"Life Begins With Freedom": The College Nisei, 1942-1945

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EDUCATION, wrote Margaret Mead in 1943, creates a "drama of discontinuity" between parents and children in modern life. By encouraging children to be different from their parents, education holds forth the possibility, unknown to traditional societies, of introducing new values, even bringing new worlds into being. The dark side of this possibility is that education can degenerate into "techniques of power," teaching through indoctrination and locking the future into coercive relations of superiority and inferiority while conditions of life change in other respects. To avoid such a prospect, she argued, education should be placed at the service of learning instead of manipulation, spontaneity instead of control. A proper use of the discontinuity between parent and child would be to "devise and practice a system of education which sets the future free."[1]

During the year before Mead published these views, the United States government evacuated more than 110,000 Japanese Americans from their homes in western states, placed them in temporary "assembly centers" under the control of the U.S. Army, then moved them inland to ten "relocation centers" in wilderness and barren lands, guarded by military police and administered by a civilian agency of the government. The reflections of an anthropologist may seem ethereal when compared to the reality of fenced enclosures with rows of barracks inside and guard towers at intervals around the perimeter. Nevertheless, her perspective illuminates the dilemma of the camps in relation to democratic traditions of education in the twentieth century. Mead located the menace of totalitarianism as a potential within her own society, where a "spurious sense of superiority" had corrupted education. What was true for education in general was even more real and present for Japanese Americans during the war. For them, the value of education depended, in part, on deciding whether freedom might possibly exist in the future, even when their current investment in learning was being made under circumstances of manifest oppression. This decision about the future, unlike the order to build the camps or the administrative policies that ensued, had to be made by the Japanese Americans themselves, and it could be no more than a guess, whether informed by hopeful conviction or bitter disillusionment.

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Educators, social scientists, and camp administrators, no matter how gracious their motives, could not promise that the future would be free.[2]

The wartime evacuation came at a crucial juncture in the experience of Japanese Americans. Indeed, the camps heightened the drama of discontinuity between the Issei and Nisei, the first and second generations. Nisei outnumbered Issei by 79,642 to 47,305 in 1940. By 1942 the median age of the Nisei was 17, almost time for college and work. Although some had been born as early as 1910 and others were still being born in the 1940s, a great many Nisei entered the camps during the throes of their transition from youth to adult life. The discontinuity would have been dramatic even if there had been no evacuation in 1942. Born in the United States, the Nisei were citizens by birth; born in Japan, the Issei were permanent aliens by law. By the time the war began, the dominant language of the Nisei was English; the first language of their Issei parents was Japanese. Both generations had developed their own distinctive organizations and styles of leadership; the Issei had emphasized cultural preservation, community solidarity, and ethnic enterprise, while the Nisei were more attuned to political participation as citizens and assimilation into the dominant culture of the United States. Both generations left remarkable records of adjustment to social and economic conditions, both suffered from racial discrimination, but by the early 1940s the Nisei had participated more widely in the world outside of ethnic enclaves, especially in public schools.[3]

Surrounded by techniques of power in the camps, not only those of barbed wire and military police but the more subtle instruments of a benevolently coercive administration intent on making the best of its planned communities, the Nisei had to decide whether accommodation would make them patriots or quislings, whether the future would make their people Americans or "another Indian problem." Without knowledge of where their actions would lead them, who could say what ends might materialize to justify the different means available for coping with incarceration? Which agenda was most plausible, and to what extent would present beliefs influence future success?[4]

Out of the evacuated population several groups came forward with strategies for action. This essay explores the history of one of those groups, the college Nisei. These were more than 4,000 students who were allowed to leave the camps to study in institutions of higher education outside of the restricted zone of the Western Defense Command. The purpose of this inquiry is not to gloss over the importance of other sources of leadership among Japanese Americans. Rather, it is to understand the experience of a group that served as a living argument about future society for the entire racial minority. The argument suggested a transition from camp to college, from oppression to opportunity even in the darkest of times. For many students it was a journey across space, time, culture, and class position. If their experiences were unusual when compared to life in the ten wartime camps, this made it all the more central to the dilemma created by evacuation from their pre-war homes.

In many respects, theirs was the vision of the future—and theirs the new problems and predicaments—that came about for many more Japanese Americans in the post-war world.

Fortunately, there is an ample record with which to interpret the experience of the college Nisei. The files of the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council, including hundreds of letters written by the Nisei students, have been preserved at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. The organizational history of the student relocation has been well told by Robert O'Brien in his pioneering study, *The College Nisei*, first published in 1949. A tremendous wealth of documentary evidence on the history of the camps has been amassed at Bancroft Library in Berkeley and the National Archives in Washington, D.C., among other places. It is time now to reappraise the experience of these young people and to delve more deeply into their consciousness and initiative as related to the discontinuity created by the camps. The experience of the college Nisei offers valuable insight into the sudden concentration and dispersal of Japanese Americans during the war. Their reflections also throw light upon the complexities faced by any group of people trying to achieve acceptance in a society where the terms of citizenship, social status, and economic well-being are often racially determined.[5]

Of the approximately 2,5000 Nisei attending college in western states at the beginning of World War II, only about two hundred were reported to have transferred to other schools in the Midwest and East before being evacuated. If the rest were excluded from higher education, what was to become of them, and what hope was there for the many other Nisei students graduating from high school each year? In 1942 more than 28 percent of the evacuated population was 15-24 years old, compared to slightly more than 17 percent of youth in the same group for the entire U.S. population. From the rising generation of Nisei almost four thousand boys and girls had attended twelfth grade in the 1941-42 school year before being evacuated. Within the camps there were few opportunities beyond high school, and nothing approaching a genuine college education. For most of the evacuees in 1942 the best alternative was work, which in the camps was regulated by the government so that no "colonist," as the Japanese Americans were often called by administrators, could receive more than $19 per month regardless of skills or productivity.[6]

