zones, many Japanese decided to move to the areas labelled as less critical. Since I had just entered the University, after having worked for three and a half years after high school with the fixed goal of saving enough to be able to continue my education, my mother agreed that I should stay behind and continue to go to school. My mother and sisters moved. I was convinced that my citizenship would protect me. Furthermore, the fact that my family had to move was rationalized as being necessary and unavoidable because my mother was not a citizen and my sisters were too young to be separated from her. At this point, my defense was the conviction that it cannot happen to me!

My citizenship did not save me, nor did my family's moving to a less critical zone. I was ejected from my country and detained in the middle of a vast, barren and unwelcoming desert. And in the middle of that desert, an expectable psychological process was set in motion. Poverty was no stranger to me. I could adapt to the physical discomforts, the loss of privacy and other dehumanizing conditions, but I could not deal with the assault of being in a prison without being guilty of any crime. The manifestation of this inability was covert and, and in retrospect, very crazy. Something in me said, "Don't become aware of the fence. If the fence is not there, you are not in jail." In the two years I was in Topaz, I never went near the fence! I had achieved a

second level of denial, i.e., psychological removal (Dimsdale, 1978).

The avoidance and the denial worked well, until the loyalty questionnaire. The demand for a written statement of loyalty was the assault that broke the denial's back. No longer could I avoid the issue. If my country was indeed just, if it respected me, if it loved me, what was I doing here? Why was I being subjected to this? I had never understood that my citizenship, my participation was conditional and legitimized only after I had proved myself in a test of fire. It was as if my mother had said, "I will acknowledge you as my son only if after I defile you and debased you and eject you, you will swear that you love me." The walk to the questionnaire site was the longest, the most tortous half-mile I have ever walked or hope to walk. When denial fails, anxiety and despair is heightened. Why is this happening to me? What have I done to deserve this?

3. Psychological assault eventually engenders hostility. Hostility, in turn, can be handled in a number of ways. One is direct action. Hence, the riots, and the expressions of disloyalty. If hostility cannot be aimed at the assaulter, it can be repressed or avoided, e.g., "It's behind us now, so let's forget it ever happen." Or as Bettelheim (1943) pointed out, one can identify with the aggressor. We now have the spectacle of some Japanese Americans having "nothing to do with Japanese and having only Caucasian friends," or in another but bizaare, identification with the rationale of the aggressor, "it was a great opportunity for them to have a vacation, to get in touch with their culture, to get in the mainstream of American society...it was the best thing that could have happened to them."

Or one can introject the hostility and experience guilt and shame,

as victims of rape often do. I introjected. I can remember and re-experience the questioning of my worth. When I left Topaz to go to Cleveland, I can remember the feeling that everyone knew that I had been found wanting. I was an outcast, a stranger in my own country. The feeling of nakedness will never be forgotten. I can understand why some Japanese Americans have not shared this shameful episode with their offsprings. One does not share a shameful experience easily.

One can also scapegoat. We have those who scapegoat the Japanese American Citizens League, as if the United States Government and the Western Defense Command and the bigots had nothing to do with the whole sorry mess!

I scapegoated. I could not hate my country. So, crazy as it may sound, I focused my non-introjected hate on California. I began to dislike anyone from California. I disliked those Japanese Americans who stooped to move back to California. I felt as if they were identifying with the aggressors and betraying me. I turned down offers of employment in California. In fact, it took fifteen years before I would visit my only relatives that I have, simply because they lived in California. While my anger has diminished with the passage of time, and as I generally became more mellow, the anger and bitterness still remain.

4. Behind every anger, there is a tear. What was behind the anger? Why was it insatiable? Expressing the anger and talking about it did not significantly diminish it.

One day, about four years ago, a bit of information hit me right between the frontal lobes. I learned that with the Gentlemen's Agreement

of 1924, the Issei had felt abandoned by the Japanese Government. What was felt was the sense of "suterareta," or being cast aside. I remembered that as children, one of the most coercive socialization threats was the threat of being given away. This practice was not uncommon in the culture from which our parents came. It is a devastating threat. I now came to realize that my country had in 1942 abandoned me, much as my father's country had abandoned him, but in an infinitely more direct way. Like an animal who chooses to destroy its unwanted young, my country had turned on me. It said that I was unworthy and not to be trusted. It encouraged the hate-mongers to spread their venom. It finally ejected me and had made of me a pariah.

When a child feels abandoned, he cries. Only later does anger come. But we did not cry in 1942. I think this is why when Japanese Americans go on pilgrimages to the camps, the tears that were not shed then now come, and come, and come. We cry because of what we lost. And the loss goes beyond property issues, beyond physical hardships. To paraphrase a statement made regarding the Iranian hostage situation, "let no one be deceived...some part of each of us will remain in those camps forever." I had finally learned that behind my anger, there was a tear.

5. With some resolution of the intrapsychic freeze, energies for constructive efforts are released. In analyzing the experiences of the Jews in the death camps, Hoppe (1971) states that as soon as one "can identify with a group fighting the common enemy, inner conflict is alleviated." The JAACL campaign for redress, for me, has become the constructive effort. The common enemy is the set of conditions which led the United States to abandon and to turn on 120,000 of its citizens and permanent residents, simply on the basis of racist economics, politics and social perceptions.

6. The consequences of psychological assault can be multigenerational. Studies have indicated that first and second generation offsprings of the Holocaust survivors are being affected by the Holocaust (Barocas, 1970; Barocas and Barocas, 1973; Phillips, 1978; Davidson, 1980; Rosenthal and Rosenthal, 1980). In the same way, I am now convinced that the impact of my camp experience has been reflected in the way I reared my children, in the way I served as a role model, in the way I both consciously and unconsciously shaped my children. Respondents to the aforementioned JACL survey were clear in their continued distrust of the United States Government and the pervasive fear that "it wouldn't take much for it to happen to me again." This constant alert has, in fact, transmitted to our progeny for their question is, "What will it take to make it happen again?" In probably more subtle ways, the guilt which results from introjection of hostility is also transmitted. The guilt in the death camp survivors is "Why did I survive, while others did not?" (Niederland, 1968; Koranyi, 1969). The guilt in the American concentration camp veteran is, "I was not worthy."

I marvel that a people so rejected, so maligned, so abandoned, did not surrender. I am referring to both the Jews and the Japanese Americans who suffered in different ways.

The fact that the Japanese Americans have not shown up in numbers in the psychiatrist's office does not indicate an absence of pain. It does present testimony to the marvelous strengths of Japanese American victims who refused to be victimized.

This study is not simply to make a statement, nor to bare my soul.

I hope and pray that this account of one man's forty year journey in pain may serve to sensitize the Commission to not only the observable and quantifiable losses incurred, but also to the ongoing covert damages. When I ask that this never happen again, I am asking that this country never again abandon its children, that it never again turn on its own, that it be true to the principles which I thought and still think can make it great.

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