

THE FAIR PLAY RIDES

Dissing a Collaborationist Fairy Tale Disguised as Japanese American History...

By Dwight Chuman

Fifty years ago there was no Nisei Week, Japanese America had been stripped of its civil rights and shipped off to wartime concentration camps far away from the sights, sounds and smells of its beloved J-Towns. It was a time of confusion and betrayal. In fact, extolling Japanese ethnic heritage back in those tumultuous times might have been grounds for being labeled "disloyal" and being thrown onto a train bound for the infamous Tule Lake Segregation Center.

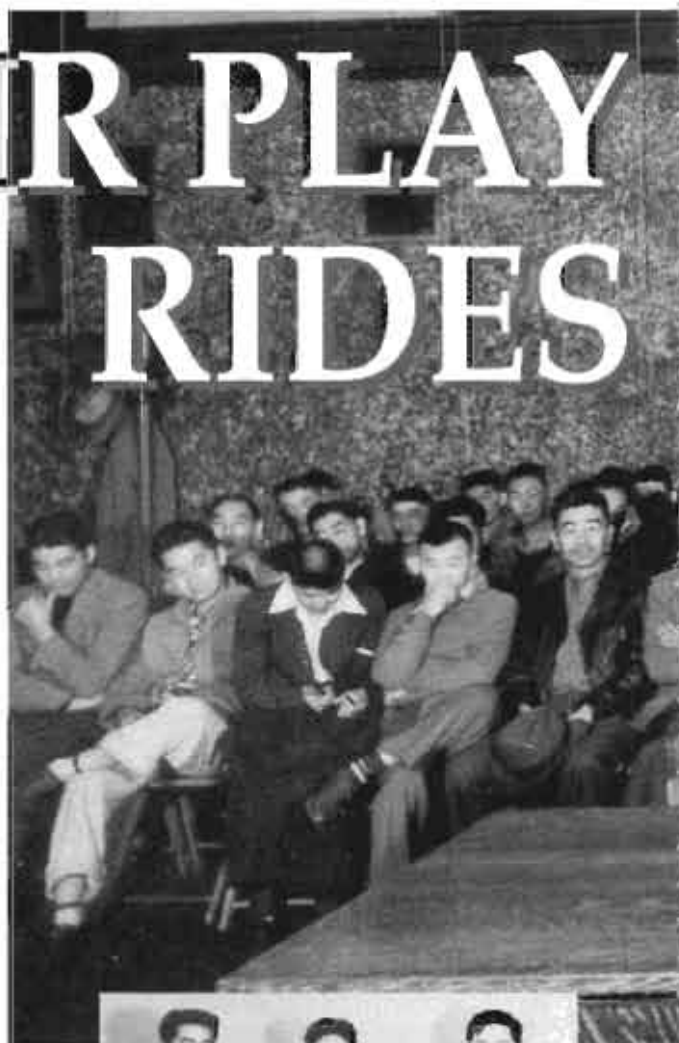
Fortunately, those attending this year's festivities need not fear being labeled "pro-Japan" by a fellow inmate-turned-informer whispering information to the camp guards. The barbed wire and the machine gun towers are down. Eat the foods, speak the tongue and dance the dances of your Japanese forefathers to your heart's content. After all, it's Nisei Week, the mother of all Japanese American celebrations!

As currently written, the faux myth of Japanese America behind barbed wire demands that the reader accept

this group's illogical transition from forced relocation and imprisonment to super-patriotism and death on the battlefield. Not surprisingly, a community without a historical or moral rudder meanders aimlessly, it's pockets full of government blood money. Sadly, in 1994, the Japanese American community seems destined only to disappear.

