Japanese Internment: Struggles Within the Newspaper

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The United States entered World War II, on December 7, 1941 when the Empire of Japan attacked the naval base at Pearl Harbor. The entrance to the war was not the only thing that resulted from the attack. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Executive Order no. 9066. This order allowed the United States to "designate areas from which any or all persons may be excluded,"[1] ultimately making it legal to forcefully detain the Japanese Americans in the States. The relocation of the Japanese Americans was a result of wartime hysteria; however, racism deep within the American community and history played a significant role. Anti-Asian ideals and laws from the late 19th centuries up to the Japanese relocation became the stepping-stones of Japanese internment. As a result of the Executive Order no. 9066 and exclusion laws, the camps where the Japanese were detained established their own culture and way of life racially excluded from the rest of the world. Some of the larger camps such as the Manzanar and Tule Lake had their own newspapers. These newspapers reveal the life of exclusion and struggles of identity of the Japanese Americans detained in internment camps in respect to the culture and history of the United States up to that time.

The Tule Lake newspapers were the source of information within the camp for the residents of Tule Lake. At first glance, the newspaper seems like any other papers from anywhere in the United States. The newspaper itself has an article from issue ten of volume three published on July 27, 1942, explaining, "the editorial policy of the Tulean Dispatch is no different from any other American newspaper published outside in this time of war."[2] Meaning that the newspapers could be censored. In order to retain citizen support, newspapers were often censored and consisted of positive propaganda during wartime. By stating that the Tule Lake newspapers were no different from any other American newspaper, means that the government was in control of what was being published. The article continues to explain the paper's primary goal of helping the community attain social order in their time of confusion and perplexity. The newspapers seem perfect, with information about all the major categories in a society including sports, economics, and politics. The papers made the internment camps seem like a well-functioning happy society, even calling it a colony, however the newspaper only includes news within the internment camp, excluding the camp from outside news. Carefully examining the articles reveals a life of exclusion and an attempt to create a new society of Japanese Americans loyal to the United States. The newspaper contains articles of education, sports, and opportunity of entertainment, which all factors into creating a culture within a community. Although the government censored the newspapers, it shows an attempt by the Japanese Americans to live normally within the camps.

Similar to that of the Native American reservations, the government tried to create a new society of people within a certain boundaries in order to exclude them. The Japanese Americans seemed to make the best of their situation by recreating a community. Dance classes, sports teams, religious buildings, and schools were all implemented into the camps while job opportunities were also given to qualified individuals. By bringing together all ethnically Japanese people and giving them a chance to create a new culture, the society of

the internment camps began to live life of exclusion without many problems. Japanese Americans became editors of newspapers, teachers, coaches, and managers within the society, however they were given the bare minimum to sustain a culture. The government provided the camps with insufficient amount of equipment for a growing population to maintain everyday activities. Throughout the newspaper there are complaints for the lack of equipment needed for churches and schools. An article published on July 23, 1942 acknowledges the problem, "the community is in dire need of various equipments…."[3] Although it is evident that the internment camps were poorly supplied and Japanese Americans were poorly supplied and treated, the editors of the newspaper seem to be optimistic by publishing articles of achievement and ways to cooperate with the government in order to receive more equipment.

Japanese Exclusion was not a new idea and the only form of exclusion in the United States. Excluding groups of people has been present towards African Americans, Chinese Americans, and other ethnic groups since the birth of America. In the late 1800s, "Chinese immigrants were the targets of racial hostility, discriminatory laws, and violence."[4] Until the 1960s African Americans were targets of racial discrimination segregating them from the rest of the society. One can also see that groups were forcefully excluded by the Government were given bare minimum to survive. Both Native Americans and the Japanese Americans were forced into an area of arid lands. Although the situation of the Japanese American was different, the attempts to separate the Japanese Americans were apparent even before World War II. As Asian Americans, the Japanese were under the same law and same racial treatment as Chinese and Korean Americans as shown in this quote from "A Brief History of Japanese American Relocation During World War II" by Burton, "Anti-Japanese movements began shortly after Japanese immigration began, arising from existing anti-Asian prejudices."[5] Laws such as the Alien Land Law and the Chinese exclusion act, which prohibited land ownership and limited immigration respectively, paved a way for Japanese exclusion and internment. The growing immigration of Asians into America that was sparked by the gold rushes of the 1800s created fear that the Asians were eventually going steal jobs, women, and land from the White Americans. The fear of Indians taking jobs and women described in Nayan Shah's *Stranger Intimacy*[6] can be also seen in Japanese Americans, "Many of the anti-Japanese fears arose from economic factors combined with envy... Other fears were military in nature; the Russo-Japanese War proved that the Japanese were a force to be reckoned with, and stimulated fears of Asian conquest."[7] These anti-Japanese laws and sentiments became the stepping-stone for Japanese exclusion, however the newspapers of Tule Lake Internment camp reveals Japanese Americans coping and surviving a life of exclusion.