As students inside the camps realized that "all we held dear to us could be swept away," outside it dawned on a few liberals, educators, and religious groups that concentrating citizens and their immigrant parents behind barbed wire was inimical to democratic ideals. The *Christian Century* featured an editorial in the summer of 1942 asserting that there was a "strategic necessity" for immediate action to protect "a whole generation of young Americans in one of our minority groups." The editorial spoke to the conscience of the white majority in American society: "To validate our many declarations of purpose and goal in this world struggle, all the rest of us must extend to them every chance for fuller assimilation into our national life." During the

evacuation in 1942, a small coalition formed to help the dislocated Japanese Americans, giving special attention to helping the college-educated elite, partly because of their importance as a vanguard that was seen to be leading the group into the mainstream of American life, but also because other strategies of assistance seemed impossible in the face of the anti-Japanese hysteria and the so-called "military necessity" in western states.[7]

Educators and concerned citizens working to help the Nisei from outside the camps were also protecting the norms of open competition and individual freedom that gave higher education its legitimacy as a democratic institution in American society. The list of advocates included nationally known educational leaders like Robert Gordon Sproul of the University of California and Ray Lyman Wilbur of Stanford University. Besides advocating the interests of the Nisei, educators were defending their own position in the moral order of U.S. society as keepers of enduring values, sorters of intellect, managers of assimilation. In support of the student relocation from camp to college, educators argued that it was essential to avoid the waste of human resources brought about by the evacuation. The Nisei were citizens who would play a role in American society after the war, and sending them to college would cost no more than maintaining them as wards of the government in the camps. Those who went to college, the argument continued, would symbolize to their families and friends in the camps that education was still the best route to a successful future. Finally, the process of assimilation would be enhanced among young Americans in midwestern and eastern communities, where the relocated students would be received more generously than on the west coast.[8]

For many Nisei students there was little doubt that that the brighter prospects were *outside*. This word acquired new meanings for those who had been forced to live inside the camps. As one student wrote from Amache, the camp in Colorado, while awaiting leave clearance so that he could go to college, "this is taking on more and more of a concentration camp atmosphere. Spotlights will start glaring soon . . . a fence is being built . . . closer and closer the net winds. And we sit speechless . . . either in astonishment or from lack of interest, or from lack of any direction to the voices raised here and there." Some people complained that the family unit was breaking down, leaving children without the discipline needed to prepare them responsibly for the future. Those within the camps, deprived of movement, unsure whether their former communities on the west coast would remain forever out of bounds to them, were now in danger of losing their capacity to imagine where they might go and what they could do to rebuild their lives after such a calamity.[9]

The organization of special channels for student relocation proceeded quickly as soon as the government began removing Japanese Americans from their home communities to temporary assembly centers. During the confusion and uncertainty of the mass evacuation, it helped considerably that the plea for fairer treatment of the Nisei found a sympathetic audience in the

nation's capital. On May 21, 1942, John J. McCloy, the Assistant Secretary of War, wrote to Clarence E. Pickett of the American Friends Service Committee: "Anything that can legitimately be done to compensate loyal citizens of Japanese ancestry for the dislocation to which they have been subjected, has our full approval." Successive meetings of educators and concerned groups in the spring of 1942 led to the formation of the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council, with offices first in several cities, then centralized in Philadelphia during 1943. The council, a voluntary agency operating on private funds outside of the government, became a strong advocate for the interests of Nisei students eligible to go to college. It played an aggressive role in persuading institutions of higher education to participate. It set up standards and procedures for college application, then screened candidates and coordinated communication. It raised funds to help the Nisei pay for college, since the government would provide no support. The council also pressured federal authorities for expanded educational rights for the Nisei, and it tried in several ways to boost the sagging morale of young people in the camps.[10]

Some colleges right away refused to participate. One would not even issue transcripts of former students of Japanese descent, arguing that they should all be treated as prisoners of war, whether citizens or not. Despite such occurences, the response from colleges was favorable enough overall that hundreds of students were able to relocate in the year following evacuation. By the fall of 1942 the council had administered and collected from the camps more than 2,000 questionnaires filled out by Nisei interested in attending college. Japanese Americans matched their energy with their own as they raised funds—more than $3,000, no mean sum in those days, from the camp at Topaz alone—to give scholarships to Nisei students leaving the camps for college. The effort to get students out of the camps became known as an "Underground Railroad" among those who kept it going during the early months of the war. The metaphor suggested a transit not merely from camp to college, but from slavery to freedom.[11]

For students, thanks to the council and the willingness of the government to cooperate, there was a way out of the camps, though only for a few during the first year of incarceration. For a time early in the war, the journey for a select few from camp to college was one of the only available niches in the world of normal communities beyond the fence. The journey was a quest for educational opportunity and for a brighter future, but it was also a choice offered on terms set by those who directed higher education, terms that were at the same time checked and controlled at every step by the government. Social advancement was to be had through sponsorship by designated officials who selected students according to criteria based on cultural traits as well as cognitive aptitude. A committee of deans, registrars and personnel administrators evaluated the Nisei applicants, reviewing scholastic performance, character, professional ambitions, contacts with Caucasians, and special interests or unusual talents. This sponsorship by a philanthropic organi-

zation working to create opportunities for a disadvantaged group—an arrangement new to the Nisei and, in fact, to most minority groups—operated within the constraints of government policy and the receptivity of communities and local institutions. To obtain leave from the government to attend college, the Nisei aspirants needed proof that they had been accepted at an institution outside of the Western Defense Command. The government required evidence in advance of adequate financial resources, testimony from a public official that the student would be acceptable to the local community, proof that the institution had been cleared by the U.S. Department of War, and certification that the Federal Bureau of Investigation had completed a security check and granted the student a clearance. At first, Nisei students were not allowed to attend most major universities because of defense-related research and production on campus or in the cities where these institutions were located. When the restriction was lifted in 1944, Nisei students applying to such universities were subjected to an additional "personal security" questionnaire.[12]

Beyond these general policies controlling the selection of Nisei to leave the camps in pursuit of higher education, notes taken by the field staff of the student relocation council reveal that government officials took an interest in regulating the process. Camp authorities often required advance appointments for interviews. Outside educators and staff of the council found their movements constrained and monitored when they tried to gain access to evacuated students. Within the camps the government allowed only sole-purpose interviews, focusing on the college admission procedure, not on family or community life. The presence of a member of the internal security staff of the administration was mandatory in meetings between students and field staff of the council, and all communication had to be conducted in English. Perhaps most importantly, those given indefinite leave to go to college found it difficult to go back to the camps, except for one small group of college Nisei who returned under the auspices of the student relocation council to recruit other students for college.[13]

In summary, three features stand out from the early history of student relocation. First, educators and humanitarian groups organized a system for selecting and sponsoring individual Nisei to leave the camps to attend institutions of higher education. Second, the system of sponsorship functioned within narrow constraints set by governmental authority and local willingness to receive Nisei students into the community. Third, the conditions placed upon the admissions process and upon college attended impeded communication about the family and community of Nisei students, and for the most part prevented those who attended college from returning to the camps for the duration of the war.