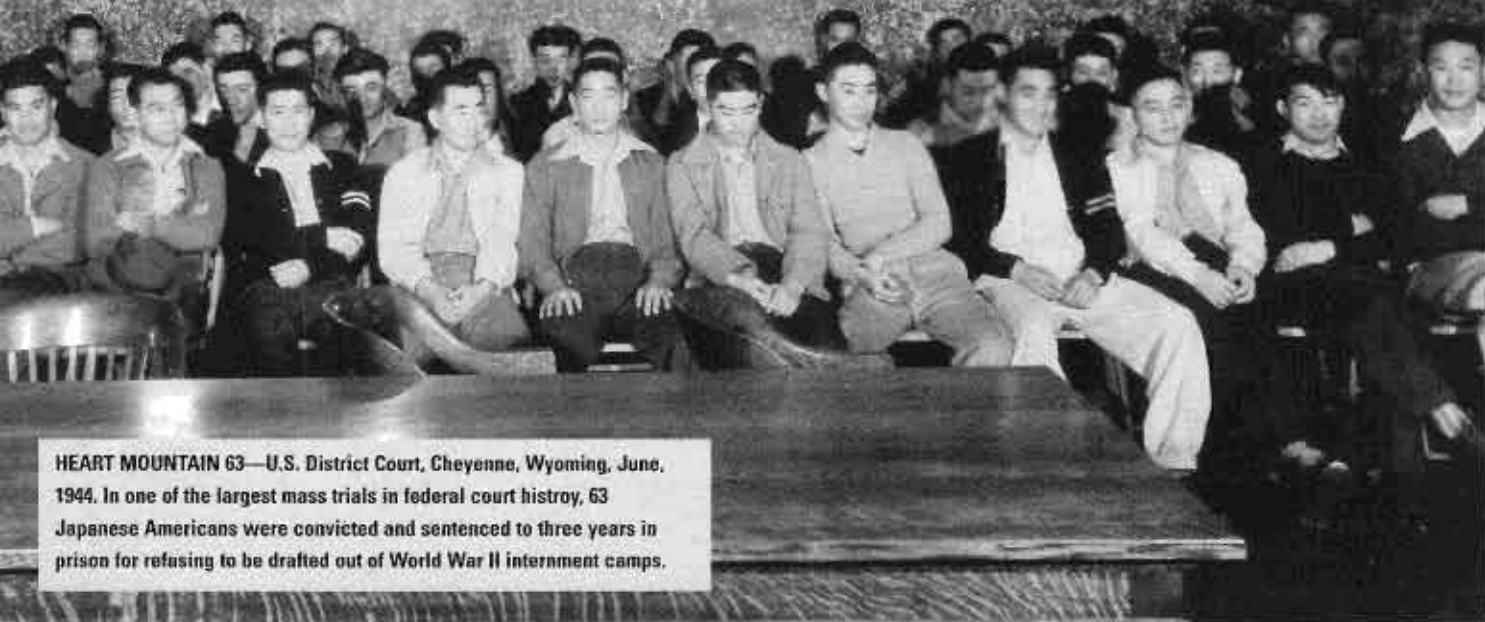
And that's ironic, because to make the Japanese American community "disappear" was once part of the government's final solution for the "Japanese problem." In a 1942 letter to then War Relocation Authority director Milton Eisenhower, Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) point man and government collaborator Mike Masaoka wrote:

"We do not relish the thought of Little Tokyo's springing up...for by doing so we are only perpetuating the very thing which we hope to eliminate: those mannerisms and thoughts which mark us apart... We hope for a one hundred percent American community."



Prior to their 1944 federal convictions, Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee leaders Frank Emi (left), Art Emi and Sam Horino are shown with a sympathetic Laramie, Wyoming resident "Mr. Adachi".

COMMITTEE AGAIN!



HEART MOUNTAIN 63—U.S. District Court, Cheyenne, Wyoming, June, 1944. In one of the largest mass trials in federal court history, 63 Japanese Americans were convicted and sentenced to three years in prison for refusing to be drafted out of World War II internment camps.

The Japanese American community's successful campaign to win redress and reparations for its World War II incarceration in government-run concentration camps sparked a long-dormant dialogue about "camp" and a review of Japanese America's history during the time it spent behind barbed wire. As the drive for redress gathered steam in the mid-1980s, those who had survived the unjust imprisonment revealed stories which added new clarity. A common thread in many of these living histories is the battle of principle which smoldered inside all of the internment camps, pitting young Japanese American internees willing to challenge the legality of the camps against fellow Japanese Americans collaborating with the government to stifle all debate.

