

FRANK CHIN

STATEMENT TO THE COMMISSION ON THE WARTIME RELOCATION AND
INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS

I'm Frank Chin. Writer, playwright, editor and student of Asian American literature. For the last four years I have been researching the camp years in an effort to understand the dramatic difference between the Nisei writing before camp and those writing after camp.

Before camp, Nisei like Toshio Mori wrote of the Issei with character, detail, respect and experimented with translating the rhythms and structure of the Issei speaking voice into a literary style in English. After the war, the Nisei writers deny Issei models and influence, reduce the Issei to comic, sentimental stereotypes, unabashedly take white models, and have no greater stylistic ambitions than to write the best English they can. This is comparable to Einstein giving up physics to devote himself to the mysteries of addition and subtraction.

As a literary historian, I wanted to know why the Nisei writers of big ideas before camp can write nothing but "little things mean a lot" after camp.

In the course of my reading in the National Archives and the literary, anthropological, sociological, historical, journalistic literature on the camps, I learned that knowledge of the loyalty oath and the segregation and repatriation programs attached to it are as essential to the simplest understanding of the camps and their effects on the Nikkei as Pearl Harbor is to an understanding of the American participation in WWII.

This is the consensus of the scientific literature on the subject. Thomas and Nishimoto's "The Spoilage," Leighton's "The Governing of Men," Bosworth's "Concentration Camps U.S.A.;" Rosalie Hankey Wax's "Doing Fieldwork;" the work by social scientists working in the camps, the reports and letters by Dillon Myer; the anthropologists of the WRA's Community Analysis Section (CAS); Bill Hosokawa's JACL versions of history, "Nisei: The Quiet Americans," and (with Robert Wilson) "East to America;" and the non-JACL Michi Weglyn's work of pure research, "Years of Infamy" all point to the "registration" and questions 27 and 28 of the registration for Leave Clearance form, the so-called "Loyalty Oath," as the cause of a bitter and violent splitting of Japanese Americans into "Yes-Yes" and "No-No" — "Loyals" and "disloyals." "Inu" traitors and betrayed victims.

Anthropologist Solon T. Kimball of the Community Analysis Section, in his official War Relocation Authority report "Community Government in War Relocation Centers," gives a whole period of camp history over to the loyalty oath and the terrible mischief it performed on Japanese American society, and the dangerous relations between the administration and evacuees it caused. Kimball, a professor recently retired Emeritus from the University of Florida, called it "The Troubled Period."

Kimball reported:

"Registration was the first of the administratively determined policies affecting all residents which produced a violent reaction. On January 28, 1943, Secretary of War Stimson announced that the War Department would soon create an all-Nisei combat team, to be composed of Japanese American volunteers from Hawaii and the mainland, including the Nisei in the relocation centers...

"In connection with the call for volunteers, it was decided to conduct a special registration of all male Nisei who were above 17 years of age. The Army had prepared for this purpose a four-page questionnaire which inquired in great detail into the individual's past history and which included a loyalty question.

"...In order to speed up leave clearance and relocation to private life, WRA decided to conduct a registration program at the same time that the Army was registering the Nisei men who were of fighting age...Accordingly a form entitled "Application for Leave Clearance" was devised; it followed closely the questionnaire which the Army was presenting to the Nisei men.

"...The participation of community government organizations in the registration program varied from center to center.

"At Heart Mountain resistance developed first among the Nisei, some of whom protested both the segregated nature of the proposed combat team and the propriety of inducting Japanese Americans into the Army as long as their rights as citizens remained in doubt. The opposition was strong enough to make the administration question its ability to conduct any registration.

"At Granada center...registration proceeded with comparative smoothness. However, even at Granada there was a point at which 100 citizens were answering "No" to the loyalty question and only 30 had volunteered.

"At Central Utah a tense situation developed when a considerable number of citizens protested the registration on civil rights basis and demanded a clarification of these rights and the status of the proposed segregated unit."