The people on the outside who helped Nisei students in the camps were nourishing the hope that persisted among Japanese Americans, hope that educational opportunity was still alive, that equal citizenship and social mobility were still plausible images of the future. In working to keep alive

such hopes, educators and other Caucasian allies created a system of sponsorship that, by design, dispersed individual aspirants away from the concentrated community and impeded their return. Exactly when the median age of the second generation was on the threshold of the college years, individual students faced a choice between rapid dispersal, high achievement and isolation away from their racial group, or the slow, disspiriting but nonetheless still recognizably communal life of being concentrated in segregated camps as wards of the government. This was the design of educational opportunity that surrounded and helped to shape the relationship between the college Nisei and the incarcerated population in the camps.

One student, writing from Smith College, said she knew what it was to fly from a cage. She soon found that this was also to fly into a chasm between two worlds. Many Nisei students recognized the contradictions of their flight to freedom and acknowledged their ambivalence as they tried to untangle opportunity from oppression. They wrote hundreds of letters to the few Caucasians they felt were genuinely working to help them. These letters piled up at the offices of the American Friends Service Committee, for the Quakers had reacted to the evacuation in 1942 by extending what they called a "spiritual handshake" to the victims, helping in various ways to soften the impact of anti-Japanese hysteria during the nation's mobilization for war. At the invitation of the federal government, the Quakers had played a central role in setting up the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council. Perhaps because these pacifists had offered unequivocal support to Japanese Americans at a time when even most liberals were rationalizing the oppression as a regrettable consequence of military necessity, they were privileged to hear voices among the Nisei that others could not hear. The evidence offers glimpses of self-awareness during an extreme crisis for Japanese Americans. Such evidence could be seen as limited, to some extent, by the fact that the Nisei students were writing to enlist the sympathies of Caucasians who had power to help them, but the range of written reflections in the letters suggests that a deeper and more authentic communication was taking place. To go back and read these letters is to realize that later explanations often leave out the role played by the Nisei as subjects of their own experience, not merely the objects of history. The college Nisei, vanguard of a minority group that excels in higher education, helped to construct their place in American society in part by how they chose to understand what was happening to them.[14]

Even good fortune spawned bizarre predicaments for those who went from camp to college. Riding trains eastward across the country, the Nisei students traveled with servicemen returning from such places as Pearl Harbor and Guadalcanal. They arrived to college towns where no Japanese American had ever set foot before. These young people immediately confronted their own insecurities, the fear of having the wrong face and being in the wrong place. Venturing forth as a tiny elite, the Nisei students saw themselves as "ambassadors of good will" whose charge was to open the way for racial

tolerance. In the words of a play staged at Amache, they were "eastward pioneers," their frontier good relations with the white majority. "Living in the same dorms as others and studying together," wrote three Nisei students from a college in Missouri, "we are testing a type of relation that we were never able to experience on the Pacific coast." Writing from Wellesley College, a student told her friends in camp that "those who have probably never seen a Nisei before will get their impression of the Nisei as a whole from the relocated students." The ones who went first were clearing a path for others to follow.[15]

Education presented the college Nisei with opportunity, but it also impelled the select few into a diaspora. Before the war most of the college group would have been concentrated in a half dozen universities on the west coast. A relocated Nisei student wrote from Ohio that "seeing America, the larger America, for the first time . . . we are creeping out of a shell that we have unconsciously been in." Once on the outside, the college Nisei confronted a stark dichotomy between past and present, children and parents, school and home. Quite often they found themselves to be the only Japanese Americans in an entire college town of Caucasians. For most of them the separation from what they had known before was total, since they could go back neither to the camps nor to their pre-war homes during the war.[16]

Techniques of power intruded upon their good fortune wherever they went. The sole means of escape for the college Nisei was exceptionally high levels of performance and verifiably conventional behavior on terms set by their Caucasian sponsors in the new world they were entering. Having been instilled with a strong commitment to education by their immigrant parents—who, as Charles Wollenberg has observed, "may well have been the best-educated immigrant group ever to come to America"—the Nisei now found it necessary to prove themselves worthy of equal treatment or else fall back into the enclosures where their race had been concentrated. In this way, the cultural affinity of the minority group for educational achievement was channeled by racial oppression and liberal sponsorship, first into a pattern of dispersal away from parents and the concentrated community, then into an obligatory challenge of maintaining high levels of performance and conformity to defend the second generation's status as citizens in American society.[17]

This predicament added a frightening dimension to the usual concerns of students about success and failure. A quest for confirmation replaced the self-evident truths of citizenship, and for the time being the alternative to assimilation was not the familiar ambience of an ethnic neighborhood and family businesses, but existence as wards of the government in a controlled, completely segregated environment. The Nisei were fully aware of this predicament: "the long stay in the camp has etched in my mind the value of freedom," wrote one of them from Salt Lake City. "So I say again," she continued, "Life begins with freedom." But freedom was no longer an inalienable right since the shock of evacuation. It depended on successfully managing the preceptions of others, persuading them that one deserved to be

free. One had to gain recognition and the approval of whites to be selected and sponsored to leave the camps. Once free to go to the place approved by the government, one still had secured only the right to begin convincing others that freedom was appropriate, not yet the secure enjoyment of that status. While one Nisei journeyed to the Statue of Liberty and marvelled that "she still carries a torch for me," another remarked that "the fellows out here treat me very well so I haven't got a kick coming anywhere."[18]

In spite of the risks and disenchantments, higher education was a channel to the free world, the world outside the camps. Education brought the Nisei into contact with people whose alliances could help them to turn around public acceptance of the intolerance and political opportunism that had swept Japanese Americans out of their homes at the beginning of the war. While a history of both accommodation and resistance developed inside the camps, the college Nisei fought for connections with the outside world, a mixed world of oppressors and friends and mostly indifferent people. Even when they met with hostility, the college Nisei were in a position to learn more about the circumstances that were causing their oppression.