And among the most compelling of these camp-time tales is the story of a courageous band of second-generation Nisei who braved FBI threats and betrayal by camp informants to become known as the Fair Play Committee and the Heart Mountain Draft Resisters. It is fitting that these men, now in their 70s and

80s, lead the community one last time on a mission to recover history.

The story of the Fair Play Committee and the Heart Mountain Draft Resisters took place 50 years ago at the Heart Mountain internment camp not far from Yellowstone National Park in the wilds of Wyoming. Frank Seishi Emi was 27 at the time. He was married and the father of two young children. A grocer in the San Fernando Valley prior to internment, Emi, plain-spoken, dignified and unpretentious, was a leader of the Fair Play Committee, a group born in the turmoil caused in the internment camp by the so-called Application for Leave Clearance loyalty questionnaire advocated by the collaborationist Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) and circulated by internment camp administrators in 1943.

Some background: In February of 1943, ten teams of specially trained Army officers arrived unannounced at the internment camps to administer loyalty questionnaires to the inmates. These questionnaires contained the infamous Question 27 (Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States

on combat duty, wherever ordered?) and Question 28 (Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any and all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power or organization?)

Personal Justice Denied, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians' report to Congress, detailed how these registration teams were greeted.

"The registration teams arriving at the centers during the first weeks of February 1943 found a hostile audience. In the past year, evacuees had endured the evacuation, the assembly centers and the relocation camps. Living conditions were poor, their lives outside the centers had disintegrated, and the government had broken many promises. Congressmen in Washington continued to agitate for stripping the Nisei of citizenship. Disturbances at Poston and Manzanar during the two previous months showed tensions that existed to some

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FAIR PLAY COMMITTEE

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degree at all the camps. It was not surprising that many were ready to question any government action that might affect their future, and there was considerable sentiment for putting the claims of family ahead of those of country."

Let the Fair Play Committee's Emi, now a resident of San Gabriel, Calif., take you back in time a half century to the Heart Mountain internment camp:

"My first involvement in the resistance movement began with the introduction of the so-called loyalty questionnaire... These questionnaires were ill-advised, poorly written and badly presented to the camps. The more I looked at it, the more disgusted I became. We were treated more like enemy aliens than American citizens...

"In January, 1944, the Mike Masaoka-Japanese American Citizens League-inspired draft law was introduced into the concentration camps—the end result of the dismal showing of the volunteer programs at centers. The draft issue became the most important topic of conversation in the camp... The Fair Play Committee took up the draft issue. We conducted public meetings to discuss all the ramifications of this program.

"Our two main speakers were Kiyoshi Okamoto and Paul Nakadate. The two speakers rather complemented each other. Okamoto was blunt in his speech and sometimes tended to get salty with his vocabulary. Paul, on the other hand, was smooth and polished. Guntaro Kubota did the Japanese translation for the Issei parents."

Up to 400 internees would jam these Fair Play Committee meetings at Heart Mountain. They unanimously endorsed the committee's stand. In all, there were some 200 dues-paying members of the FPC, however, not all who endorsed its stand actually refused conscription, understandably fearing imprisonment and family separation.

Contrary to widely accepted accounts that Japanese America, especially the first-generation Issei, resigned themselves to the internment, mouthing rationale like *shikata ga nai* ("There's nothing we can do"), support for organizations like the FPC and others like it at the other relocation centers represents solid evidence of resistance to the government edicts. It is not true that Japanese America went quietly to the camps. The Issei, who held most of the money in these camps, made their voices heard and views known by funding the activities of Nisei challenging the government's actions.

