

Response to

Aiko

MRS. JIRO ADACHI

YEAR 1980  
Aug 7 (22) 1979

Dear David,

Remnants of some thoughts from the Sunday meeting (which, incidentally, you handled in your expected effective and pleasant style). It concerns Eji's having raised the question of the need for the existence of a JACL and your having asked for my reason for belonging. Obviously, I'm not content with my one-line reply I gave you on the floor.

Eji had prefaced his question with a comment something to the effect that the Sanseis are perpetuating a pattern of high achievement and successful scholarship set by Niseis, and because they too will undoubtedly live comfortable middle-class lives like the Niseis, they too will become too deeply entrenched and content in their middle class to care about having a JACL.

I have a different view of the matter perhaps because I attribute more to the function of JACL and also because I have a somewhat different perspective of the Niseis' middleclassness.

First about the point of middle class-ness. I question whether it is success and contentment that keep Niseis away from JACL. Rather, I wonder if it is not more correct to say that they are still working at their middle class-ness and do not wish to be identified with an organization which might generate unwanted attention to them. It reveals to me a great deal of insecurity rather than confidence about their earned position and the inability to handle issues outside of their immediate lives — unless they're safe and socially acceptable activities they prefer to keep at arms length.

I was encouraged by the turnout Sunday — especially the Sansei representation. Perhaps the Sanseis have a bigger image and expectation of the American life.

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and are not lulled nor intimidated into not joining.

As to why I regard it important - to have a JAAC, a thriving one preferably, but even one limping along. Eji's question of the need for a JAAC prompted me to imagine briefly - and it was brief, because the horrible thought of it struck me immediately. During the many, many years as a non-member and not even thinking about JAAC, apparently I had been grateful that "they" (JAAC) were there working.

We Japanese Americans all individually probably feel perfectly capable of representing ourselves. But the reality of the Bureaucratic way of this country is that it relies upon organizations and is geared to getting and giving information first through organizations. Since the JAAC is already the recognized spokesman for the Japanese Americans, like it or not, it seems to me to make sense to be a part of the voice heard and to support it or to disagree with it from within.

And there is that painful reality (for all Japanese Americans I presume) that however much I feel American and regard myself as American first, and secondly as of Japanese descent, the non-Japanese community apparently sees me first as being Japanese. There does appear to be a need for a JAAC which can educate the non-Japanese society. <sup>(white society)</sup> IJA is now quite capable of making the superficial distinction between whites and Japanese but not the real between Japanese Americans and Japanese.

And of course education need not be limited to those without. Japanese Americans themselves can become better informed, not only about issues that are strictly Japanese American but issues that are relevant in indirect ways. If things are so quiet that JAAC

chapters are doing nothing but gather statistics it could still be worthwhile, since apparently, as you personally experienced during your channel 2 interview, there is a need for it.

Most of us J.A.s disdain collecting certain types of self-backpadding material, but if the information is factual, gathered objectively and legally, and used without abuse, exploitation, and excesses, I think it <sup>would</sup> be a useful thing to have.

I think about the possibility of ~~a~~ JACL study groups to take up objective and in-depth (as the League of Women Voters have done in past so successfully) studies on a variety of previously agreed-upon issues and prepare reports. (Don't groan.)

The current US-Japan relations could make up several groups, each covering a different aspect, for example. (I'm not saying this should be done. I'm not sure it's feasible or of interest.)

Since it's been acknowledged that the Japanese Americans in the US are affected by the formal US-Japan relationship, however unfair, it would appear important to have an informed and strong JACL capable of being called upon as Japanese American spokesman — just as it was in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, but unlike then have an informed leadership with equally informed and strongly supporting membership that could permit Japanese Americans to fare better should the ever tenuous US-Jap ties ever falter.

A word concerning the Nisei group (or called Retirement group — under objection). It has no formal membership list, and it collects no dues. It's actually a very diverse group held together by a very strong common denominator: the experience of Japanese cuisine. (The power of the traditional)

woman in the kitchen who's created generations of families strongly bound through ethnic food and memories of her cooking! With more and more men cooking today, women will lose that grip. But I would not, were I a modern young woman rush back to the kitchen. I'm sure that future generations will have other strong binds.)

In any case, not many in that Nisei group would join JACL. I was glad to see Evelyn Glen (who said she would join) at the Sunday meeting, but there are others who should join (because they too would make excellent members) but who must first shed their negative feelings about JACL (but not rush them into doing so). When they discover that the New England chapter is not floundering, that it is a viable organization supported by a stable membership and under good leadership, they might find it appealing enough to join.

Now do you regret you ever asked me a question? I normally don't abuse anyone like this — except my immediate family? I'm closing.

Did I hear that you have been nominated for the Presidency for the coming term by acclamation and that you have graciously accepted? I'm jesting, of course, but I would like to think that I'm foretelling

Sincerely,  
Aiko

P.S. - I would find it helpful to have a directory of New England chapter addresses & phone numbers. Has one ever been prepared? I would be willing to Xerox or type up for dittoed copies. Please let me know.

P.P.S. Aiko, not Mrs. Adachi. O.K.? Regards to Mary Ellen.