"As we face the future," wrote a Nisei woman in an education magazine, "our horizon is darkened by the possible threats of movements taking place to exclude all the Japanese from the United States after the war and to deprive us second and third generation American citizens of our citizenship." A coalition of southern and western congressmen was pushing to keep all Japanese Americans, including the college Nisei, inside the camps. Bills were proposed to deprive the Nisei of their chitizenship. Government officials had even discussed the possibility of using evacuees as a "reprisal reserve" to insure the survival of American prisoners of war in Japan. The fortunes of Japanese Americans were fragile material amid the violent movements of public opinion and the machinations of special interest groups. Total war was just then coming of age—the terror bombing of civilian populations was one example. It was not clear how the worldwide obliteration of moral scruples about the limits of warfare would affect the status of Japanese Americans. Among the groups that mobilized to oppose their interests were the American Legion, the House Special Committee on Un-American Activities, and the congressional delegation from California. In an editorial in its *National Legionnaire,* the American Legion found it

> hard to understand why, at this time, men whom the Government does not see fit to trust with rifles are permitted to pursue uninterruptedly their college and professional courses. . . . There is a rankling hurt in the bosom of good, honest, patriotic, loyal, and devoted Americans when they see their sons come to the crossroads—their sons take the road that leads to war and the battlefield. The Japanese boy takes the road that leads to college and, to use a trite phrase worn rather thin and threadbare, the abundant life.[19]

Many traces of this resentment remained among local agitators and officials even after the Nisei were allowed to serve in the U.S. Army after the second year of the war.

Colleges wishing to accept the Nisei students were sometimes confronted with a fusillade of local protest. When politicians and pressure groups agitated against the presence of Japanese Americans on campus, they were guided by reasoning that pronounced guilt by racial association with the enemy. In some places, trustees feared sabotage or fifth column activities, and enterprising administrators wanted military personnel on campus to boost war-depleted enrollments. The presence of the military in programs designed to further war aims would mean that no Nisei could be admitted to the institution. Among educators, though, many instances of resistance to the relocation of Nisei students probably stemmed less from prejudice than from timidity, a fear of undermining the prestige of their institution among conventionally minded citizens who, unnerved by the war emergency, had little patience with the nuances of educational opportunity in a democratic society. It is remarkable in retrospect that a majority of college officials welcomed the Nisei and defended their rights even when highly vocal segments of the surrounding community disapproved.

Recognizing that the challenge was, above all, one of persuasion and public relations, many college Nisei spoke far and wide to community groups while they were going to school. A star pupil who became class president in his college and served on the executive committee of the local YMCA spoke nine times a month to different groups around the state where he lived. Another was elected student body president at a college in Kansas, but decided, without prompting from college officials or fellow students, to step down when local pols downtown staged a fiery meeting to denounce his election and decry such subversive activity on the campus. It was a delicate process for the Nisei students, balancing self-determination and accommodation under these circumstances. "Understanding will have to come through seeing, feeling, experiencing—and then believing," reflected one of them. "I know we Japanese Americans will first have to develop a philosophy of understanding others and their reactions in order to *be* understood and to comprehend in a small way our own problems in relation to others." In spite of the realities of total warfare and some instances of public resistance to their presence in college, it was still possible for this group of young people to believe that "our acceptance in the American community must germinate from us, from our activities." They realized that they were struggling not only against external oppression but against self-imposed limits, their assumptions about what was possible.[20]

Some of their deliberations touched upon the appropriate response to injustice—and to success when it came. The college group was well aware of the conflict among Japanese Americans in the camps over whether it was possible to hope for anything but discrimination and exclusion in a racist society. One young Nisei wrote that he preferred to be treated badly because "the race situation is what it is and there isn't anything we can do about it. I expect prejudice." Another asked her peers rhetorically, "What can you and I expect in a country where they tolerate slums like those of Chicago, or the

Okies in California, or the poor whites in the South and the lynching of Negroes?" many others among the college Nisei felt that the only answer was total assimilation and one-hundred percent Americanism. For some, though, this doctrine raised the specter of Nisei racism as the college-going elite adopted the racial attitudes of the dominant white majority. One student warned that "our hope is to gain equality with the Caucasians, and the Negro is forgotten in the rush. . . . We've got to combat this racial feeling . . . any group in trouble finds it so much easier to shove the blame onto some other minority group, and we are as guilty as any other racial stock." There were also signs of solidarity between the races. Those who went east, where there was less stigma attached to being Asian than in the west, found friends in various stages of nascent critical consciousness about the democratic promise of the United States. One Nisei student reflected on the patterns of prejudice standing in the way of other minority elites attending college: "There were several Jewish boys who tell me that they cannot enter medical school; the Catholic boys here have similar problems to tell, the Negro chap can talk endlessly of the south, the fellows of Italian descent speak of the disparagement they often receive, and on it goes." In Chicago a Nisei woman attending college lived in a cooperative house that was battling its landlord to keep a black student member on the premises. The example was one among many of how the college Nisei were learning to recognize the contradictory position of education—and educated elites—in a society that continued to be sharply divided along lines of race and class. It was a poignant reminder of the burden of race in America when blacks offered expressions of sympathy as government propaganda attacked Japanese racial characteristics.[21]

The racial stigma would not wash away easily. Many Nisei students wrote of the need to avoid forming cliques when several Japanese Americans attended the same school. But this strategy was not enough. The quest for social acceptance was not to be consummated merely through rapid dispersal of the race. One problem was sheer indifference, the tendency of the majority to lump minorities into a single insignificance as far as the dominant culture was concerned. One student complained that a teacher "actually asked me whether the rest of the Niseis spoke English, and another *history* teacher asked me why the Isseis were not citizens." These more subtle forms of prejudice were cause enough for desperation at times: "I feel like tossing my books into the fire and taking the first train to Topaz," the camp in Utah. This melancholy correspondent confided that he had begun to discover "something unreal" about his experience at college, a "slow, subtle change . . . it seems harder to make Caucasian friends . . . I can't help feeling that I am putting a wall deliberately between myself and others."[22]

Such feelings of powerlessness no doubt recurred as the dispersed elite graduated from college, moving on to job discrimination, dual wage scales for white males versus minorities and women, and further exclusionary policies set in their path, education and the good will of some Caucasians notwithstanding. Even so, the college Nisei also felt empowered as they advanced.