The Fair Play Committee issued three major bulletins to the general internee population. The first two were only informational in nature, but the third blew the lid off the whole situation by stating that the drafting of Nisei from concentration camps without restoration of their civil rights and rectification of the tremendous economic losses suffered by the internees was not



THE WAY WE WERE—Heart Mountain draft resisters pose in front of their wartime courtroom picture at a 1993 Japanese American Bar Association banquet. Seated from left are Teizo Matsumoto, Kei Yoshida, Tom Oki, Frank Emi, Toru Iino, Mits Koshiyama and James Kado. Standing are Akira Matsumoto (left) and Yosh Kuromiya.

only morally wrong but legally questionable. Under these conditions it was decided, the final bulletin noted, that members of the

77を必ず入る。

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THE RESISTANCE—the Heart Mountain Resisters shows at a 1993 Cal Poly Pomona program recognizing their stand and honoring Nisei archivist/author Michi Weglyn. Seated from left are Mits Koshiyama, former Rocky Shimpō editor James Omura, Michi Weglyn, Walter Weglyn and Manzanar camp activist Harry Ueno. Standing from left are Art Emi, Dave Kawamoto, Yosh Kuromiya, Frank Emi and Tak Hoshizaki.

FPC would refuse to report for physical examination or induction into the U.S. armed forces.

For the internment camp administrators, the committee's third bulletin provided the smoking gun they been waiting for. The seven most visible leaders of the Fair Play Committee were indicted and arrested by the FBI shortly after its distribution. But the movement the FPC had started would not be denied. A group of 63 Japanese Americans from Heart Mountain were first to defy their draft orders. They were tried in what was one of the largest mass trials in U.S. legal history in U.S. District Court in Cheyenne. Although the JAACL enlisted one-time Nisei dissident Min Yasui, who had since turned JAACL supporter and, some say, FBI special agent, and Joe Grant Masaoka, brother of JAACL czar Mike Masaoka, to scare the 63 young Nisei (in their late-teens to mid-20s) into dropping their protest by threatening they would be severely beaten by prison guards if convicted. Not one of the 63 changed his mind.

The week-long trial of the Heart Mountain 63 ended on June 20, 1944, two weeks after D-Day. They were all found guilty and sentenced to three years in federal prison. About 30 of the resisters served their time at McNeil Island Federal Penitentiary in the state of Washington. The

rest were sent to Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary in Kansas. A second group of 22 Heart Mountain draft resisters were convicted and sentenced later the same year.

On July 21, 1944, right around what normally might have been the start of Nisei Week in Little Tokyo, the Fair Play Committee Seven—Sam Horino, Minoru Tamesa, Ben Wakaye, Okamoto, Nakadate, Kubota and Emi—was charged in a separate case with conspiracy to violate the Selective Service Act and with counseling others to resist the draft. To the surprise of the FPC Seven, a Japanese American journalist from Denver, Colo., James Omura, editor of the Rocky Shimpō and a long-time critic of JAACL policy, was indicted along with them.

"We had never met Mr. Omura, and had never talked with him. We sent news items to him," recalls Emi. "He was the only editor to print our news releases, and the only person supporting us with editorials. He showed plenty of guts in doing this, but to charge a newsman with conspiracy for publishing news items was outrageous... Of course, the WRA-JAACL duo was behind this too."

In fact, even after the indictment and jailing of the FPC Seven and the draft resisters, the JAACL lobbied hard to deny them effective legal representation and continued to preach its official view that dissent was "bad publicity" and that "Nisei are sacrificing their rights for the opportunity to prove Japanese American loyalty with their blood."

Despite interference from the JAACL, The FPC Seven managed to retain noted constitutional law attorney A.L. Wirin as its defense counsel. Wirin cautioned the Japanese American defendants that their chances at the federal district court level were not good and that they would stand a better chance in appellate court. The attorney's assessment proved correct. During the District Court trial in Cheyenne, prosecutors produced a surprise witness, an informant working for the War Relocation Authority and the FBI. The snitch, a Nisei internee from Heart Mountain named Jack Nishimoto offered fabricated testimony aimed at bolstering the government's case against, most notably, Emi, who had talked circles around Heart Mountain internment camp director Guy Robertson during an interrogation in April of 1944.

