Japanese Americans: Social and Historical Contexts

by Curtiss Takada Rooks, Ph.D.

Reasons for Emigration

To understand fully the Japanese who came to the U.S. and the lives they would build, one must understand why Japanese left Japan for the Hawaiian Islands, the U.S., Canada, South American and Australia. Generally, pull-pull migration theory—that is poor conditions in the home country that serve to push immigrants to the more favorable conditions of the host country that pulls them to new lives—is used to explain migration to the U.S. as huddled masses from around the world come in search of "the American Dream." But, this migration theory does not account for the forces creating migratory push conditions. World systems migration theory posits that linkages between the sending and receiving countries are created by the active intervention of the receiving countries into the economy, governance and society of the sending countries. This intervention generally results in deteriorating conditions in the sending countries (i.e. the push) making economic and political needs of the receiving country attractive (i.e. pull). In short, immigrants to receiving countries do not choose those countries at random, and moreover these immigrants are usually actively recruited to meet the economic needs of the receiving country. Such was and is the case of Asian immigrants (Cheng and Bonacich, 1984; Ong, Bonacich, & Cheng, 1994).

Despite popular notions of Western European and American history, initially Asia did not come looking for the West. The West—the United States and Europe—went looking for Asia.

> "Asians, it must be remembered, did not come to America; Americans went to Asia. Asians, it must be remembered, did not come to take the wealth of America; Americans went to take the wealth of Asia. Asians, it must be remembered, did not come to conquer and colonize America; Americans went to conquer and colonize Asia" (Okihiro, 1994:28-9).

By 1850 each of the major western powers had established colonial footholds in Asia except the United States. In 1854 this changed as Admiral Matthew Perry of the United States sailed warships into Tokyo (Edo) Bay with the mission of establishing a diplomatic and trade relationship with Japan. Under the threat of force from the U.S., Japan ended over 200 years of self-imposed isolation from the rest of the world. Japan signed a series of unequal trade agreements with the U.S. and its western allies. Even after the signings, western nations continued the use and threat of force to remind Japan of its precarious states (Chan, 1991). Life in Japan would change drastically in response to western encroachment.

During the decades prior to U.S. encroachment Japan watched Britain's colonial domination of China. Seeking to avoid a similar domination by the U.S., Japan adjusted quickly to the changing world and entered into what historians call the "Meiji Restoration" (1868-1912). The Meiji Restoration modernized Japan's industry, technology and military, transforming it from an isolated agrarian feudal society to an industrial world power by the early 1900s. Military victories over China in 1894-5 and Russia in 1904-5 (the latter the only defeat by a non-white nation of a white nation in modern times) solidified this position. The Meiji Restoration also transformed the lives of the Japanese people. Funding for Japan's modernization came on the backs of small landowners/farm families. The increase in taxes, along with concurrent changes in tax calculation based on the value of the land versus a percentage of that year's crop and requirement for tax payment in currency rather than product created an undue hardship for small farm families[1] often leaving them vulnerable to market and weather conditions over which they had no control and unable to meet their tax obligations in the new system.

[1] Many of the Japanese and Japanese American history texts use the term "farmer" referring to individuals. I use the term "farm families" because though males ruled the household, families are the significant Japanese cultural and sociological unit of analysis. Characteristically, individual

The Meiji Restoration also resulted in broader domestic and international political developments that further impacted the economic consequences to farm families. Internally, disenchantment with the Meiji government brought organized revolt culmination in the Satsuma Rebellion in 1877. The suppression of the Satsuma Rebellion and later the financing of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-5), along with foreign trade deficits caused inflationary pressures that further impacted the income and abilities of small farm families to meet their tax burdens.

The small farm families seeking to keep their homes employed a variety of strategies to augment household incomes. Among the strategies chosen was the cultural practice of *dekasegi rodo* (Ichioka, 1988; O'Brien and Fugita, 1991) or the temporary leaving from home to go out to neighboring villages and prefectures to earn money for the family. [2] In the mid to late 1800s this cultural practice was extended to international migration. The financial burdens resulting from the transformation of Japan's polity and economy forced families to separate, many never to be reunited. In a seven-year period from 1883-1890 some 367,000 farm families lost their land (O'Brien and Fugita, 1991) and others became tenant farmers (Chan, 1991).

The Meiji Restoration the Satsuma Rebellion let to the suppression of political unrest that created another pool of émigrés comprised of political exiles and others disenchanted with the directions of the Meiji Government. Among the dissidents seeking refuge abroad in the U.S. were many in the intellectual or scholarly class in Japan. Having spoken out against the choices and actions of the Japanese government they fled to continue to voice their discontent and advocate for a different path for Japan (Ichioka, 1988; Ichioka).

---

achievements, sacrifices and failures are seen as a collective act of the family. Thus, families lost their lands and ancestral home places not just the individual "farmer."

[2] Generally speaking this was a temporary practice because the cause or need of augmented income was often temporary, for example a prolonged drought. However, the changes created by western encroachment went beyond the experience of the Japanese and perhaps none could envision the permanence of their actions at the outset.

With the military industrialization in Japan came the need for raw material resources and expansion. This in turn, along with a desire to protect Japan from further western military intervention, led the Japanese government to development a formidable "world class" military force. Northern China and Korea possessed what was needed by Japan, and Japan took it. Wars with China and Russia as well as the occupation of Korea required the conscription of young men into the military. Evading the draft arose as another reason for emigrating. Young men used a loop hole in Japan's 1873 national conscription that made them ineligible for the draft while abroad. Those men remained abroad beyond the age of thirty-two were made permanently ineligible (O'Brien and Fujita, 1991:11).