Accepting an unfair challenge and proving themselves, through education, to be fully part of the nation at war with the nation of their grandparents, many of them gained an appreciation of the larger arena of contending forces that made the United States so paradoxical in its freedoms and tyrannies. The letters they wrote suggest another gain as well. Inasmuch as the college Nisei were leaders who saw themselves as clearing a path for others to follow, they recognized that part of their task was to create a shared understanding beyond themselves, a way of symbolizing to others the social faith that would turn tragic events into a future reconciliation. As one of them reflected in a long letter:

> When misfortune falls we tend to wallow in it, and completely ignore the forces working to counteract this situation; we concentrate on those who brought about the misfortune and forget those who under severe handicaps are fighting to ease and correct the misfortune; one suddenly realizes the gross injustice one has done to those who have kept faith and courage in the ideal he himself has given up for lost and useless. The ideal becomes more beautiful and real than ever because it is now devoid of its superficial members and we see it in its purer working forms. It becomes clearer than ever before and finally we grasp the inner meaning of such terms as "faith," "courage," and "democracy." The course of the past two years had been thus with me.[23]

It would be beautiful indeed if this were the whole story. But whatever hopes or fears the college Nisei might have had, were they not still the chosen few? By what means did their leadership come to be known in the camps? How did it fit into the drama of discontinuity there? Who responded to their ideals from within the dislocated community?

Life in the camps, it must be remembered, had a history of its own, marked by such high points as riots, work programs, strikes, shootings, loyalty tests, segregation of supposed "disloyals," the drafting of young men into the army, draft resistance, and a family resettlement program that met with resistance from Japanese Americans because they were wary of what might happen to them in the outside world. While some of the college Nisei wrote ecstatically about barbecues and pillow fights with their Caucasian peers, young Nisei in the camps were losing heart. By late 1943 the field director of the student relocation council was appalled by the contagion of "lose-fight" he encountered. Most disturbingly, the percentage of graduating high school seniors who were applying for leave clearance to attend college was declining as the war progressed. A Nisei poet in the camps found shadows gathering inside while others on the outside professed hope and promise:

> Oh—
> Is it only a vanished mirage
> That I though the land of the future—
> Hope, success, happiness, fulfillment of humanity?
>
> In the falling dusk—
> I hear discouraged, disillusioned voices—

"Why is it wrong to be colored?"
"We have served, and want to serve! Are we given no place in this land?"[24]

The educators and government administrators involved in student relocation had thought of ending the council in 1943, since by then it seemed to many that the path to college had been cleared. Obviously, a new problem had arisen, intensifying the need for active sponsorship of students, and thus, as it turned out, extending the life of the council for another three years. Now that the energies of the council were not needed so much for persuading colleges, communities, and all levels of government to make way for the Nisei students, the focus turned inward, into the camps, where it appeared to those on the outside that the younger generation was "thinking up reasons for staying put," perhaps even losing its will to live in the United States. Even worse, it was becoming evident to some advocates of Nisei educational interests that the schools inside the camps were contributing to the problem.[25]

Touring all ten camps in the summer of 1943, staff of the student relocation council learned that many Caucasian teachers were, despite the progressive rhetoric of their profession, advising Nisei students not to go to college. "Some of this hostility," observed the field director, "is born of race prejudice, particularly among the teachers who are attracted to the projects by the relatively high salaries paid by the Federal Government." But, he added, the lack of support for Nisei educational aspirations also arose from

> an attitude which the teachers describe to you as realism. They will tell you that it is a mistake for a Japanese American to think in terms of a college education since he is destined to be only a manual laborer anyway. They point out that if he goes to college and gets "high falutin" ideas about what he can do in life, it will only lead to unhappiness and disillusionment when he finds that the fields for which he trained are not open to him.

Such attitudes became an even more serious factor in 1944 when the college placement function of the student relocation council was absorbed by the counseling staff in the camp schools. This policy change meant that the council would henceforth engage only in supportive activities such as raising funds and coordinating communications. In that year the field director of the council discovered that students at Topaz were not able to take more than four academic subjects in school. By design, then, they were not being prepared adequately for college. One of the thirteen college Nisei who returned to the camps under the auspices of the council in the summer of 1944 said that the evacuated students "sensed a diabolical plot which had as its end the un-education of the Nisei, in the hope of having our mental processes compete with the Digger Indians of yore in excavating for a living."[26]

There were other reasons as well for the drop in college applications. Many students in the camps who could have gone to college refused to do so. If they were the oldest children in their families, they often felt a responsibility to care for the young and for their aged parents. An illness in the family was enough to keep many students in the camps, since the parents often depended on their

children to communicate with authorities in the English language. Many boys preferred to wait and show their loyalty with derring-do instead of sitting in college classes. "Maybe after the war when Freedom comes, I might again ask you for advice," wrote one lad to the student relocation council as he enlisted in the army. More than 16,000 Nisei from the mainland United States served in the armed forces during World War II. Some Nisei males, however, refused both college and military service. From Heart Mountain, the camp in Wyoming where the draft sparked bitter and organized resistance, one student who spoke up probably reflected the attitude of others who remained silent:

> It is true that I applied for student relocation . . . but I did so under the influence of another man, and I was not sufficiently independent in my thinking. I had left college toward the end of my sophomore year because of a distaste for the methods and philosophical bases evident in the educational system in practice—and also because of a basic readjustment of my views wherein lay true service in life and wherein lay right and wrong.