The FPC Seven was convicted. Federal District Court Judge Eugene Rice sentenced them to four years each in Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary. Journalist Omura was acquitted, but his byline would not appear in print again for more than 40 years.

The Seven was held without bail during their appeal to the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals. The JAACL and WRA urged the courts not to extend bail to or release on parole any Japanese American draft resister.

The FPC and their supporters would pursue appeals for the 63 all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. An appellate court allowed the convictions to stand. The Supreme Court refused to hear the case.

Finally, a full 18 months after the surrender of Japan and the end of the war, the appellate court reversed the seven conspiracy convictions of the FPC Seven and acknowledged the principle for which they had fought, writing: "one with innocent motives, who honestly believe a law is unconstitutional and, therefore not obligatory, may well counsel that the law shall not be obeyed."

Today, nearly five decades after the fact, Japanese America is still searching for its history. What now passes as the community's wartime legacy is a cloying caricature so bizarre and unlikely that it merits only an obscure footnote to the larger American experience.

Japanese America's failure to struggle within itself to flesh out an honest legacy may have doomed it to have no self-identity at all. How can a community live with two diametrically opposed histories? The ques-

tion most commonly asked in any discussion of the wartime internment of Japanese Americans is "Why didn't they stand up for their rights, why didn't they resist?" Now that the cat is out of the bag, better questions might be: "Who suppressed the story of the Fair Play Committee and the Heart Mountain 63? Who has been denying Japanese America of its real history?"

On Feb. 21, 1993, members of Southern California's Japanese American community finally welcomed home members of the Fair Play Committee and Heart Mountain Draft Resisters in a salute held aptly in Little Tokyo at Centenary United Methodist Church. A group of the surviving resisters told their stories to a standing-room-only audience. Of the original Fair Play Committee Seven, five were unable to attend.

- Kiyoshi Okamoto, the inspirational chairman of the committee, was never heard from again following his release from prison. His whereabouts are unknown.
- Paul Nakadate, the articulate 29-year-old Los Angeles Nisei who assumed the helm of the FPC after the FBI took Okamoto away,

died at the age of 49 never telling his only son about his wartime stand.

- Guntaro Kubota, the only Issei was 44 and was the FPC's link to the Japanese-speaking parents of the resisters, passed away at the age of 62. Inspired by her father's wartime role, Grace Kubota Ybarra pursued a career in law.
- Minoru Tamesa (30 during the war) passed away in Seattle in his early 50s.
- Ben Wakaye, FPC's 30-year-old treasurer,

died shortly after the war in San Francisco.

- One of the original Heart Mountain 63, Dave Kawamoto passed away last year.
- Sam Horino, a founding member of the FPC, today lives quietly in Monterey Park, Calif.
- Frank Emi, still active at 77, teaches judo every week at the Hollywood Dojo.
- Crusading journalist James Omura died on June 19, 1994 in Denver, Colo., as this article was being prepared for publication. ■

FOR THE RECORD: Of the 120,313 Japanese Americans interned during World War II, a total of 19,963 Nisei were eligible for the draft.

- Those answering "No" "No", qualifying their answers or refusing to answer Questions 27 and 28 of the Leave Clearance Registration Form and who were eventually sent to the Tule Lake Segregation Center as "disloyals"—4,600.
- Although they claimed to be 30,000 strong, the JACL, according to their own admissions, had but 1,800 dues-paying members during the war. ■
- The total number of Nisei to volunteer from camp for the all-Japanese American combat units—1,181 (805 were accepted.)
- Total of members of the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee—200.
- Number of Heart Mountain internees to resist the draft—85.
- Total number of Nisei who resisted the draft and subsequently convicted, sentenced and served time in federal prisons—315. The resisters served about 27 months of their 36-month sentences. Then, finally, on Christmas Eve, 1947, President Harry S. Truman granted a Presidential Pardon to all Nisei who had resisted the draft. Their records were cleared and political and civil rights were restored. ■

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