Encroachment by the West through political, economic and military intervention created push conditions that laid the foundation for *who* immigrated to the U.S., as well as explaining *why* they came. In short, the bulk of the laborers, male and female, who came to the U.S. from 1890-1907 were family members living out family obligations by sojourning abroad to earn money to assist in the family's survival in Japan and if possible, keep family lands from being permanently lost. For political exiles, the U.S. offered a place of refuge. For young men who did not wish to fight in their country's wars, life abroad provided legal respite from military duty. Regardless of the motivation of leaving Japan, many of the emigrants would make the U.S. their home.

Immigrants

Hailing almost exclusively from the four southern Japanese prefectures of Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Kumamoto and Fukuoka, "(t)he history of Japanese immigrants can be divided into two broad periods: 1885-1907, and 1908-1924" (Ichioka: 1988:3) and three locations, Hawaii,

the U.S. west coast and Alaska. The first period 1885-1907 refers to the *dekasegi* or sojourning motives for migration. During this period, Japanese immigrants embraced a sojourning practice of leaving home empty handed, hopeful of earning money to send home, as well as build a bit of a stake so as to return home triumphant. The second period marked an active decision on the part of the ethnic community to become settlers and make the U.S. their new home, and more important the home of their children (Ichioka, 1988). The place where Japanese immigrants landed and the conditions they faced shaped their experiences, social formation and outlook on life.

In the plantation life of Hawaii the obligations of contract labor and wage earning coupled with the paternalism of the plantation owners exercised contributed exponentially many influences on the immigrant Japanese community. Get rich quick dreams of single men dwindled quickly (Murayama,). Despite this consuming intrusion, a rich interactive multicultural life, accompanied by the rise of multi-ethnic community, emerged (Takaki, 1983). On the West Coast the carrot of the "big strike" that came with land ownership or land leasing fueled dreams of quick riches, though the reality was much more austere. Beset by legal discrimination and social prejudice the Japanese immigrants in the West would find segregation as the norm leaving them to create strong ethnic communities and institutions. Alaska provided yet another rich multicultural experience for Issei men.

Hawaii

Though the vast majority of Japanese immigrants migrated to Hawaii and the U.S. mainland from 1885-1924, the earliest notable migration occurred in Hawaii during the late 1860s. Hawaiian planters anxious about replacing Chinese sugar plantation workers went to

Japan to recruit workers. "'We are in much need of them, [Japanese]' implored Robert Crichton Wyllie, Hawaiian foreign minister and master of Princeville plantation…' I myself could take 500 for my own estates'" (Okihiro, 1991:19). In 1868 the Japanese government granted Hawaiian officials :to send 350-400 workers to Hawaii, but with the key provision that the laborers be returned…" and "(o)n May 17, 1968, the Scioto sailed from Yokohama for Honolulu carrying 149 Japanese migrants—149 men, 6 women, and 2 children" (Okihiro, 1991:20). This group consisted primarily of young urban male laborers with few economic prospects in Japan who were ill suited for the work that awaited them. These "city boys" found the physical work on the plantation fields and regimented master-servant relationship of the plantation beyond what they thought they had bargained for. Planters, too, found the experiment in Japanese urban laborers less than satisfactory. Following this failed effort, and despite repeated pleas by Hawaiian officials, Japan would virtually close the door to its émigré until 1885.

When Japan re-opened its door to Hawaiian emigration it did so with very specific and strict contract conditions. Mindful of its fledgling international status, the Japanese government, fearful that the host countries abroad would treat its citizens unscrupulously or that Japanese poor performance would become a national embarrassment, carefully regulated emigration. Given the failed experiment of the 1860s, both the Japanese government and the HSPA sought only agricultural workers which resulted in the heavily regionalized migration of Japanese to Hawaii and eventually to the mainland U.S. with the vast majority of immigrants hailing from seven southern Japanese prefectures: Kumamoto, Nagasaki, Fukuoka, Yamaguchi, Wakayama, Okayama and Hiroshima. Between 1885 and 1908 this resulted in some 142, 000 Japanese migrating to the Hawaiian Islands (Ichioka, 1988). Okinawa natives would also provide a critical mass of workers recruited by Hawaiian planters. This strategy of a customized workforce worked

inasmuch as the Japanese immigrants proved to be a capable and hardworking work force whose labor laid the foundation for Hawaiian corporate agricultural successes such as C & H Sugar and Dole pineapple.

A complex interaction and intertwining of economic and moral imperatives guided Planter attitudes and actions that would shape the life the Japanese would find in Hawaii. Profit motivation led Hawaiian planters actively to import a multinational, multicultural and multi-ethnic work force in an effort to head off any labor alliances and organizing that might result in coordinated job actions among the workers (i.e. strikes). The planters reasoned that the differences in language, customs, along with active national political aggression and ethnocentrism among the countries of origin would keep workers from finding common ground (Takaki, 1983:24). Additionally, the Planters imposed differential wage scales based on ethnicity, paying one group slightly more than another and giving one group slightly more favorable work assignments than the other.

In this way, the planters exploited and hoped to exacerbate ethnic divisions and notions of ethnic entitlement. The quest for profit also fostered the view of Asian immigrant labor as commodities. Indeed, orders for laborers were often placed on the same invoices as flour, nails and other dry goods with Japanese laborers being requested as if they were hammers (Takaki, 1983:23). This practice of commodification and notion of property found support in the laws and practices of Hawaii. The manner in which labor contracts were enforced created conditions in which planters exercised virtual property rights over the workers and the imposition of tyrannical

work conditions (Okihiro, 1991:33, Beechert). This practice of property ownership set the stage for the emergence of an ideology of paternalism on the part of the Planters.[3]

The Planters' held Christian beliefs that required them to see the Japanese immigrant workers as "heathen souls" in need of salvation. At times these Christian and paternalism beliefs contradicted the quest for profit. Still at other times it supported the planters' need for a controlled labor force. To reinforce efforts of control over their workers planters implemented rigid dawn to dusk work schedules inspired by the Protestant work ethic, established missionary churches and schools, and encouraged family formation.