Though girls were often preferred by colleges (they aroused less suspicion), many were discouraged by their parents from leaving camp for fear of what might happen to them in distant places. Other young people stayed in camp to help their families eventually resettle in outside communities instead of using scarce family resources for their own education. A smaller number merely awaited the end of the war and expatriation.[27]

The college Nisei who returned to camp ran into a wall of questions about the future, social life on the outside, reasons for the council's altruism, and a sense of foreboding that one interviewer summarized as follows: "I wonder if there's any use going to college in these kind of circumstances. Broken down: How will they treat you? Eats on the train? Call you a Jap? Stare at you: Cost a lot?" Encountering resistance, one of the college-educated elite complained of students in the camps that "they do not see the whole problem of democracy, and therefore, cannot argue constructively, and when pressed, fall back onto the constitutionality of the evacuation as a basis for disbelief in America." There was also the issue of guilt for the college Nisei. To witness the lethargy of the "colonists" while they, the racial pioneers and ambassadors of good will, advanced to new occupations and a more normal life on the outside, was deeply disturbing, for it was "heartrending to think of the 100,000 others who should have the same opportunities I have, but who are instead being subjected to that environment of mass internment." One returning Nisei admitted that "defeatists in the Center have expressed their disapproval of my beliefs and I can feel the effect of their words digging into me."[28]

Hoping to expand family resettlement by creating a positive impression of the outside world, the camp administrators allowed the "returnees," as the college Nisei visiting the camps under official auspices were known, to circulate freely in the barracks and speak with parents as well as children. The reason for this belated liberality is to be found in the predicament of the government after it had built segregated camps for a racial minority. Once

people have been excluded, dispossessed, concentrated together against their will, it is no easy task to disperse them with a second act of coercion. From the perspective of the government in 1944 and 1945, not enough evacuees were leaving the camps to resettle in American communities. The total population of all ten camps in January of each year went from 110,240 in 1943 to 96,576 in 1944 to 80,878 in 1945, even though there were few obstacles to obtaining leave clearance in the last two years of the war. The remaining population within the camps showed a higher and higher proportion of young and old people, as the most employable and educable left for opportunities outside. Thus, the complement to elite sponsorship for the few—the shadow of opportunity and dispersal—was an even greater concentration of those members of the evacuated population who, having lost the security of their pre-war ethnic communities, did not have the resources, the attitudes considered appropriate, or the will to master the channels of sponsorship that were available for reincorporating themselves into the world outside on favorable terms. Those of the college elite who returned to the camps, sponsored by the same Caucasians who had helped them to get out, now faced the concentrated community and tried to persuade its younger members that they should disperse themselves widely, as the vanguard had done, into niches that awaited them in places they had never seen. The records of the student relocation council suggest that the returning college Nisei were successful in making known their views and reaching many ambivalent high school students in the camps, but that they also encountered varieties of resistance that were deeply rooted in the crisis of the generations and not likely to be resolved through individual opportunities for exit and dispersal.[29]

Among school-aged Nisei who remained in the camps, one of the chief obstacles to higher education was parental objections. Knowing how much the parents supported the education of their children under normal conditions, the college Nisei who returned saw right away that this was a more complex problem than it had appeared from the outside. A torturous communication was taking place between the remaining Issei and Nisei in the camps. After experiencing the imposed authority and opportunity that had divided the generations in so many ways, those who still inhabited the camps by 1944 were, paradoxically, moved to consider what they had in common. Mirroring the drama of discontinuity, which was carrying the young from the inside to the outside world, was its exact complement, a drama of continuity, as the generations lived at close quarters in a coercive setting, drawing the attention of dispersing individuals back to their concentrated point of origin as a racial group. The demand of many Issei for family solidarity, even when they believed strongly in the value of education, became a way of negotiating the future on their own terms. The reports of the few college students who returned to the camps suggest that the Issei were demanding an awareness of collective needs as the college-bound Nisei pursued individual opportunities.

The students who returned came to see, therefore, that their role was not merely to persuade fellow Nisei to enter the channels of outside sponsorship

so that they could leave the camps and attend college. Their role was also to serve as examples to the Issei, showing them that a settled life in America was again possible through the education of their children, that families would surely benefit from new opportunities in the post-war world. Returning students found that the prospect was not an outlandish one to the Issei if it was presented in the right way. "Parents will listen," concluded one who returned, "to children who show determination and initiative in their thoughts about education. It is the Niseis who waver like a pendulum or toss like corks in a sea who succumb to the objections of their parents." The educated Nisei, returning to the camps as children of character and accomplishment, exemplified the plausibility of the future to the older generation. They gave Japanese Americans who were inside the camps an occasion to speak directly with those who had ventured forth into the outside world and showed that it could be done.[30]

Certain subtleties in this message made the returnees convincing to many high school students and their parents in a way that educators, administrators, and social scientists in the camps could never be, no matter how altruistic their intentions. The written reflections of the college Nisei indicate that both assimilation and resistance were at play for those who sought higher education through the sponsorship of the student relocation council. The college Nisei had demonstrated through great effort that future success was not ruled out by present suffering in the camps. But they had also encountered shadows—isolation, fear of rejection, marginal status—that crisscrossed their social mobility. They were forced to acknowledge these shadows, even as they achieved greater acceptance than in the past. Theirs was, they believed, a path that many others would follow in the post-war world. And so it was, beginning with another important leadership group, Japanese American soldiers returning to the generous educational benefits of the G.I. Bill.

Watching the new generation on the rise, the Issei had mixed feelings about the opportunities of their children, a spectrum of emotions ranging from disgust to adulation. The legal isolation of the elders remained unchanged, reaching back to the permanent denial of citizenship or any right of naturalization that had conditioned their lives in the United States from the beginning. There is no shortage of evidence to reveal the tensions between old and young over the cultural consequences of assimilation. "I find myself stumbling over words," said one Nisei son, "as I make vain attempts to talk to my father. I don't understand him; he doesn't understand me. It is a strange feeling to have such a barrier between my father and myself." Yet, it also appears from the letters of the college Nisei that many Issei did enter into an unstated pact of reconciliation with their children, or at least one of tragic acceptance.

> My father is old, 78 years old, and he knew I would miss him greatly and that he may never be able to see me again. But as I left, he strengthened me with these words. "I am old, someday you will hear that I am dying, perhaps while you are

still in school. Forget about me. Make my dying days happy in the knowledge that you are studying and preparing yourself for service. My life is in the past, yours is in the future."

