

Editor:

Kotori shini karenō yoku suku kago nokoru
Bird dead, withered field transparent, cage remains
(Ameyama Minoru, ne 1926)

On 19 May 95 a group of former Heart Mountain Relocation Camp inmates revisited that antilandscape as part of a symposium entitled "Japanese American History: The Heart Mountain Experience" sponsored by Northwest Symposia, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, and history department of Northwest College, Powell, Wyoming. The only land mark remaining, now that the barracks and other buildings have been removed or destroyed, was a chimney--why is a tall smokestack often a singular defining feature of concentration camps?

Speakers and presentors from ten major state universities, Nikkei and Caucasians, presumably historians and archivists, several Nikkei non academics, former inmates, journalist, soldier, and a single woman were assembled to propose a "balanced" approach to the 1942 exile--a oxymoronic proposition and exercise.

If the primary desideratum was to present or seek new insights and fresh ideas, it failed. Instead most of the presentations consisted of tired retrospective reviews of ancient details and interpretations embedded in history books and in our collective memories. Some of the Nikkei academics had accumulated vast amount of data which remains uncollated. How long must we wait for publication--where are the new scholars knowledge in three subcultures (Japanese, Nisei, and subsequent generations) who can properly distill the collected experiences--ad does it really matter anymore?

For clarity and directness, Mrs. Velma Kessel, Heart Mountain's first nurse supervisor of the health service and hospital, was clearly a winner. Providing health care under most difficult circumstances and woeful lack of equipment she generously

credited the diligence and intelligence of the medical and nursing staffs. With acerbic outlook and wit she somehow managed to highlight individuals with precision, sympathy, and love.

Mr. Bill Hosakawa gave a well organized journalistic account of the life and death of Heart Mountain Sentinel, the camp newspaper. Although he left camp within a year he continued to contribute a weekly column. Disclaiming any part in the editorial stand on the Draft Resisters he thought the inflammatory comments and epithets "somewhat intemperate"--indeed. He repudiated the Kessler (assist. professor of journalism) report imputation that all of the camp newspapers may have been under certain restraints (censorship). We ^{WILL} have to read the complete report.

Mr. Phil Roberts's (U of Wyoming) post-war review of Wyoming newspapers, public reaction, and political activities revealed that majority of state citizens were unaware of the camp. All of the state's newspaper, except one, carried generally negative and inflammatory news almost always derived from national wire services. This was not surprising as Wyoming's racial concerns, like most of the neighboring states, were preoccupied with Native Americans and reservations.

Engaged and researched in the origins of draft resistance in Heart Mountain, Dr. Frank Inouye's (U of Hawaii) presentation was read by his son, Allan. It was a model of concision with ring of authenticity, courage, anger, and bleakness. As ~~WE~~ well know, draft resistance terminated in a trial and sentencing resisters and Fair Play Committee. Mr. Jack Tono, a resister, delivered a fevered and somewhat overlong personal reading with energy, anger, and passion. Then in counterpoint, Mr. Sam Fujishin's forth-right account of his journey with the draft and Regiment (442 CT) and assessment of Nisei soldiers' "contribution to post-WWII Japanese American Rights" (? immutable constitutional rights) was a telling presentation. Responding

to questions, he generously accepted and acknowledged the draft resisters' choices--without reservations?

At the end it was the former inmates who triumphed over the stale mantras of the old professors and cohorts. They listened patiently with dignity, grace, and possibly, forgiveness. From the camps and world that embodied the absurd, they had learned that history can be blind and dull, life unfair, and events more often than not didn't work out for the best. Then there were the resisters, draft and otherwise, who had become and continue to be burrs under the Niseis. The former had been saddled with an "original sin" and are still pursuing paradise lost with passion instead of withering with age. They are now the quintessential victims and symbol of Evacuation.

Finally has civil rights of minority citizens or aliens moved in the positive direction of history? The symposium did not and could not provide an answer; I believe "it" can happen again--and again.

Sincerely yours,



Eji Suyama

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[Redacted address block]

Dear Sir,