Culture shock and mixed emotions greeted the parochial Japanese men and women migrating to Hawaii. On the one hand, the life awaiting the Japanese was extremely structured and physically taxing. Though the Japanese immigrant men and women were used to a disciplined rural agricultural lifestyle in their homeland, the totalitarian nature of the plantation programmed by the Hawaiian planters proved altogether oppressive. On the other hand it was most certainly exciting and new as the Japanese immigrants met a wide variety of people from different prefectures of Japan, from different countries, races, ethnicities and cultures. While this engineered multicultural society entailed elements of the desired conflict the Planters sought, it would over time foment extraordinary innovation and practical invention.

Planters implemented a highly regimented work environment rationalized by an in loco parentis philosophy that extended beyond plantation management to government circles as well (Beechert, 1985: 73; Takaki 1983: 60-74). Sirens and whistles regimented workers' days,

[3] The Hawaiian Planter paternalism mimicked the beliefs and practices of Southern slave owners in relationship to enslaved Blacks prior to emancipation. So ingrained with this belief that former Southern slave owners carried it over to their relationship with free Blacks in which structural conditions left Blacks with few legal remedies against planter encroachment.

commanding them to wake up, begin work, take a break, eat lunch, return to work, end work, eat dinner, and go to bed, all the while under the watchful eyes of an overseer, known as the luna. Beyond the highly structured day, planters imposed codes of conduct upon the workers requiring docility, obedience, industry and specified behavior, such as baths (Takaki, 1983:67), Failure to comply initially resulted in corporal punishment and in later years planters used the courts against malcontents, union activists and participants, as well as low performing workers. Judicial enforcement resulted in longer contract obligations for the workers under the threat of penal incarceration.

Single young men comprised the bulk of the earliest Japanese migrants to Hawaii as they set out to fulfill family obligations by sending remittances from their earnings to assist their families in meeting tax bills in Japan. While the intention of the first migrant groups (1885-1894) was to return to Japan, roughly 44% settled Hawaii, 3% migrated to the mainland, 7% died, and 46% returned to Japan (Chan, 1991:12). Thus, intention aside, many emigrants became immigrants settling in Hawaii. As the unmarried Japanese young men settled in as a major component of the Hawaiian planter work force, they were encouraged to marry. Contractually and financially unable to return to find a bride, most turned to Japanese traditional absentee marriage practices. Through these means planters achieved their desire for immigrant Japanese families as the core of the plantation workforce.

By the early 1900s families comprised a critical mass within the Hawaiian Japanese immigrant population and workforce. The planters sanctioned families because they felt it would improve the quality of life for the Japanese laborers and they also believed it would make the male labor force more stable and docile (Takaki, 1983:96). If burdened by family the planters believed that the Japanese men would be less likely to engage in vices, especially gambling and

drinking. Planters also felt that family men would be less likely to become involved in forming unions or participating in job actions because of the obligation to provide for their families the men could not afford to risk the loss of a job. The presence of family also gave planters the added benefit of a larger lower cost workforce. Wives and children were paid less than the men for doing the same or similar jobs generally without a large drop off in production.

Though faced with many challenges faced the Japanese migrants to Hawaii, the challenges also constituted opportunities. As a result of the highly structured recruitment and policy practices the Japanese in Hawaii came in cohorts from villages as well as from the neighboring provinces in Japan. This provided a cultural and community familiarity that minimized intra-ethnic differences such as dialect. This kinship and family relations connections and familiarity of shared home country experiences allowed for greater ease in both community and labor organizing activities. In this sense culture in the form of intense family relations and the Japanese value of maintaining "face" (i.e. not bringing shame to the family or one's self) played a major role in the social organization of the Japanese in Hawaii and elsewhere in the U.S. The cultural values of group interest before individual interest, reciprocity, and obligation to family provided the foundation of ethnic community organizing (Fugita and Obrien, 1991).

The planters' use of Japanese family formation as a tool for control yielded mixed results. With the addition of family to the work force community ethnic practice and continuity intensified as parents sought to provide their children with the experiences they had as children. Japanese language schools, sumo tournaments, sports leagues, Boys and Girls Day celebration and Obon festivals emerged as priorities for the community. Providing these activities brought the parents together with a focus that allowed them to put aside the everyday drudgery of plantation life. Unmarried men also found a place in these families as they became "uncles" to

countless children and could enjoy family or community meals on special occasions. To be sure, the notions of "*kodomo no tame ni*" translated, "for the sake of the children" restricted maverick actions of the parents, but it also instilled in them a drive to better their conditions. Plantation life was hard and dehumanizing, a lifestyle they did not want for their children. Indeed, one can argue that children motivated the Japanese immigrant adults to reach across racial prejudice, national citizenship, linguistic and cultural divides that separated the plantation work force and to do so in a committed and organized fashion.

Ironically, the harsh plantation life itself created a shared "work culture" for the diverse workforce. The very types of diversity the planters engineered to protect their control by recruiting an international workforce fractured by contemptuous political tension, ethnic competition and cultural divides eventually found commonality and shared experience created by the harsh working conditions planters felt was required for maximum production and profit. Responding to unbearable work condition this diverse workforce comprised of Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean and Portuguese forged a common language, a shared culture and identity that enabled resistance.

The regimentation of the plantation six-day workweek provided all workers with a shared and scheduled experience to which they all related. Everyone lost the abilities to regulate their lives as the plantation whistle signaled when to wake up, when to eat, when to take a break, when to go home, etc. These harsh working conditions in the field spawned additional common ground. The workers faced with such harshness found release by voicing their feelings in song. Japanese women composed and sang songs reflecting in harshness of their lives as they worked.

