



The University of Michigan

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

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Dear Nisei Research Project Participant,

Between late 1995 and early 1996 you requested to receive a copy of preliminary findings from our Nisei Wartime Internment Research Project. We are enclosing a copy of this report here. Unfortunately, it has taken us much longer than expected to send these results, and we apologize for the delay. We hope you will find this information of interest.

Thank you, once again, for your interest and participation in the project. Your time and effort were most helpful and truly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Donna K. Nagata, Ph.D.

Yuzuru J. Takeshita, Ph.D.

THE NISEI WARTIME INTERNMENT RESEARCH PROJECT- REPORT ON PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Introduction

This report summarizes the preliminary findings of the Nisei Wartime Internment Research Project survey conducted in late 1995. The goal of the Nisei Project is to explore the variety of ways the Nisei view their internment experiences, the impact of those experiences on attitudes, communication, and coping, and their perceptions of the redress movement.

In reading the following sections, please bear in mind that these results are preliminary. They represent generalities about the group based on our initial analysis of the survey data. The data analysis is still underway and we are in the process of examining the information here in greater detail. You may also notice that this report includes results from only a portion of the questions in the original survey. Given space limitations, we could not include all of the data.

Who Were Surveyed

The findings reported here are based on the answers given by 544 persons who chose to respond to a mail questionnaire that was sent to some 1,700 Japanese Americans drawn randomly primarily from lists of participants in camp reunions held in the early 1990s. We had access to the lists of participants at various camp reunions for all the War Relocation Centers, except Granada and Jerome, as well as a list of former Crystal City detainees. Obviously these lists do not cover all survivors of the wartime internment; they include for the most part only those who chose to attend the camp reunions in recent years. In addition, the data reported here is based on only about a third of the sample to whom questionnaires were sent. These facts limit the generalizability of these results.

Background Characteristics of the Respondents

The respondents' average age was 70, with half of them in the ages between 66 and 73. Thus, the average age when they were first interned was about 16-17, with half of them in the ages between 13 and 20. Gender was about evenly split: 49% men and 51% women. A large majority (73%) of the respondents currently lived in California. 24 other states were represented, with the largest numbers from Washington, Illinois, Colorado, Oregon, and Hawaii.

80% were currently married and 13% widowed. The rest were either divorced or never married. 94% had married fellow Japanese Americans, 80% of whom had also been interned. 45% percent reported being Christian, another 43% Buddhist, and 5% other religions, with 7% indicating no religious preference. 98% percent had

completed at least high school and 64% some college. Most of the respondents had occupations in the professional, managerial, and clerical categories either currently or before retirement, with a median income in the range of \$30,000-\$34,999. More than two-thirds belonged to groups whose membership was predominantly Japanese American; half of the respondents belonged to JACL. 87% had gone to a Japanese school before the war; 23% had studied in Japan. 76% had visited Japan at least once since the war, mostly as a tourist.

The Internment

At the time of the evacuation, 95% of our respondents had lived in the three West Coast States (mostly in California), directly affected by the evacuation order. 24% had one of their family members, for the most part their father, arrested by the FBI. For this and other reasons, 29% reported that their families were separated when they were initially evacuated. When the evacuation order was posted, 9% moved to another place, mostly within California, before they were interned. A few moved to Arizona, Colorado, Utah, or another place in Oregon. 3% left camp as early as in 1942, 19% in 1943, 22% in 1944, and 48% in 1945. 8% left as late as in 1946. Understandably, the early leavers were the older internees who left mostly for military service, outside employment, or schooling. 38% (75% of whom were under 20 at the time) left because camp was being closed. The most common destinations were California (35%), Illinois (14%), and New York (9%). The rest were scattered in 29 other states, mostly in the Mountain and Midwestern states, and Japan. That 73% currently live in California, as noted earlier, indicates that a large number of them who relocated elsewhere returned to California.

104 men, 27% as volunteers and the others as draftees, and 3 women, all volunteers, had served in the armed forces during World War II, the men for the most part with the 100th Battalion, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, or the Military Intelligence Service. 46% attended school in camp. Most typically the quality of education they received was rated as neither good nor bad. A few rated it as very good (7%) and some as very bad (9%). 236 were subjected to the loyalty oath, with 72% of them answering "Yes-Yes", 10% "No-No", and the rest in various combinations of "Yes" and "No". 17 had renounced their citizenship, 15 of them men and 2 women.

Coping with the Internment Experience

How have our survey respondents, characterized by such diversity of background and experience dealt with the internment experience since the war? We report here some highlights of our findings. Differences by gender and age (under 70 vs. 70 and over) are presented where they are worthy of note.

Communication with parents: About two-thirds of our respondents reported having talked to their parents about their internment experience at least occasionally (5 times or more since the war); only about 13% report never having done so. Somewhat less than half (40%) had talked 15 times or more. Women and the younger respondents were more likely to have talked more frequently than men and the older respondents. If they talked, their talks most typically lasted less than 15 minutes (70%), but for some (12%) they did last 30 minutes or more, with the discussions for women and the younger respondents usually lasting a little longer than for men and the older respondents. The topic tended to be brought up slightly more often by the respondents themselves than by their parents. But the topic was brought up most often incidentally in passing and/or as a reference point in time. Only about 26% reported talking with their parents about the internment as a central topic as a common way of discussion.