The stories within newspapers of Tule Lake show a smooth running culture and society within the camp; however, many of the articles are not the real voices of the Japanese American, but rather the voices of what the government wants to hear. Many of the articles within the papers are written about good things, such as new educations, famous visitors, population boom, sports news, and other notable events. Although many of the articles are of good news, there seems to be conflict of disagreement between the editors and the general public. Most of the newspaper's issues contained a segment called "We the People", which contains the voice of the general public. These segments reveal a more honest view of the detainees rather than other articles written by the editors. Two of the

quotes in the segment published on July 21, 1942 complain about unfair rations or treatment between different blocks. One detainee quotes, "we are unable to get lumber, let alone scrap pieces…yet, those who live across the block 45 are able to get lumber."[8] The editors seem to hide certain problems in the papers, just as the characters from James Baldwin's *Go Tell it on The Mountain* tries to hide their sins from the congregation.

In many of the articles, the editors praise the "colony" on different achievements in sports, population, growth, education, and other important aspects of society. Although there are articles written about the problems of the community, the editors seem limited to go in depth In issue six of volume three published on July 23, 1942, "the community is in dire need of various equipments…."[9] however it also mentions that the goods shipped by the War Relocation Authority will not become government property. Every time the readers wrote to the editors to raise a problem, the editors usually follow up with information that makes the government look better than it is. This raises the question of the quality of some of the articles, whether if it's accurate enough to trust. The "We the People" segment helps see a part of the society that has honest problems. While one might conclude that the government might have created the Newspaper in order to justify their actions of relocating and detaining the Japanese Americans, it seems like the newspapers were created and ran by Japanese Americans. In that sense, the editors are protecting the general public from being seen as a threat to the state. Even with the editors trying to show the best qualities of the Internment camps, there seems to be underlying and hidden problems. Since Tule Lake was one of the largest populated camps, it had constant problems of overpopulation and was constantly short on supplies. The newspaper is not the best source for learning about the real problems and treatment of the Japanese Americans, but it shows a struggle to survive, even if it means to disagree with some of the public.

One of the main issues within the internment camps was racial identity. Reading through the newspaper, the detainees seem to struggle with what it means to be a Japanese American. The newspapers show a direct correlation to how one is treated according to their identity. Although the newspapers never directly raise the issue of racial identity, it is shown through the articles. The articles within the papers reveal a struggle of the Japanese Americans to be recognized as Americans instead of Japanese. Many of the detainees seem to realize cooperation and serving the community seem to ease their time in the internment camps. There are articles in the paper of Japanese Americans who become representatives, block managers, and other higher positions, while others were not too lucky. Different blocks seem to receive different treatments as stated in an article published on July 21, 1942 when a man complains about the difference between the meals served between certain blocks. He quotes, "after hearing glowing reports of satisfying meals in other mess halls, I am getting disgusted... We don't get the quality or quantity reputed at many other kitchens."[10] Issues such as this raise the question of the differences between one individual to another. By looking at the history of Japanese Americans in internment camps, one can come to the conclusion that some Japanese were choosing to cooperate and become "white." To some Japanese becoming White meant to cooperate with the government, hoping to minimize the impact of the internment process. Others were just trying to assimilate with the White Americans to be accepted as an American rather than a Japanese.

To many of the Japanese Americans to become White was to become loyal to the United States and participate in White activities. Many of the young Japanese American

men joined the military to show that they were Americans: "The Japanese American communities, particularly the Nisei, were trying to establish their loyalty by becoming air raid wardens and joining the army."[11] Some of the younger generations participated in White sports such as baseball. The newspaper contains sports news about baseball teams within the internment camps as seen in an article published on July 22, 1942 commemorating the start of a hardball league. Older generations showed their patriotism by serving the community and not rebelling the relocation or the internment. This loyalty shown throughout the newspaper reveals that the editors wanted to show the government that they were not enemies of the state.