> "Misa Toma remembered years of hardship endured on the plantation; she called her songs, *setsunabushi,* 'songs of pain':

Starting out so early
Lunches on our shoulders
Off to our holehole work
Never seems to be enough
(Okihiro, 1991:29)

These songs, known as *hole hole bushi,* demonstrate the emergent development of a Japanese immigrant Hawaiian culture as the lyrics reflected integration of the daily experience of work: *hole hole* or the stripping of dried cane lives and the *bushi* or tune of Japanese folk songs. In the singing of songs women workers shared their feelings about their lives and found solace in knowing that others shared the same pain, the same loss. The hole hole bushi not only cataloged the life experiences they created a "history" that children would learn from reflecting and symbolizing the process of settlement, growing "deep roots 'with green leaves'" (Okihiro 1991:30).

Japanese men too would share their experiences. Following a hard day's labor, or on a their day off, the men would "talk story." As Takaki writes:

> Sitting around fires, workers nursed their sore hands. "We suffered from blisters on our hands all the time," Choki Oshiro said. "Because we did not have any medicine, we tried to cure them by burning them over the fire, while we prepared for the next day's work."
>
> Mostly the laborers sat on rocks and porches and "talked story" [...] "In Japan we could say, 'It's okay to take the day off today,' since it was our own work. We were free to do what we wanted. We didn't have that freedom on the plantation. We had to work ten hours every day" [...] Slapping at the buzzing and bothersome mosquitoes, laborers complained about the heat in the fields, the stinging yellow jackets, their bruised mucles, and the mean lunas. "It burns up up to have an ignorant *luna* stand around and holler and swear at us all the time for not working fast enough."
>
> (Takaki, 1983:89)

Like the Japanese women, the men found ways to share their experience with one another without the appearance of weakness and loss of face. The practice of 'talk story' like the *hole hole bushi* created an ethnography of shared experiences cataloging a history while literally

voicing frustrations, broken dreams and on occasion triumph. Most important hole, hole bushi and talk story created shared memory. This preservation of the experiences and emotions of the early Japanese and other Asian Pacific Islands plantation laborers represent some of the earliest recorded expressive forms among the plantation communities. Out of the oppression of the plantation fields came art forms as well as a language that would provide the foundation for a shared pan-Asian, Pacific Islander and multiracial "local culture."

Hawaiian Creole, more commonly known was "Pidgin," began as the language of work and instruction. Plantation workers expanded upon the work words to develop their own language. With English as its base, words from all of the various ethnic groups joined together to create a syntax and grammar structure that could be used to communicate with the planters, and at the same time be manipulated to give unique expression to their lives.

Pidgin became the language of "talk story" among the plantation workers across racial, cultural, ethnic, national and regional lines. Lyrical in its sound, Pidgin gave a distinctive sound of the pan-ethnic workforce sharing hardships, grievances and the desire to make change. This common language allowed plantation workers to form unions and alliances to address harsh working conditions, low wages and substandard living conditions. These organizing activities culminated in several major strikes between 1900 and 1950. The first major strike, known as the "Great Strike" occurred in plantations on Oahu during 1909. While the strike was not successful in terms of bringing the planters to the table, it was significant for a number of important reasons. First, the Great Strike of 1909 marked the formation of the Higher Wage Association which built networks across plantations and focused attention on the ethnic and racial divide and conquer strategy of the planters. Second, although the organization and strikers were almost entirely comprised of Japanese laborers, the striking workers found support among other ethnic groups as

well. For example, Chinese merchants in Honolulu extended credit, on good terms, to striking workers (Okihiro 1991: 51). This laid the foundation for pan-ethnic organizing in the future. Third, the Great Strike clearly signaled that for the Japanese plantation workers, they intended to stay in Hawaii, no longer sojourners but settlers.

In 1920, plantation workers would again strike. This strike brought together Japanese and Filipino workers in the first large scale pan-ethnic work action in Hawaii. Though planters defeated the 1920 Strike, the workers learned significant lessons. The striking Filipino workers "found large numbers of Spaniards, Portuguese and Chinese workers striking with them. They were soon joined by thousands of Japanese laborers" (Takaki 1985: 174). In the aftermath of the strike workers formed the interracial Hawaiian Laborers Association in April 1920 recognizing the need to move beyond "blood unionism."

For the children (Nisei or second generation) and grandchildren (Sansei or third generation) of the immigrant Japanese plantation workers, life among diversity was a fact of life. Their lived experiences incorporated the intermixing of languages, cultures, ethnic practices and people. While many spoke Japanese at home and English at school, Pidgin was the neighborhood language. Using Pidgin, children of the multiracial, multicultural work force developed a shared "local" identity. The shared local identity would provide the basis for future labor organizing and eventual political mobilization resulting in the election of first Asian American U.S. Senator and the first Asian American state Governor.

The West Coast

Life for the Japanese immigrants to the West Coast, and California in particular, differed greatly from their kinsfolk in Hawaii. Japanese replaced aging Chinese migrant gang laborers in

what Cary McWilliams termed California's "factories in the field." In addition to agricultural labor, the Japanese also succeeded Chinese workers in the railroad, salmon canning, mining and timber industries, as well as provided agricultural labor throughout the Pacific Northwest. In contrast to the regimented life of the Hawaiian plantation, mainland prospects for Japanese immigrants boasted greater opportunity, appeared brighter and more optimistic. Yet, with this opportunity came the weight of white bigotry and discrimination. Most Japanese American scholars divide Japanese American history into two distinct periods: Pre-camp or Pre-World War II and Post-Camp or after World War II. The imprisonment of over roughly 120,000 Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans during World War II provides a pivotal point of reference in the understanding of Japanese American community and identity development.