Fathers who lived long enough to leave the camps at the end of the war often found that the niches their children attained in school and jobs became the new home of the family.[31]

One student, mindful that her family had come to the camp with little more than a suitcase each, having lost their home, their land, and most of their possessions, wrote that "the only place in the world for us is America." A momentous communication occurred among Japanese Americans during World War II. It was a threshing time of symbols for the future. The drama of discontinuity was magnified by official policies that concentrated and dispersed the group, and it was played out amidst the passing of cultural authority and community leadership from one generation to the next. Inasmuch as the college Nisei were a vanguard, a leadership group, they carried within them and transmitted to others a sense that this journey they were making outward from the concentrated community was the journey of their people. It was, as we have seen, a paradoxical vision, isolating those who believed in it and dispersing them, while those who were in doubt, who were not able to gain the sponsorship of Caucasians, or were frightened by what they saw, remained inside for a longer time. Meanwhile, both inside and outside the camps, young and old alike wanted more than anything to be home. This was the ground of human dignity that joined the experience of people who otherwise disagreed. But their home of the future was a pioneering venture, not a foregone conclusion. The college elite had realized that they must learn to speak to the majority to preserve the rights of the minority group. Many of their letters reflect a conviction that Japanese Americans must work in combination with others to construct a future society in which the security of their race would be guaranteed. A Nisei student wrote to one of his sponsors from Chicago, where he was studying: "If no one speaks, no one will ever know what an experience America passed through in using expediency instead of justice, and falling prey to fear instead of rising to understand. God grant that it never happens again, to any minority in this country!"[32]

NOTES

1. Margaret Mead, "Our Educational Emphases in Primitive Perspective," *American Journal of Sociology* 48 (1943):633-39.
2. War Relocation Authority, *The Evacuated People: A Quantitative Description*, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1946, p. 4. Mead, "Our Educational Emphases," p. 638.
3. For the 1940 figures, see U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States*, Part I (Washington, D.C., 1975), p. 14. These figures are for the continental United States and do not include Hawaii. For a comparison with previous decades, see Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II* (New York, 1972), p. 21. The figure for median age was computed by the Evacuation and Resettlement Study at the University of California; see Dorothy Swaine Thomas, *The Salvage* (Berkeley, 1952), p. 19.

4. The phrase "another Indian problem" appears in the weekly reports and field notes of the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council (NJASRC), Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University.
5. Robert W. O'Brien, *The College Nisei* (Palo Alto, 1949). The organizational files of the NJASRC at Hoover were augmented in 1982-83 with files of John W. Nason, an NJASRC official and president of Swarthmore College, and the papers of Thomas Bodine, a Quaker who served as field director of the council. The Bodine papers include transcripts of hundreds of letters sent by Nisei students to NJASRC staff. A comparison between a sample of these transcripts and originals in the NJASRC organizational files, which are also at Hoover, shows the transcripts to be accurate, including grammatical errors. Since only a small percentage of the individual student files of NJASRC were saved in the Hoover collection of the organizational files, the Bodine papers are an invaluable source of Nisei views during the relocation from camp to college. The Bodine papers will be referred to as Bodine-Hoover in subsequent notes; the NJASRC organizational files will be referred to as NJASRC-Hoover Archives; and other NJASRC materials at Hoover but not in the archives will be known as Hoover Library. Archival restrictions do not allow use of individual names for the letters written by students, so the letters are identified by their dates for the Bodine-Hoover papers and by student identification number for NJASRC-Hoover Archives.
6. Margaret Cosgrave, "Relocation of Japanese American Students," *American Association of Collegiate Registrars Journal* 18 (1943):221-26; John H. Provinse, "Relocation of Japanese-American College Students," *Higher Education* 1 (16 April 1945):1-4; O'Brien, *College Nisei*, p. 34; War Relocation Authority (WRA), *Evacuated People*, pp. 95, 100, 81. For an overview of the work program and compensation, originally published by WRA, see Edward H. Spicer et al., *Impounded People: Japanese Americans in the Relocation Centers* (Tucson, Arizona, 1969), pp. 88-96.
7. George Sakata, University of Toledo, as quoted in "Nisei Students Speak for Themselves," *Junior College Journal* 14 (1943-44):246. Robbins Barstow, "Help for 'Nisei' Students," *Christian Century* 59 (1942):836.
8. "Bulletin No. 2, Student Relocation Committee, May 16, 1942," quoting a written statement by Monroe E. Deutsch, vice president and provost, University of California, Berkeley; in President's File, Bancroft Library, CU5 Box 588, University of California, Berkeley. Also relevant is the testimony provided by Deutsch and other university officials and faculty for the Tolan Committee, *Hearings*, Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration, 77th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D.C., 1942).
9. Student letter, January 29, 1942, Bodine-Hoover.
10. Letter from John J. McCloy to Clarence E. Pickett, May 21, 1942, John W. Nason Collection, Box 1, Hoover Archives. Executive Committee Minutes and Staff Reports, NJASRC-Hoover Archives. For a description of meetings, organizations, and people involved in the formation of the NJASRC, see O'Brien, *College Nisei*, pp. 60-73.
11. Cosgrave, "Relocation of Japanese American Students," *Education for Victory* 1 (15 September 1942):2, 24. On funds raised for scholarships at Topaz, see *Newsletter* 6 (5 August 1943):2, in NJASRC-Hoover Archives. The newsletter was prepared by NJASRC staff for student counselors in the camps. Letter from Thomas Bodine to Joseph S. Daltry, May 24, 1942, Bodine-Hoover.
12. Student application forms, staff reports and memoranda, NJASRC-Hoover Archives and Bodine-Hoover. Cosgrave, "Relocation of Japanese American Students," *Education for Victory*, p. 2. Provinse, "Relocation," pp. 3-4. Also see official list of conditions for leave clearance in letter from John J. McCloy, Assistant Secretary of War, to Dillon S. Myer, Director, War Relocation Authority, August 5, 1942, Japanese Evacuation and Resettlement Records, Bancroft Library 67/14 C1.08, University of California, Berkeley.
13. Notes and correspondence of the field director of NJASRC, Bodine-Hoover. Restrictions on movement and communication of NJASRC field staff were gradually relaxed later in the war at most of the camps.
14. Student letter from Smith College, 1942 (undated), Bodine-Hoover. "Japanese Evacuation Report #5," March 10, 1942, Bodine-Hoover.
15. The notion that Nisei leaders were cultural ambassadors bridging the gap between East and West had a history going back more than two decades before World War II. For a discussion of this background and the alternate visions of Nisei leadership before the war, see Jere Takahashi, "Japanese American Responses to Race Relations: The Formation of Nisei Perspectives," *Amerasia* 9 (Spring/Summer 1982):31-32 and *passim*. "New Pioneers for America," a play presented at commencement services, Amache High School, May 19, 1944, p. 18, Bodine-Hoover. Student letter, January 3, 1943, Bodine-Hoover. *Trek* 1 (February 1943):34, where the final quote appeared in an article from a student at Wellesley College, was a literary magazine produced by evacuees at Topaz, Utah. The word Nisei was not capitalized in the article.
16. Student letter, June 22, 1943, Bodine-Hoover. According to Section 60.4.21.A-C of the WRA Administrative Handbook, return to the camps by those who had been granted indefinite leave was allowed only with the permission of the authorities. Evacuees were encouraged not to return, but could reapply for residence if they could persuade a Relocation Officer that they could not keep outside employment. Visitors to the camps were required to give up their indefinite leave permits in order to enter. Although the permits

were returned to them upon leaving, the procedure seemed unpleasantly akin to giving the authorities the power once again to determine conditions of exit.

