

Unfocused L.A. Hearings: "A Circus of Freaks"

Sobstory Testimony of Nikkei Witnesses, Mob-Like Reaction of Spectators Hit Why Has the Commission Shunned Expert Testimony in Favor of Emotionalism?

Chinese American playwright/journalist Frank Chin has been researching the experience of Japanese Americans in America's World War II concentration camps for the past five years or so. He has been researching the histories of the Chinese and Japanese in America for more than a decade. Chin, creator of plays such as "Chicken Coop Chinaman," "Year of the Dragon," "Gee Pop" and "Oofy Goofy," attended both the Washington, D.C. and the Los Angeles hearings of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians. A couple of weeks ago, this lanky Asian guy walks up and says, "Hey, here's something I just wrote up about the hearings. . . . What do you think?" Well, after reading the 10-pages of stream of consciousness he handed me that day, I have come to feel that this former San Francisco State University and UC Davis faculty member's perceptions of the camps, Japanese America and the recent hearings ring painfully true.

—The Editor

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Ladies and gentlemen, friends. . .

The Los Angeles hearings of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians was a circus of freaks. Rep. Daniel E. Lungren sweats and looks desperate as the gallery became an audience at a show. They cheered, applauded, commented and Lungren sitting as chair, in place of Joan Bernstein, left them to clap and boo. They booed and jeered S.I. Hayakawa. They made Hayakawa look good. Hayakawa made the news.

Of course he made the news. Of course he's ridiculous and an asshole and everything everybody call dears old Sleepy Sam.

Who . . . who advised Lungren to allow applause and audience participation at the L.A. hearings to make the Japanese Americans look like a raving mob? No matter how they felt as individuals, the members of the audience joining in one big boo, with hate on their faces are wrong to mob Hayakawa. And Lungren is wrong to allow the guests to do anything more than listen. Applause is not proper in the courtroom. Congress, state legislatures and congressional commissions. The audience—if we must call it that—as Lungren did, attends at the whim of the chair. They are there to listen, not to influence the commission or the witnesses or attempt to . . . There was not applause at the Warren Commission on the Kennedy assassination. No applause at the war crime trials at Nuremberg. Applause in court at hearings is always extraordinary, never the accepted form.

After making news for booing Hayakawa, the Japanese Americans came into Room 1138, the auditorium of the state building in L.A. ripe for a fight. They came not to listen but to cheer their side at a sporting event. They applauded the good guys, fumbling out their sob stories full of proper-

program of yet another narrated slide show and panel of former internees remembering camp at Pine Methodist Church in San Francisco, or the Oakland Museum, 30 years of interviews, articles, panel discussions, forums, seminars, pilgrimages, where the Nisei have shown up to week in public. Amy Uno Ishii, late of L.A., had a slide show she worked on 'til the day she died. Jack and Dorothy Yamaguchi have been building and showing their slides for almost 20 years now. Aki and Juns Kurose speak to the American dream in

his organization's stand on redress. He was about to climax another JACL-inspired show. A good public show of Nisei veterans and vets organizations, laying their resolutions and great American slogans on the record. Kawaminami was disassociating the 100th 442nd from a letter to the editor by Lillian Baker, the blonde avenging angel. A Japanese flag taken as a was trophy was on display in Gardena. The Manzanar Committee objected. They took the flag as a racial slur. Lillian Baker's letter claimed the 442nd

hostile crowd. Where is the expert testimony? Where are the penologists, the cultural anthropologists, applied anthropologists sociologists? There certainly were enough of them working in the camps. Where are the psychologists, the historians? The experts and specialists?

It's clear the victims of the experience did not understand much beyond the immediate orbit of their family. They don't know what happened to anyone but themselves. And they're vague and full of protective rhetoric about that. They've read a few book and the Pacific Citizen, the Japanese American Citizens League weekly. They are neither technically nor temperamentally equipped to speak knowledgeably, factually and candidly about the depth, degree and kinds of damage they absorbed because of camp. They are victims still inhabiting the shock and horror of the unspeakable. They are not experts. No more experts than the victims of the Holocaust were experts on the Nazi's "Final Solution." The victims' testimony on damage done them by camp, is as expert as the testimony of the mentally retarded on retardation.

It is no accident that expert testimony has neither been sought nor encouraged by the commission. Unless the commission is so arrogant as to determine no experts on the camps and their effects on the various kinds and generation of Nikkei culture and history exist.