Many Japanese Americans who showed loyalty seemed to be rewarded and mentioned in the newspapers. In an article published on July 23rd, an individual name Niyamoto was "appointed business manager of all community enterprise,"[12] for his loyalty to the U.S Government. Although trying to prove your loyalty as an American worked to a certain point in facilitating life of exclusion, in the overall aspect Japanese Americans were not American in the eyes of the Whites. No matter how American they acted, they were still considered enemy of the state and anti-Japanese American sentiments were deeply rooted in the American society. As stated in Ozawa versus US, a Supreme Court trail in 1922, "A Japanese, born in Japan, being clearly not a White, cannot be made a citizen of the United States."[13] This trail shows that Japanese were clearly not White, and cannot be a White American if born in Japan. Also anti-Japanese American sentiments targeted the American born Japanese as well, "A viper is nonetheless a viper wherever the egg is hatched so a Japanese American, born of Japanese parents grows up to be a Japanese, not an American."[14] This quote by Burton from "A Brief History of Japanese American Relocation during World War II" shows that American viewed Japanese Americans as Japanese but not an American. Within the United States history, race has always been categorizing factor of identifying a group of people. No matter where they came from the Japanese Americans are Japanese. The United States has always used ethnicity and race to classify a group of people. This history of categorizing race in the United States has been constant throughout all minority groups. Omi and Winant from *Racial Formation* quote, "Racial categories and the meaning of race are given concrete expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded."[15]

The racial category of Japanese Americans being only Japanese was created throughout the history of the categorizing other minority groups within the States. With the stories published in the newspapers and the history of the mistreatments of Japanese Americans, many seem to be caught in an identity crisis. In a Newspaper article from the Mananzar camp, Japanese Americans were given the opportunity to choose to be repatriated to Japan. This shows that not all Japanese Americans in the camps were trying to prove their loyalty to America, however the editors of newspapers tends to stray away from those individuals. There are barely any articles discussing repatriated Japanese when there are evidences of repatriation as shown in Wendy Ng's *Japanese American Internment During World War II: A History and Reference Guide*, "Among the evacuees were a number of citizens and aliens who filed for repatriation or expatriation to Japan.[16] One can see the newspaper as a chance to show that the Japanese Americans love America. Throughout exclusion, many excluded minorities like the Japanese Americans fought to express their love for America. Like the Japanese Americans in Tule Camp, the Native Americans in the

novel *Ceremony* tried to express their love for America, "Now I know you boys love America as much as we do, but this is your big chance to show it."[17] The detained Japanese Americans knew they loved America, but they had to show it. This exclusion and detainment gave the Japanese Americans a chance to show their love. Also like *Ceremony*, they struggled with their identity as a Japanese American, because no matter how hard they showed their love to Americans they were nothing but Japanese in the eyes of the Whites.

The Japanese American Internment camps show the problems of racism and the struggle of defining what being an American is. The newspapers written in some the larger camps show a group of people struggling to be accepted as an American rather than Japanese. The newspapers of these camps show the struggle of Japanese American in respect to the American culture and history. In the underlying of the positive articles of the newspaper, it shows the true struggle of the Japanese American, a group of people learning to live life through forced exclusion, censorship, and mistreatment. Throughout the papers, the camp life seems too good to be true, however it can be seen as a way of coping with the problems of exclusion and a form of identity crisis.

Notes

[1] Allyson Patton, "American History," *Executive Order 9066* (1999):192

[2] Frank Tanabe, "Newspaper," *Daily Tulean Dispatch (Tule Lake)*, July 27, 1942.

[3] Ibid., July 23, 1942.

[4] Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*. (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 25.

[5] Jeffrey F. Burton and Mary M. Farrell and Florence B. Lord and Richard W. Lord, "A Brief History of Japanese American Relocation During World War II," *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites* (2010).

[6] Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2011). "Every day, whites are being replaced in the mills by the Asiatic. The Invaders have become bold and insolent [with] many instances of women being pushed into the gutter, insulted on street cars…News reports underlined fears of male strangers [Indians] and the threat they posed to the public good"

[7] Burton et. al., "A Brief History."

[8] Tanabe, "Newspaper," July 21, 1942.

[9] Ibid., July 23, 1942.

[10] Ibid., July 21, 1942.

[11] Burton et. al, "A Brief History."

[12] Tanabe "Newspaper," July 23, 1942.

[13] U.S Supreme Court, *Ozawa v. United States*, 1922.

[14] Burton et. al., "A Brief History."

[15] Michael Omi and Howard Winant), *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 14.

[16] Wendy L. Ng, *Japanese American Internment During World War II: A History and Reference Guide* (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), 60.

[17] Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 64.