(p.37-39-"Community Government in War Relocation Centers," Dept. of Interior, WRA- Washington D.C.-Government Printing Office-1946)

The leave clearance process included an interview. The interview questions constituted another loyalty oath, and opened with:

Before questioning you any further, we would like to ask if you have any objection to signing a Pledge of Allegiance to the United States.

The interview consisted of questions to be answered "yes," like:

Will you assist in the general resettlement program by staying away from large groups of Japanese?

Will you avoid the use of the Japanese language except when necessary?

Will you try to develop such American habits which will cause you to be accepted readily into American social groups?

Are you will to give information to the proper authorities regarding any subversive activity which you might note or which you might be informed about directly or indirectly, both in the relocation centers and in the communities in which you are resettling?

Would you consider an informer of this nature an "inu"? (Stoolpigeon)

Will you conform to the customs and dress of your new home?

Will you make every effort to represent all that is good, reliable, and honest in the Japanese Americans?

Questions to be answered "no," like:

Have you ever been associated with any radical groups, clubs or gangs which have been accused of anti-social conduct within the center?

Do you think you are "losing face" by cooperating with the United States?

Loaded essay questions like:

What part did you play in the development of any constructive organization or development at the center?

What do you think of the Segregation of the loyal from the disloyal in the relocation centers?

What does the Samurai tradition mean to you?

(ASW 014.311 WDC Segregation-Japs, RG 107,
National Archives)

The loyalty oath of the printed questionnaire and the interview for leave clearance that followed were taken, answered, signed without the presence of legal counsel. The process required all who hoped to obtain clearance to leave the camp for a life outside, to reject the Issei,

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agree to discriminate against the Issei, display respect for the "Inu" and show a willingness to turn informer to the FBI and the various military intelligence agencies posted in the camps, besides agree to serve in the military if called, and reject any form of known or unknown allegiance to the Emperor of Japan they might have.

The questions of the form and the interview were familiar to Japanese America. For twenty years, discrimination against the Issei and the Kibei, ^{*}elimination of, what JACL historian Togo Tanaka called "Japanesey" traits, the adoption of an ethic of white acceptance, absorption and racial assimilation had been JACL policy.

All who would pass the loyalty oath and win clearance had to, in effect, in writing and in oral presentation, endorse and swear themselves accomplices to the JACL program of voluntary submission to indoctrination.

By Mike Masaoka's reckoning, the JACL he led, and the WRA were partners in running the camps as a controlled indoctrination program. He met with Milton Eisenhower, the newly appointed director of the WRA in April, 1942, in San Francisco. He handed Eisenhower an eighteen-page list of recommendations.

Masaoka's "general policies" leave no doubt as to his organization's intention to use the camps to modify Japanese American society, culture, history and individual behavior:

GENERAL POLICIES:

We believe that all projects should be directed (1) to create "Better Americans In (sic) A Greater America"; (2) to maintain a high and healthy morale among the evacuees; (3) to train them to cope with the difficult problems of adjustment and rehabilitation after the war; (4) to permit them to actually and actively participate in the war effort of our nation; and (5) to develop (sic) a community spirit of cooperative action and service to others before self.

(P.4-Masaoka to Eisenhower-April 6, 1942-
RG-210-71.505-National Archives)

Mike Masaoka led the JACL in taking the stand that Japanese America was sacrificing its citizens' rights, and voluntarily entering the relocation centers in order to prove their loyalty, and as their contribution to the war effort. Therefore, the centers were not concentration camps and did not intern or detain. Therefore, by Masaoka's reasoning, the rights of the citizen evacuees were not violated, and he wrote Eisenhower:

Paradoxical as this may seem, we are opposed to Hearing or Determining Boards or Commissions which might attempt to determine the loyalty of those in these resettlement projects...

...should a person be adjudged disloyal at this time because of something which he might have said or done years ago, he would be branded for life and would be useless after the war.

