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INTRODUCTION

This anthology consists of eight articles by me that have previously been published in a variety of books and journals through my career-long passion for and preoccupation with the subject of the World War II exclusion and detention experience of Japanese Americans.¹ All of these writings on that subject intertwine my dual commitment to the historical phenomenon of social resistance and the research method of oral history. Accordingly, the volume as a whole is enriched by the intertextual compatibility of its constituent parts, each of which is informed by my ideological allegiance to employing principled dissent, protest, and struggle to redress oppressive institutional power emanating from whatever source.

In the case of the essays in the volume, the resistance depicted by Japanese American individuals and groups was mounted primarily against an “external” oppressor, the US government, and an “internal” one, the Japanese American Citizens League. Since neither of these two entities was monolithic in nature, it should be assumed that the oppressive power being resisted in both cases was their controlling core leadership, not their inclusive and diverse membership.

It should be understood, also, that the essays in *Barbed Voices* exemplify and valorize two species of resistance against oppression. Although these are closely related, they are also significantly different. The first type of resistance falls under the classification of *history*, the second of *memory*. In the former instance, the intention has been to document some of the degree and diversity of resistance activity enacted by Nikkei, or Japanese Americans, during the World War II years; in the latter case, the governing purpose has been to draw upon this empirical data both to help develop a new and robust narrative for the Japanese American wartime experience and to provide present and future Nikkei with a usable past upon which to anchor their persisting quest for an enlarged constitutional democracy, comprehensive social justice, and vitalized human dignity.

With respect to the designation of “social disaster” within the study’s subtitle to describe the World War II Japanese American experience, I have arrived at it advisedly. Permit me to explain. In comparatively recent times, the older journalistic accounts of disasters have given way to more sophisticated methods of data collection and theorization. Nowadays a special, and rather esoteric, branch of collective behavior, “disaster research” includes a body of findings about the psychosocial impact of disasters.

To date, most research in this field has been focused upon physical disasters—hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, fires, and floods—but increasingly attention has been paid to the impact of man-made disasters such as bombing attacks and industrial accidents. As early as 1972, for example, the British sociologist Stanley Cohen, in *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, applied disaster research models to explain the reaction of the British public in the 1960s to the Mods and Rockers rebellious youth phenomenon. Therein, Cohen adopted the sequential model used by disaster researchers to describe the phases of a typical disaster: warning, threat, impact, inventory, rescue, remedy, and recovery.

Although mindful that the “moral panics” under investigation by him—the decade-long series of deviant juvenile happenings at British seaside resorts—cannot be considered disasters in the same sense as earthquakes or floods, Cohen still felt both that (1) there are sufficient resemblances between the two categories of events and (2) definitions of “disaster” are broad and inconsistent enough to warrant his extrapolation from existing theory.

Likewise, it is my contention that the events constituting the Nikkei wartime eviction and incarceration experience lend themselves to similar

extrapolation. As Cohen observed, although definitions of disaster are characterized by imprecision, an inventory of them reveals agreement on the follow salient elements: “whole or part of a community must be affected, a large segment of the community must be confronted with actual or potential danger, [and] there must be a loss of cherished values and material objects resulting in death or injury or destruction to property.”²

Given these criteria, it is hardly an exaggeration or a distortion to style what the Japanese American population underwent a disaster. First of all, the mass removal and confinement policy of the US government directly affected almost the entire Japanese American mainland community. Not only healthy adults, but pregnant mothers, hospitalized cases, the extremely aged, and even infants were evicted to makeshift and isolated detention centers.

Second, from the time of Japan’s attack on the Pearl Harbor naval base in Hawai’i on December 7, 1941, to the ultimate closing of the ten War Relocation Authority–administered concentration camps, this affected majority of the Nikkei community dwelt in a daily atmosphere colored and confounded by actual and potential danger. If before the Japanese Americans’ exclusion and confinement per se it was difficult to distinguish between potential and actual danger, thereafter it became virtually impossible to do so. Who is to say whether living in a horse stall or being surrounded by barbed wire and monitored by armed sentries in watchtowers posed a real or prospective danger to the imprisoned Nikkei. Comparing what the inmates confronted with “famine, flood, drought, disease, or other calamities,” Nisei anthropologist Toshio Yatsushiro, a Bureau of Sociological Research staff member at the Poston Relocation Center in southwest Arizona, aptly concluded that “the situation . . . in the center had all the characteristics of a disaster.”³

Lastly, there is no gainsaying that the third criterion applying to disasters—a loss of cherished values and material objects resulting in death or injury or destruction to property—fits the facts of what the confined war-time Japanese Americans faced. Not only were entire West Coast Japanese American communities uprooted and scuttled by Executive Order 9066,⁴ but also the series of actions that this action catalyzed entailed a cataclysmic change in every facet of the victimized population’s cultural composition. The fabric of family was stretched and torn, the pattern of leadership disturbed, the economic structure dismantled, and the underlying sense of personal, family, and community identity endangered. Infusing and imparting

focus to the assorted socioeconomic losses was the psychological conviction of being a threatened people.

The burden of this anthology is to provide a basis for understanding why, when, where, and how at least some of the 120,000 imprisoned Americans of Japanese ancestry responded with resistance to the perilously threatened status of themselves, their families, their reference groups, and their racial-ethnic community during World War II.

NOTES

1. The bibliographical references for the originally titled eight articles, in the order of their appearance within the volume, are as follows: "Oral History and the Japanese American Evacuation," *Journal of American History* 18 (September 1995): 625–39; "The Manzanar Riot: An Ethnic Perspective," *Amerasia Journal* 2 (Fall 1974): 112–57; "A Riot of Voices: Racial and Ethnic Variables in Interactive Oral History Interviewing," in *Interactive Oral History Interviewing*, ed. Eva M. McMahan and Kim Lacy Rogers, 107–39 (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994); "Cultural Politics in the Gila Relocation Center, 1942–1943," *Arizona and the West* 27 (Winter 1985): 237–62; "Protest-Resistance and the Heart Mountain Experience: The Revitalization of a Robust Nikkei Tradition," in *A Matter of Conscience: Essays on the World War II Heart Mountain Draft Resistance Movement*, ed. Mike Mackey, 81–117 (Powell, WY: Western History Publications, 2002); "Political Ideology and Participant Observation: Nisei Social Scientists in the Japanese Evacuation and Resettlement Study, 1942–1945," in *Guilt by Association: Essays on Japanese Settlement, Internment, and Relocation in the Rocky Mountain West*, ed. Mike Mackey, 119–44 (Powell, WY: Western History Publications, 2001); "Sergeant Ben Kuroki's Perilous 'Home Mission,': Contested Loyalty and Patriotism in the Japanese American Detention Centers" in *Remembering Heart Mountain: Essays on Japanese American Internment in Wyoming*, ed. Mike Mackey, 153–75 (Powell, WY: Western History Publications, 1998); "Peculiar Odyssey: Newsman Jimmie Omura's Removal from and Regeneration within Nikkei Society, History, and Memory," in *Nikkei in the Pacific Northwest: Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Louis Fiset and Gail Nomura, 271–307 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005).

2. Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1972), 22. See also the second edition (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1987) and third edition (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2002) of this work, replete with new introductions. In 2011 Routledge released a new edition of this book in its classics series.

3. Toshio Yatsushiro, "Political and Socio-Cultural Issues at Poston and Manzanar Relocation Centers: A Thematic Analysis" (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1953), 393.

4. Signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 19, 1942, this executive order authorized what was to become the mass forced removal and incarceration of all Japanese Americans on the West Coast.