Pre-World War II

Student-laborers made up the vanguard of Japanese immigrants to the U.S. Between 1882 and 1890 student visas account for 43.8% of the passports issued in Japan (Ichioka, 1988:8) for migration. Roughly, 2,500 lived in San Francisco in 1890, of which over 1,700 were students and throughout the 1890s, 2,764 additional student passports were issued (Ichioka 1988:9). This vanguard attended school, acquired English skills, worked as house boys in affluent homes, learned the "ropes" and played instrumental roles in Japanese immigrant communities throughout the West, serving as the conduit to employment and anchors of community support networks.

According to Ichioka (1988:51-52), labor migration from Japan occurred in two phases. In Phase I, between 1891 and 1900 27,440 Japanese immigrated to the U.S. with the vast majority entering as laborers. In Phase II, 1901 to 1907 42,457 more Japanese entered the U.S.,

bolstered by over 38,000 Japanese laborers migrating from Hawaii. Canada provided another source of Japanese migrants, as did Mexico and other South American countries, though the numbers are less certain. This vanguard and early phases of immigration to the U.S. was comprised primarily of young single males with distinct family obligations. From 1882-1907, the migrants can be described as sojourners embracing the notions of *dekasegi*. Earning money for remittance to their families and the hope of striking it rich motivated them. However, as Japanese immigrant numbers increased, whites viewed them as economic and social threats. Anti-Japanese movements in the West escalated resulting in changes to laws, policies and practices that socially excluded the Japanese and impeded their economic opportunities. These sentiments were brought to a head in 1906 in San Francisco when the Board of Education expelled Japanese from the general public schools, segregating them in the "Oriental" schools with Chinese. The Japanese immigrant community objected strongly and the Japanese government via the U.S. Federal government intervened on the immigrants' behalf. In a concession to the Japanese government, Japanese immigrants and their children could attend the general public school; however, in exchange Japan agreed to curb emigration to the U.S. In these concessions, known was the Gentlemen's Agreement, the Japanese government agreed to no longer issue passports to first-time laborers. The Federal government also acted by Executive Order, closing the U.S. borders to Japanese seeking to enter via Hawaii, Canada, the Panama Canal or other non-mainland destinations.

Following the 1907 Gentlemen's Agreement, the predominantly male Japanese immigrants faced a dilemma. Were they still sojourners, or were they settlers? This question played out in the editorials of the Japanese immigrant press with the decision to settle winning out. With this came the addition of women and family formation. Though the 1907 Gentlemen's

Agreement prohibited labor, immigration, it did allow for family reunification of Japanese residents of the U.S. regardless of their status as a laborer. Using this provision between 1900 and 1910 the number of Japanese married households rose from 410 to 5,581 and by 1920 this number rose to 22,193 (Ichioka, 1988:164). This marked a third wave of Japanese immigrant labor: women. This was accomplished through three practices. One, men already married summoned their wives to the U.S. Two, single men traveled to Japan, married (usually through family arrangement) and returned to the U.S. with their brides. Three, single men in the U.S. contacted family members in Japan seeking arranged marriages in absentia, in what is now known as the "picture bride" practice. The cultural practice of arranged absentee marriage was not new to the Japanese. Indeed inasmuch as marriages were the union of two families, rather than two individuals per se, family-arranged marriage was the common Japanese practice at the turn of the 20th century. The immigrant men would send photographs along with statements of economic hominids and prospects to their family in Japan, who would then arrange a marriage. All three methods of family development and reunification served to impact the lives of the Japanese in America. Indeed, with the immigration of women one can argue the Japanese American community as settlers began.

Japanese American immigrant families, like families in Japan, were based in family obligation. However, unlike families in Japan, often the new brides (and grooms) lacked the support network of nuclear and extended family and most importantly societal support. Indeed, the young Japanese women began life in the U.S. under several difficult burdens. First, they stepped off the steamships to a racially hostile environment. Second, they began married life with men many had never met, save for a photograph and letters of introductions. And third, many of the women were 10 to 15 years younger than their husbands. The age gap was

exacerbated by the differences in life expectancies of women and their new husbands, who generally had been living in the U.S. for years (some as many as 10). Thus, the new brides were left even more emotionally, economically and socially vulnerable. Yet, despite these burdens Japanese Americans women adhered to the Japanese notion of *gaman* or perseverance and were the keys to Japanese American ethnic community development, economic stability and the birth of the American-born Nisei generation.

The addition of wives helped to stabilize the economy of the Japanese immigrant community as women played several important roles in the household economy. With women, households had at least two wage earners. This allowed families to save up enough capital to invest in urban small businesses and buy or lease farmland. In the urban areas, women either worked along side their husbands as unpaid labor in the family business or the sought wage work outside the home, predominantly as domestic workers (Glenn, 1986). In both cases, the added income whether through cost savings or wage work income, family wealth increased allowing for the acquisition of additional assets. In the agricultural arena, women played several key roles as well. Like women in the urban areas, Japanese women worked alongside their husbands as unpaid labor in the fields. IN addition to fieldwork, the women also provided domestic benefits for single workers, often for a direct fee or for reduced wages in exchange for laundry and meal benefits. In any event, capital cost were reduced and agricultural profits increased.

With marriage came children. As the children grew older, they too, added to the economic stability of the household by adding their labor, either unpaid at home or wage income outside the home, to the family income. But, the American-born children would provide an even Ironically, the very diversity the planters engineered to enable the harsh work conditions by recruiting a workforce unable to communicate and fractured by political and cultural differences

became the spawning grounds for the development of a common language, culture, identity and resistance.