Communication with children: Somewhat more (71%) report having talked to their children at least occasionally, with only about 4% reporting no such experience at all. About a third (35%) have done so quite often (15 times or more), again with women and the younger respondents having done so more often than men and the older respondents. Their talks with children also lasted most typically less than 15 minutes (69%), but for some (10%) they lasted 30 minutes or more. Talks by women tended to last a little longer than those by men, and the topic was brought up more often by themselves as parents than by their children. As much as 65% of the respondents reported that their talks with children were brought up most commonly as the central topic of discussion. Interestingly, this figure is twice as large as the 30% or so of the Sansei who reported talking about the internment with their parents as the central topic of discussion in an earlier survey by Nagata. This discrepancy may reflect either a generational difference in perception or, perhaps, noncomparable samples of parents---between the Nisei who participated in the present survey and those to whom the Sansei who participated in Nagata's earlier survey were referring.

These data suggest that on the whole, our respondents reported having talked about their internment experience with moderate frequency with either their parents or their children. However, we caution our readers that those who responded to our survey constituted but a third of those to whom the questionnaires were sent and that the lists from which the sample was drawn included for the most part only those who happened to have participated in camp reunions in recent years. Therefore, our respondents are selected by their willingness to talk about their camp experience through our survey and by their interest in joining others in reunions to remember in a public way their wartime experiences. Unfortunately, we have no information as to whether those who are not represented in our study talked much about their internment experiences with either their parents or their children and, if they did, how often and in what ways.

Comfort in talking about the internment with others: Our respondents, regardless of gender or age, reported feeling very comfortable discussing their internment experience with other Japanese Americans. They were somewhat less comfortable in doing so with other minority group members and even less comfortable, though not by much, with Caucasians. While men tended to be somewhat more reticent with their parents and children, they reported feeling somewhat more comfortable than women in talking about their internment experience with these non-Japanese Americans. As for their children, our respondents report feeling very comfortable talking with them, only slightly more comfortable now than when the children were growing up.

Reasons for reluctance to talk about the internment: When our respondents were asked how much some of the statements we listed reflected their feelings about their not talking as openly about their internment experiences as other life experiences in their past, the following came out moderately strong: "People who have not been through it cannot understand it", and "It is the Japanese way to cope with hardship in silence". Less strongly but still noteworthy were statements like: "I don't like to dwell in the past", and "I would prefer to let bygones be bygones".

Suffering and coping: Our respondents feel that the Japanese Americans suffered a great deal from the internment experience but they have coped with it quite well. They feel they suffered a great deal economically and emotionally but physically only moderately. As for their own families, they feel they suffered about the same as most and coped with the experience as well as most. As for the respondents themselves, most feel that they have coped quite well both emotionally and physically but only moderately economically.

Reaction to the redress legislation: Participation in the redress movement among our respondents was minimal, though two-thirds reported discussing the issues with their children. The overwhelming majority (70%) favored monetary compensation, the younger respondents (71%) slightly more than the older respondents (68%). The greatest single impact of the passage of the redress bill for our respondents was that their faith in the U.S. Government increased. It had a moderate effect in bringing about relief from emotional suffering, slightly more for women and the older respondents, and some sense of closure to the whole episode, slightly more for women than for men. It had little effect, however, in reducing the negative feelings they have had about the internment. It also did not affect their feelings about the need to talk about the internment. Interestingly, a large majority were surprised that the redress bill passed. The success of the redress legislation was attributed, in order of importance, to: the effort of the Japanese Americans who organized and directed the movement, the effort of the Japanese American senators and representatives in Congress, the record of the Nisei soldiers during World War II, the report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment appointed by President Carter, and finally the enlightened political leadership of Congress at large. Very little credit

was given to any remorse felt by the American public at large.

What brought about the internment: Finally, in response to the questions as to what they thought in retrospect were the conditions that led to the internment in the first place, the following were given strong endorsement, in order of importance: the strong anti-Japanese sentiment at that time, Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor, the failure of the American public to recognize the violation of the internees' constitutional rights, and the failure of political leadership in Washington, D.C. Somewhat weaker endorsement, though still relatively strong, was given to the lack of awareness of their constitutional rights as well as the failure of political leadership among the Japanese Americans themselves. Their being "too Japanese", on the other hand, was given only moderate endorsement.

Concluding Remarks

We have presented an overview of preliminary findings from the Nisei Research Project. As noted earlier, further analysis of the survey data is currently underway. We are also continuing our analysis of in-depth interviews conducted with a small group of Nisei respondents last year. Our hope is to eventually publish the results of these analyses in appropriate journals for wider circulation.

In closing, we take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to all those who participated in our project. Your input has been an important and valued contribution.

(Prepared by Donna K. Nagata & Yuzuru J. Takeshita)

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