...until definite facts of overt actions of disloyalty can be shown, we believe that all persons should be accepted at their face value, as loyal and devoted citizens of the United States.

(p14-Masaoka to Eisenhower-)

No arrest, no detention, no violation of habeas corpus, no hearings is the line of Masaoka's logic. In the "resettlement projects" or "relocation centers" the Nikkei would be made acceptable and loyal...loyal to a culture, loyal to a race... by a process of elimination. Elimination of the respect for and influence of the Issei, the Kibei and the "agitating Nisei" opposed to the JACL. The centers would eliminate the urge for the Nikkei to create "Little Tokyos."

Masaoka spelled it out to Eisenhower:

We do not relish the thought of "Little Tokyos" springing up in these resettlement projects, for by so doing we are only perpetuating the very things which we hope to eliminate: those mannerisms and thoughts which mark us apart, aside from our physical characteristics. We hope for a one hundred per cent American community.

(p-5. Masaoka to Eisenhower)

...One thing is certain: there should be no Japanese language schools.

(p.6)

Special stress should be laid on the enunciation and pronunciation of words so that awkward and "Oriental" sounds will be eliminated.

(p.7)

Masaoka anticipated the Nisei need to seek redress of grievances. He offers Eisenhower a plan to head them off at the pass with a form of compensation:

Because of the unusual and unprecedented requests made upon American citizens of Japanese ancestry, special provisions should be made to compensate them for the temporary loss of some of their privileges and rights.

This might be in the form of "certificates" of citizenship or appreciation, or some other token which will help them retain their self-respect in their own eyes and in the eyes of their fellow citizens.

(p.14)

Instead of certificates, the internees were given the loyalty oath.

The loyalty oath divided marriages, exploded families into physical violence, created bitter feuds, caused social ostracism, beatings, murder, suicide and the permanent split of Japanese America into JACL and non-JACL sensibilities.

Anthropologist Solon T. Kimball observed the cleavage between Japanese America and the JACL grow to bitter proportions because of government favoritism. In 1942 he reported:

The attempts of the J.A.C.L. to claim leadership of the evacuees has been almost universally repudiated. This repudiation is based on the belief that the J.A.C.L. leaders were in large measure responsible for the decision to evacuate and that they sacrificed members of their national group for their own selfish interest. This distrust of the J.A.C.L. is held not only by the alien group but also by a large contingent of citizens...

(p.16- Kimball-1946)

Kimball reported that by December of 1942, the WRA was having second thoughts about the policy of discrimination

against the Issei, the JACL had recommended:

It had been learned that many of the older Issei were stable individuals who were cooperative and could be trusted. It had also been learned that with the exception of a small group represented largely by those who were members of the JACL, the Nisei did not wholeheartedly support the policy of discrimination. Project directors wrote of the difficulties which arose in assembly centers where Nisei councils largely JACL-dominated, had ridden roughshod over the remainder of the population and had shown favoritism and created resentment and bitterness.

(p.34-Kimball-1946)

The JACL created the loyalty oath in January 1942 as a publicity stunt to attract government attention. To justify their loyalty oath they conjured a phony issue: dual citizenship.

The truly loyal Nisei, the JACL felt, would reject dual citizenship whether they had it or not. No matter the U.S. had not recognized dual citizenship since the War of 1812.

Key phrases and the forswearing of all forms of known and unknown allegiances to the Emperor of Japan are virtually identical in the JACL loyalty oath of 1942 and questions 27 and 28 of the WRA leave clearance application.

WRA Director, Dillon Myer described the questions and the Nisei reaction to them to the Attorney General, in a letter dated August 27, 1943:

Question 27. This question appears on the application for leave clearance form, and reads as follows:

(For citizen males) "Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, when ordered?"

(For citizen and alien females) "If the opportunity presents itself and you are found qualified, would you be willing to volunteer for the Army Nurse Corps or the WAAC?"