More important than the economic benefits as unpaid laborers was the fact that Nisei children were U.S. citizens by birth under the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, a privilege denied their immigrant parents.3 Japanese success in agricultural and floral markets led the California legislature to attempt to thwart that success in 1913 by passing the first Alien Land Law prohibiting "aliens ineligible for U.S. citizenship" from leasing and owning land. By registering leased or purchased land in the name of their U.S. citizen children, Issei parents were able to circumnavigate the discriminatory law. Issei without children exercised several additional strategies to keep their land, but "blood" relatives provided the greatest protections. These strategies proved so successful that, in fact, land holdings increased from 281,678 acres in 1913 to 485,056 acres controlled by Japanese immigrant families in 1920 (Ichioka, 1988:150-155).4 To close the "children" or minor ownership and other loop holes, a tougher Alien Land Law was passed in 1920 prohibiting the registering of land in the names of minor children over which an ineligible alien was guardian. The 1920 Alien Land Laws proved effective in "undermining the economic foundation of the Japanese immigrant society" (Ichioka, 1988:243). Other western states also enacted similar Alien Land Laws. Again, despite the legal restrictions, Issei farmers employed several strategies—such as adult Nisei or white middlemen, verbal agreements with white landowners or land corporations with stock owned by Nisei—to save their investment in the land. As Nisei children gained majority age in the 1930s and 1940s, and ownership and leasing in the adult child's name once again became the preferred options.

Children solidified the Issei transition to settlement. Family life on the U.S. mainland, like their Hawaiian Island counterparts, was one of hard work. Rural families worked from pre-

dawn and well into the night, particularly during planting and harvest season. However, unlike Hawaii, families set their own routines and established their own priorities. With such freedom came risk. Crop failures, poor planning, lack of skills or sabotage could leave a family hungry and in financial ruin. Yet, despite the risks the sensibility of the Japanese American community on the mainland entailed a hopeful optimism because a bumper crop or big strike was always just around the corner.

Relationships among the family members had a distinct Japanese feel. Family roles were organized hierarchically along age and gender lines; emotional expression was suppressed, obligation to family stressed, and deference to others valued. Fathers were the "head" of the house hold. Mothers submitted to their lead. Birth order and gender of the children delineated responsibilities and opportunities. Everyone worked. However, in relation to educational opportunities, ironically often the older children, both male and female, sacrificed college education working to earn money for the family and often to finance the education of younger siblings. In more traditional families, the girls would sacrifice and support their brothers' educational attainment.

Children drastically changed the life of the Issei community. Through the parents saw the U.S. as the home of their children, they also did not want their children to grow up completely ignorant of Japanese language and culture. Indeed, many of the parents could not speak English beyond basic communication. Issei parents pooled resources to develop Japanese language and culture classes/schools, build churches, temples and community centers. Slowly, but surly as infrastructure of the Japanese American community emerged, transforming the Japantowns and Little Tokyos from segregated male ghettos into thriving economic and cultural ethnic enclaves.

Japanese American community life in the U.S., as in Hawaii, would be guided by the notions of *kodomo no tame ni* (for the sake of the children).

Issei parents also recognize that their children were "American" and Japanese. Parents individually and collectively employed a variety of strategies to accommodate the "twoness(5)" Sports leagues occupied central positions in Japanese American community life giving young Issei and older Nisei the opportunity to play "American" sports like baseball and basketball. Sports helped bridge the generational gap between fathers and sons (Nomura, 1993), as well as played a major role in cross cultural/racial interactions (Franks, 2000). Indeed, this legacy lives on today as the sports leagues, particularly basketball, continue to thrive.

Religion and religious institutions also played important community building and maintenance roles. While Issei settlers established Buddhist Temples, white missionaries started Christian churches among the Japanese American community. While meeting the spiritual needs of the community, the temples and churches doubled as the community and cultural centers hosting ethnic celebrations, boys scout and girl scout troops and cultural classes.

Alaska

The Japanese lives in Alaska took on a different trajectory than those of Issei in Hawaii and California. Pioneer Issei found acceptance, indeed almost a kinship, among the Alaska Native Eskimos and Indians. In the early 1900s, the salmon canning industry, Alaskan whaling, and the Nome gold rush provided incentives for Japanese to migrate to Alaska. The town of Juneau became the site of Japanese immigrant settlement in Southeast Alaska. Here Japanese immigrant families established themselves much like elsewhere on the West Coast as entreprenuers opening up small businesses. In Western Alaska, the majority of Japanese passed

through as migrant cannery workers or gold prospectors. A handful of Japanese men settled as pioneers. Without legal prohibitions against miscegenation, Issei pioneers married Alaska Indian and Eskimo women, joining the villages of their wives' families (Rooks, 1997). Issei integrated their skills and knowledge as fishermen, farmers as well as their formal education into the village activities. Some rose to become village leaders. Their mixed blood children grew up identifying strongly as Alaska Natives, despite their internment during World War II. As adults many of these mixed race Nisei took their place in village leadership.

World War II and Japanese American Concentration Camps

On December 7, 1941 the bombing of Pearl Harbor brought to life a ninety-year old history of anti-Asian and anti-Japanese sentiment in California (6), the West and throughout the nation. Thus, began a chapter in race relations in the U.S. that revealed to all non-whites the extent of their political powerlessness. The force migration and imprisonment of roughly 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry, of whom roughly 2/3rds were U.S. citizens without criminal charges or trial facilitated by Executive Order 9066, demonstrated the effectiveness of structural racism as all branches of the U.S. government (Executive, Congress and Judicial) repeatedly bent the law to its own ends in the name of America and patriotism. The U.S. government sited two primary reasons to justification of the internment (the term used by the government): 1) national security, and 2) for the safety and protection of the Japanese from "Americans." Both justifications proved to be unwarranted.