17. Charles Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed: Segregation and Exclusion in California Schools, 1855-1975* (Berkeley, 1976), p. 51. On the affinity of Japanese Americans for education, see William Caudill and George DeVos, "Achievement, Culture and Personality: The Case of the Japanese Americans," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956) 1102-26; Isao Horinouchi, *Educational Values and Preadaptation in the Acculturation of Japanese Americans,* Sacramento Anthropological Society, Paper No. 7, 1967; Audrey J. Schwartz, "The Culturally Advantaged: A Study of Japanese-American Pupils," *Sociology and Social Research* 55 (1971):341-353; Darrel Montero and Ronald Tsukashima, "Assimilation and Educational Achievement: The Case of the Second Generation Japanese American," *Sociological Quarterly* 18 (1977):490-503; Bob H. Suzuki, "Education and the Socialization of Asian Americans: A Revisionist Analysis of the 'Model Minority' Thesis," *Amerasia* 4 (Fall 1977):23-51; Ki-Taek Chun, "The Myth of Asian American Success and Its Educational Ramifications," *IRCD Bulletin* 15 (Winter/Spring 1980):1-11, published by the Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Teachers College, Columbia University.
18. Student letters, April 16, February 9, and January 21, 1943, Bodine-Hoover.
19. Gloria Kambara, "Nisei Students Speak for Themselves," *Junior College Journal* 14 (1943-44):251. On the idea of a "reprisal reserve" and the correspondence in which the phrase appeared, see Michi Weglyn, *Years of Infamy* (New York, 1976), pp. 54-56. *National Legionnaire* editorial quoted in its entirety by Rep. Paul W. Shafer of Michigan in the *Congressional Record,* 78th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. 89, Part 9, Appendix, p. A358.
20. Student quoted in *Newsletter* 6 (24 September 1943), Bodine-Hoover. Student letters, May 25 and 29, 1944, Bodine-Hoover.
21. Student quoted in letter to NJASRC, December 22, 1943, from psychologist working for American Friends Service Committee, Bodine-Hoover. Rhetorical question from letter of Nisei girl quoted in Otis D. Richardson, "Nisei Evacuees—Their Challenge to Education," *Junior College Journal* 13 (1942-43):10. Student letters, November 28, 1942, March 17, 1943, and March 31, 1943, Bodine-Hoover. For an example of black opinion toward the situation of Japanese Americans, see Harry Paxton Howard, "Americans in Concentration Camps," *Crisis* 49 (1942):283-84, 302. For additional perspectives on the attitudes of blacks toward racist propaganda during World War II see Delbert C. Miller, "Effect of the War Declaration on the National Morale of American College Students," *American Sociological Review* 7 (1942):631-44; Wallace Lee, "Should Negroes Discriminate Against Japanese?" *Negro Digest* 2 (September 1944):66, wherein a national poll of blacks found them strongly opposed to the discrimination taking place against Japanese Americans because "discrimination against the Japanese is based on color, much the same as prejudice against Negroes"; Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York, 1944), pp. 814-15; and Richard Polenberg, *One Nation Divisible: Class, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States Since 1938* (New York, 1980), pp. 72, 78-85.
22. Student letters, April 11-14 and March 12, 1943, Bodine-Hoover.
23. Student letter, October 24, 1943, Bodine-Hoover.
24. "Report of the Field Director, September 29, 1943," NJASRC-Hoover Library. Memorandum from Thomas Bodine to John W. Nason, November 7, 1943, Bodine-Hoover. Poem entitled "From the Dusk," two of twenty-three stanzas, student letter circa July 1942, Bodine-Hoover.
25. "Report of the Field Director, September 29, 1943."
26. Ibid. It should be noted that there were some teachers who strongly encouraged the educational aspirations of Japanese Americans. There were also some teachers and many assistants who were themselves Japanese Americans, but because they were working at a maximum of $19 per month alongside Caucasian teachers who were making many times as much, their lower status tended to confirm the view that opportunities were limited by race even as they worked hard to encourage Nisei students to seek advancement through education. Notes of NJASRC field director, 1944, Bodine-Hoover. Student letter, January 1, 1943, Bodine-Hoover.
27. Student letter, April 19, 1943, Bodine-Hoover. On the induction of Nisei into the armed forces during World War II, see *Special Groups,* Special Monograph No. 10, Vol. 1, Selective Service System (Washington, D.C., 1953), pp. 113-142; induction figures on pp. 141-42. Student letter, March 14, 1943, Bodine-Hoover.
28. Notes of NJASRC field director, 1944, Bodine-Hoover. Student letters, June 19, 1944, and October 6, 1942. "final Composite Report of the Returnee College Leaders, Summer of 1944," NJASRC-Hoover Library.
29. WRA, *The Evacuated People,* p. 18; these figures include camp residents who were on short-term or seasonal leave (such as agricultural laborers) but who were still under the control of the War Relocation Authority. "Final Composite Report," NJASRC-Hoover Library. Returnee reports, Bodine-Hoover.

30. "Final Composite Report," NJASRC-Hoover Library. Also see Box 28, "Student Returnee Project" file, NJASRC-Hoover Archives.
31. The quote from the Nisei son is in a file on "Education—Commencement Addresses and Reports by Students," Poston Project Reports, Headquarters Files, Box 18, Record Group 210, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Student letter, May 19, 1944, Box 36, File 676, NJASRC-Hoover Archives.
32. Student letters, July 2, 1943 and January 19, 1944, Bodine-Hoover.