Question 27 was not clearly understood at the projects. In many cases the evacuee thought that to answer question 27 in the affirmative meant he was volunteering for the Army and that to answer it in the negative meant merely that he would wait to be drafted.

Question 23. This question appears on the application for leave clearance form, and reads as follows:

(for male citizens) "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any and all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power or organization?"

(for female citizens)"Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor or other foreign government, power, or organization?"

(for aliens) "Will you swear to abide by the laws of the United States and to take no action which would in any way interfere with the war effort of the United States?"

There was also some misunderstanding about Question 23. In some instances a civil rights question was raised about the propriety of answering Question 23 in the affirmative while in detention without formal charges. Some evacuees also objected to forswearing allegiance to an emperor to whom they had never had an allegiance.

(p.2-3 "Notes" appended to Myer to Attorney General-August 27, 1943-
RG210 WRA Series 16; 34.110
Litigation Cases: Hirabayashi: Box 336
National Archives)

The JAACL loyalty oath of 1942 read:

The JACL loyalty oath of 1942 reads:

I, _____, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I hereby renounce any other allegiances which I may have knowingly or unknowingly held in the past; and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion. So help me God.

(p.5. K.D. Ringle to Chief Naval Op-
Feb. 1942. RG 107 Records of the
Secty of War-ASW 014.311-WDC-
National Archives)

The JACL created the loyalty oath. They campaigned for the loyalty oath and a segregation camp for those who flunked it. The Army and the WRA administered it. And the FBI enforced it.

The rift in Japanese American society, ^{which} non-Nikkei find complex, petty and internecine, is a product of camp. It is camp damage.

The JACL had no power over Japanese America before camp. No power of its own. The JACL became the Nikkei leadership at the government's pleasure, not by any form of popular Japanese American approval. The rift between the JACL and the Japanese Americans was created by the government when they imposed JACL leadership and Mike Masaoka on the Nikkei.

By that gesture alone, the government forcibly altered the course of Japanese American history and gave the JACL license to "create Better Americans in a Greater America," and use the loyalty oath and the entire leave clearance process as a graduation competency test. As a consequence, they ruined thousands of lives.

Nisei who opposed the JACL's refusal to support the

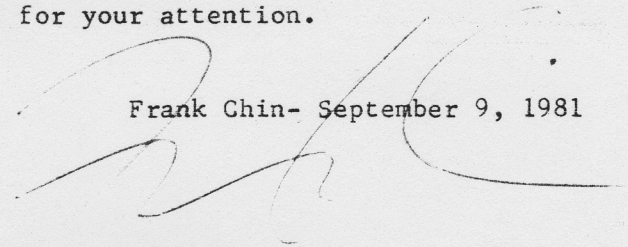
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test cases and supported the test cases challenging the camps in the courts were branded "pro-Axis" "Un-American" "disloyal" by JACL Inu informers. The victims of the Inu. The No-No boys. The victims of the loyalty oath. There were eighteen thousand of them in Tule Lake. Thus, the greatest single wrong done Japanese America, by the government, other than the evacuation itself, was the JACL.

The victims of the informers, the No-No boys, those who can speak to the question of damage caused by the loyalty oath with their lives were forced to see the U.S. Government and Mike Masaoka's JACL as one on all things Japanese American. They will not testify before a commission they feel is dominated by the JACL. Not that the commission is. Bias won't be told til the report is published. But your testimony and your portrait of camp and the damage it caused will be vitally incomplete without the victims of the loyalty oath, the victims of the informers, and the No-No boys, and those forced to renounce their U.S. citizenship and be "repatriated" to Japan and a life in Japanese concentration camps--because of the loyalty oath, and the government throwing its weight behind the JACL.

All the Nisei creative and scientific literature on the camps suggests the commission cannot write an informed and considered report without their testimony.

Thank you, for your attention.


Frank Chin- September 9, 1981