As Michi Weglyn (1976) documents the U.S. Intelligence community had been conducting surveillance of the Japanese immigrant community since 1930 and in 1939 Roosevelt gave to the FBI, Navy Intelligence, and Military Intelligence the task of consolidating all

information gathered by the various agencies. These activities yielded a suspect list of approximately 2000 Japanese, many of whom were rounded up within two weeks of Pearl Harbor. Additionally, Roosevelt ordered the State Department to conduct a separate intelligence fact finding mission and analysis regarding the Japanese loyalty question and dispatched Curtis B. Munson to prepare a summary report. In deliberations about the signing of Executive Order 9066, J. Edgar Hoover, FBI Director, "declared his steadfast objection to 9066 on the contention that the roundup had encompassed all potential saboteurs" (Weglyn, 1976:71) and the Munson report "certified a remarkable, perhaps, even extraordinary degree of loyalty among the generally suspected ethnic group (i.e. the Japanese)" (Weglyn, 1976: 34). However, proponents of the internment won the day and the lives of Japanese in American would be changed forever.

The evacuation of persons of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast and Alaska uprooted their lives. Given as little as one week's notice, the Japanese American communities, stripped of many of their Issei leaders during FBI roundups, struggled to make sense of this turn of events. Allowed to bring only what they could carry and limited to clothing, bedding, toilet articles, utensils and essential personal effects (Civilian Exclusion Order No.32), families scrambled to make arrangements to store and dispose of a lifetime of household and business goods, and other properties. Some lucky Japanese families had trusted non-Japanese friends or church organizations to care take their possessions while they were at camp. Most, however, were not that fortunate, leaving them to sell their possessions for pennies on the dollar. The entire process proved demeaning, "It is difficult to describe the feeling of despair and humiliation experienced by all of us, as we watched the Caucasians coming to look over our possessions and offering such nominal amounts knowing we had no recourse but to accept whatever they were offering because we did not know what the future held for us" (Talaki

1989:393). At times despair gave way to anger and some families destroyed valuable property rather than selling or leaving it behind.

The journey to "camp," as it was referred to by Japanese American parents attempting to soothe the fears of their children, began at local assembly centers, converted fairground stables, horse racing stalls, etc. At the assembly centers evacuee families and individuals lost their names-replaced by family identification numbers-their privacy, and most importantly their freedom to the bureaucracy. Life in the animal stalls marked by the food lines, bathroom lines, shower lines, clinic lines, the constant presence of other people and armed guards would foreshadow life at the Relocation Centers. The imprisoned evacuees were taken to ten Relocation Centers throughout the western U.S.

List of Relocation Centers for Japanese Americans during WWII

Tule Lake, California	Amache Colorado
Manzanar, California	Rowher, Arkansas
Poston, Arizona	Jerome, Arkansas
Gila River, Arizona	Minidoka, Idaho
Topaz, Utah	Heart Mountain, Wyoming

Arrival at the remote and desolate Relocation Centers signaled a dramatic reality as by guard towers, barbed wire and row upon row of tarpaper walled barracks greeted the evacuees. Regimentation of daily activities replaced freedom of choice as the imprisoned Japanese Americans awoke to the 7 a.m. wake up siren, ate meals in the dining hall at prescribed times, and shuttled in and out of shower facilities in shifts. Children attended school and adults went to work as government wage workers, a radical shift from the self-reliant small business and farming lives that many had lived. The government denied many Issei, particularly the men, work because they were not U.S. citizens, leaving them idle for the first time in their lives.

Boredom and depression resulted. Though housed together in the barracks, families had little privacy and their cohesiveness severely assaulted. The camp structure undermined parental authority as children, especially adolescents, watched parents rendered virtually powerless. The massive group dynamics of camp created situations where families no longer ate together with parents eating at different tables from the teenage children as they scurried off among their peers with this new found level of freedom. However, despite this "independence" the children were aware that they were imprisoned.

Once over the shock of their imprisonment Japanese American families began to resist their new environment. Resistance took the form of gardens (rock, flower and vegetable), and the creation of activities for the children, including sports leagues, dances, craft activities and newspapers. Christian churches were allowed to congregate and Christmas activities marked the holiday season. Woman found ingenious ways to re-create and invent ethnic cuisine from institutional food stores. Dried cabbage replaced *nori* (seaweed) to wrap sushi and *onigiri* (rice balls). Teriyaki hotdogs and hotdog *okazu* (mixed vegetables) brought life to stale meals. While men salvaged wood and irons craps to create "rooms" within the barracks, stalls in the bathrooms, basketball backboards, baseball backstops and performance stages. And, through the power of *Sears and Roebuck* parents order equipment not provided by the government. In short, faced with incredible challenges, the evacuees worked to make the "un-normal" as normal as possible, especially for the children. Once again, the spirit of *kodomo no tame ni* would override individual wants, as the evacuees banned together to create community.

Ironically, World War II also provided opportunities for the Nisei. For school aged children and teenagers, camp allowed them opportunities that their minority status denied them on the outside. As the only, and this the majority, they served as newspaper and yearbook editors,

student government leaders, cheerleaders, and sports stars (Daniels 1988:232). In an odd way, this empowered them beyond what had been possible in the everyday white pre-war world. For the young adult Nisei new futures opened as well. Work and college furlough programs throughout the Midwest and East Coast and military service provided two avenues of expanding their lives.

In February 1943 the U.S. government once again turned to the question of Japanese American loyalty. In an effort to facilitate the enlistment (and later draft) and the furlough programs, the government required all internees to answer a loyalty questionnaire. Two questions in particular posed a problem. Question No. 27 asked draft-aged males: "Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?" and Question No. 28 asked, "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and foreswear any form or allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any foreign government, power or organization?" The questions at best proved perplexing and at worse created a paradox. Question No. 28's wording suggested that Nisei had at one time swore an allegiance to the Japanese emperor and since most had not, they felt trapped. How could they foreswear an allegiance they never had? Question No. 27 asked Nisei to volunteer for military duty despite having been imprisoned in violation of their legal rights.

