

RESTORATION OF THE JAPANESE AMERICANS

All of us who were torn from our physical and cultural bases have been damaged. Restoration of the Japanese Americans from their injuries is critical at this time.

I have become interested in research on the consequences of the evacuation and camp experiences of the Issei and the Nisei and the implications they have for their descendants. This desire grew out of nearly 25 years of experience in family therapy, which includes the position of Director of Family Therapy at the Department of Psychiatry, School of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania from 1960 until 1977. The formulations advanced under the Contextual Approach by Ivan B-Nagy, family psychiatrist, has had a special appeal. He and I worked closely on clinical situations for several years along with intense consideration of the Japanese American experiences associated with relocation and internement.

To quote from his unpublished material, Ivan Nagy says "The ideal goal of a just society requires a constant struggle for the acknowledgement of the merits of all of its citizens." Merits in this sense mean those legacies that originate from one's own background of family, ethnicity, religion, racial, etc. Merits also include the concern and effort that is put into the "mandates of posterity." In other words when one is in a position to see merit in parts of his or her background, the merits can be translated into solutions to meet the needs of the future generation.

The point to be made is that the Japanese Americans have been thwarted from using their merits and participating in the society chosen by the Issei, with an adequate sense of entitlement.

What are the merits of legacies that have come down from the Issei? They brought from Japan a heritage of many values highly regarded by American society such as hard work, stress on education, family solidarity, etc. Other merits include the fact that the Issei chose the U.S. as a place to raise their families. They produced law-abiding, responsible, ambitious children. The Nisei, in turn, identified with their parents in essential ways and they were jointly struggling to develop their stake in America when WWII and the Relocation and Internment came along. Suddenly a legacy of injustice was created for them. Although innocent, they were treated as criminals in need of incarceration and hounded before and during camp by various levels of society preoccupied with an obsession to impute collective guilt on all Japanese Americans. Those desirable merits were obliterated under the all-encompassing question over disloyalty. There was nothing that an individual Issei or Nisei could do to even minimally change the tide of injustice.

It is mostly the Nisei who are now survivors of the dislocation. The devastation of the injustice has strengthened with time for the victimized persons who were condemned as not worthy of membership in a just democratic society.

How have the Nisei lived with this unresolved injustice? There are those who now state that the Nisei are still paying the price of impaired physical, mental and social conditions. However, as a rule, they have not called attention to their dramatic symptoms or circumstances. Instead what they have revealed has been a stoical determina-

tion to cope with challenges in their existence. This has given many members of our society a false understanding of the Nisei's post-evacuation adjustment.

Those Nisei who can verbalize their reactions say that a sense of "shame" hangs over them which cannot be explained even to their own children. The Nisei's entrenched and alarming silence bears testimony to the unspeakably excruciating frustrations and irresolvable pain borne by them. Irresolvable because it is not a matter of the Nisei's forgetting or forgiving what was done to them as it is a matter of society's correcting the injustice. Perhaps their situation can be compared to an innocent prisoner released into society after serving time but not ever having the injustice of the incarceration officially corrected. That individual does not feel society's approval to participate as an unencumbered citizen.

It is a frequently expressed concern at gatherings sponsored by the Japanese American Citizens League that a correction of the injustice be officially entered into the records through Congressional action. For some individuals this alone is sufficient to ameliorate their deeply felt bitterness. Others have said that some damages can never be remedied and they will not compromise themselves. Still others tried to extract official apologies and other means to regain their sense of worthiness and wholeness in the eyes of society.

Another significant and undiminished burden carried by the Nisei today is related to the way their parents were hurt. It is now recognized that the Issei was the most injured group. I have observed that many among those Nisei who experienced psychiatric difficulties associate their problems to the suffering of their parents. Perhaps this is associated to the degree of responsibilities felt by the Nisei in their filial obligations to their parents.

What implications do the consequences of the legacies of injustice have for the Sansei and generations succeeding them?

From the viewpoint of dynamics framed within the Contextual Approach, the situation is creating an imponderable condition of split-loyalty conflict wherein the Sansei are given a choice between self-diminishing alternatives. If a Sansei decides to invest his or her loyalty on the side of parents and grand parents who were seen as opponents of society, the Sansei then shares the invalidation of merits that previously substantiated their worth. Although in the eyes of the Sansei, their parents and grandparents deserve an extra measure of merit for having been victimized, it does not release the family from the unjust incrimination of guilt. The Sansei in this position feel vulnerable. They wonder if justice would be administered in their behalf since the positive qualifications of citizenship of their parents were ignored in the face of their ethnicity.

On the other hand, if the Sansei decide to align themselves with society and oppose their parents and grandparents, they would join the view that the Issei and Nisei should get along without reestablishing their implicit and inherent merits of their background. The reality of their situation calls for acceptance of relocation and internment as part of the exigencies of the War. Such a denial of the worth of their legacies raises difficult questions about identity. It also places limits on their ability to respond adequately to the requirements of posterity.

It would be difficult for the Sansei to regard their democratic society as just until a way is found for them to express their allegiance in an unconflicted manner and in a context of amalgamation of merits from their dual heritage.

The following recommendation is made toward the restoration of the Japanese Americans through the closing of the gap of allegiance alternatives and accomodating citizenship entitlements:

- (1) A gesture be made by society through the Congress of the U.S. to repair the collective injustice imposed on the Japanese Americans through a public statement as well as through some monetary settle - ment.
- (2) A research project be established to explore the nature of concerns affecting the Nisei and their children and the kind of helpto which they can respond. The methodology suggested here is the Contextual Approach which is uniquely suitable to the promotion of Nisei-Sansei communication. In an atmosphere of trust mobilized by facilitators, the Sansei can be in the best position to assist their parents with their silent suffering and internalized conflicts. This in turn would provide the Sansei with special merits that can be passed down to their children.
- (3) A design be made for creative work with the Japanese American families to deal with their accumulated grief, loyalty issues, assessment of legacies of merits, screening for those merits that can be used to meet the requirements of the youth.

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