This thinking reached its pinnacle at Heart Mountain where Frank Emi, a 27 year old Nisei with a wife and two children, "decided to hand print his answer [to the loyalty questionnaire] and post it on the mess hall doors: 'under the present circumstances, I am unable to answer these question'" (Takaki 1989:398). Along with several Nisei, Emi later formed the Fair Play Committee, refusing to cooperate with the government until their Constitutional rights

of citizenship were restored. The movement gained support and draft resistance erupted at other camps as well. Emi and six leaders of the Fair Play Committee were arrested, tried, convicted and imprisoned for four years. At at they stated, "We, the members of the FPC are not afraid to go to war—we are not afraid to risk our lives for our country...We would gladly sacrifice our lives to protect and uphold the principles and ideas of our country as set forth in the in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, for on its inviolability depends the freedom, liberty, justice, and protection of all people including Japanese-Americans and all other minority groups" (Takaki 1989:399). In all some 300 Nisei resisted the draft on Constitutional rights grounds and many were imprisoned.

However, most Nisei answered "yes" to Questions No. 27 & 28 and more than 33,000 Nisei served in the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II, believing this was the best way to prove to the U.S. that they, too, were loyal Americans. Japanese Americans in the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) working as Japanese language translators served with distinction throughout the Pacific, while the vast majority served in the U.S. Army 442nd/100th Regimental Combat Team in Europe. The 442nd performed their duties with heroic proportions, becoming the most decorated combat unit in U.S. military history, earning over 18,143 individual decorations. But the cost was high, for though the most decorated they were also the most bloodied. Overall, they suffered 9,486 casualties and over six hundred killed. The exploits of the 442nd and the MIS earned Japanese Americans a modicum of respect at home, though not all prejudice and discrimination would recede.

Post War World II

The impact of the camps on the Japanese American community is mixed. Upon returning to California after the war, Nisei parents sought to put the camp experience behind them as they settled into post-War American. Many, perhaps most, never spoke of the camps to their Sansei children. An odd combination of pain and embarrassment accompanied the former evacuees, even those who went as children, leading to an acute silence within families, within the community. The silence would be broken as Sansei community and student activists during the 1960s began to ask about their histories. "By the late 1960s Japanese American groups in San Francisco, southern California and Seattle began to agitate for compensation for the wrongs suffered during World War II" (Daniels, 1988:330). The "redress" movement gained momentum resulting in the marshalling of Japanese American community resources from the Japanese American Citizen league to Asian American congressional members to community and Asian American student activists, resulting in the Congressional Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians. The Commission's a hearing solidified the Japanese American community as they told their stories.

"Stigmatized,' the ex-internees have been carrying the 'burden of shame' for over forty years. 'They felt like a rape victim,' explained Congressman Norman Mineta, a former internee of Heart Mountain" (Takaki, 1989:484-5). Slowly the former internees responded and the act of telling proved healing. "For over thirty-five years I have been the stereotype Japanese American,' Alice Tanabe Nehira told the commission. 'I've kept quiet, hoping that in due time we will be justly compensated and recognized for our years of patient effort… I can reflect on my past years to conclude that it doesn't pay to remain silent.'"(Takaki, 1989:485). The redress movement resulted in the passage of Congressional legislation in 1988 apologizing for the internment and granting each surviving internee $20,000 reparations.

In all, some 750 stories were told to the commission, but many more were told in the homes, churches and gathering places of the Japanese American communities. Indeed the telling continues in the form of the annual pilgrimages to Manzanar, the making of documentaries such as Lisa Yasui's *A Family Gathering* and Frank Abe's *Conscience and the Constitution* and the many films honoring 442nd/100th Regimental Combat Team, the establishment of the Japanese National Museum (in Los Angeles), and the many books and novels. When faced with difficult and at times intolerable situations people often work hard to make life as "normal" as possible. Whether through the voicing of emotions, the planting of gardens, re-creating the aesthetics of one's home country or actively resisting, people display an agency that impacts the course of their lives, thereby writing history. In breaking the silences, Sansei, their children and all in the future can own their story as Japanese Americans.

Bibliography

Beechert, Edward D. *Working in Hawai'I: A Labor History*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'I Press, 1985.

Cheng, Lucie and Bonacich, E, eds. *Labor Immigration Under Capitalism: Asian workers in the United States before the World War II*. Berkeley: University Of California Press, 1984.

Chan, Sucheng. *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History*. Boston: Twayne, 1991.

Daniels, Roger. *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988.

Franks, Joel S. *Crossing Sidelines, Crossing Cultures*. Lanham, New York: University Press of America, 2000.

Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. *Issei, Nisei, War Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.

Ichioka, Yuji. *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1924*. New York: Free Press, 1988.

Nomura, Gail. "Beyond the Playing Field: the Significance of Pre-World War II Japanese American Baseball in the Yakima Valley, in *Bearing Dreams, Shaping Visions: Asian Pacific American Perspectives,* edited by Linda A. Revilla, Gail M. Nomura, Shawn

Wong and Shirley Hune. Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1933.

O'Brien, David J. and Fugita, S.S. *Japanese American Ethnicity: The Persistence of Community*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991.

O'Brien, David J. and Fugita, S.S. *Japanese American Experience*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Okihiro, Gary Y. *Cane Fires: The Anti- Japanese Movement in Hawai'I, 1865-1945*. Philidelphia: Temple University Press, 1991.

Okihiro, Gary Y. *Margins and Mainstreams: Asian in American history and culture*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994.

Ong, Paul, Bonacich, E. and Cheng, L., eds. *The New Asian Immigration in Los Angeles and Global Restructuring*. Philidelphia: Temple University Press, 1994

Rooks, Curtiss T. *Asian Americans in Subarctic America: A Multicultural, Multivariate Comparative Study*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Irvine. Ann Arbor. UMI Dissertation Services, 1997.

Takaki, Ronald T. *Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawai'I, 1835-1920.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'I Press, 1983.

Takaki, Ronald T. *Strangers From A Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989.

Weglyn, Michi. *Years of Infany: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps.* New York: Morrow Quill, 1976.