Michi Weglyn's research in the National Archives unearthed recently declassified government documents that confirm the Hollywood hint that the U.S. State Department looked on the camps as hostage reserves. The book she wrote with her research, "Years of Infamy," is universally recognized as the most original and thoroughly scholarly work on camps ever produced by a former internee. Ironically and sadly, she is not emotionally equipped to speak of her personal experience in the camps.

From the testimony heard in Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles, it's obvious everyone in the JACL, every Nikkei witness testifying before the commission, has read and memorized if not plagiarized whole sections of Weglyn's work. Her work is cited directly and indirectly in every piece written on the x camps since 1976. Michi Weglyn is a popularly recognized expert on the camps, the decision to create them and the damage they created.

She has neither briefed the staff or commissioners, nor appeared at the hearings. She was not even asked.

This is amazing, since no serious study of any aspect of the camps is complete without her.

Peter T. Suzuki, an anthropologist at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, has been doing a study on the camp anthropologists and sociologists for years. He finds all their social science "fishy." They and their Nisei "informants" and



Studs Terkel's "The American Dream." Pity! Pity! Pity! Open weeping. Wild applause.

At the commission hearings we are not hearing anything that has not been said before, by the WWII eager beaver social scientists of the Community Analysis Section of the War Relocation Authority. We're not hearing anything we haven't heard better said in the 1950s "Go For Broke!" a film directed by Robert Pirosh, starring Van Johnson and former members of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Dore Schary produced, Mike Masaoka was the technical consultant. No matter what else can be said about the former field secretary and executive-at-large of the JACL, the movie with his name on it is still the best, most complete, complex, detailed and dramatic portrait of Japanese America to come out of Hollywood, including "Hito Hata: Raise the Banner!"

Sob stories. Property loss. Financial ruin. Boo hoo. Camp set back my career 15 years, six promotions, 20 raises in pay and big bonuses. Boo hoo. Wild applause. No questions from the commission. Next panel of witnesses. The Nisei vets. Paul Oda testifies. Boom! Pearl Harbor on the radio. Shock. Executive Order 9066. Property loss. Financial ruin. Questions 27 and 28 of the loyalty oath. Some go "No No" with the answers and off to jail or Tule Lake. Some go "Yes Yes" on to the 442nd. Medals galore. Heroes overflowing the eyes of widows and Issei mothers. Constitutional wrongs. "Even as I was serving in my country's army, my parents were interned behind barbed wire . . . I want to know why!" Thomas Kinaga said, and Paul Oda much the same

vets organization joined her in supporting the display of the war trophy.

Then Lillian Baker stood up from the sixth row of the audience. "Be careful, because Lillian Baker is here" she said, rising to her aluminum four-legged cane. The crowd peered. "Sit down!" Then "Out! Out! Out!" and "Nazi!"

Lungren was slow, slower than slow about bringing his gavel into play and calling for order. Rachel Grace Kawasaki, a white woman stood on a chair by the witness table and faced the crowd and shook her fist, and shouted back at the crown, calling them racists. Lillian Baker leaped and hopped to the table and grabbed at the notes in Nisei vet Kawaminami's hands. The security police moved in. A white woman cop and a black male cop. A strange wrestling match between uniformed police, a Nisei vet in his 70s, Lillian Baker in her white pantsuit and hanging onto her four-legged cane, towering over him, and Rachel Grace Kawasaki standing on a chair. And the jeering crowd. It's as if Hayakawa was right about the "small but vocal minority."

The blonde woman cop and black male cop hustled Lillian Baker and Rachel Grace Kawasaki out of the hearing room, without drawing their batons or using much force. No scratches. No punches. A little shoving. A lot of grabbing of wrists, perhaps an elbow. And the crowd applauded.

The press was totally bewildered. The sob stories were dull, and bland. Sob after sob, and awww the poor pitiful people. We've heard stories like this before. The Great Depression. The Bonus Marches. The Hobo Jungles. Riding the rods. The Okies abandon-

auditorium of the state building in L.A. ripe for a fight. They came not to listen but to cheer their side at a sporting event. They applauded the good guys, fumbling out their sob stories full of property loss, financial ruin and woeful career development, the story of the father returning to the family in camp, two years later told again and again, and not as well as the sappy but efficient telling of the same true story in "Farewell to Manzanar."

Listen to the stories, friends. You've heard them all before, at so-called writer's conferences, in group therapy. The endless procession of newspaper-interview-famous Nisei bleeding the same stories before Asian American Studies classes that didn't use books. You've seen these tears before staining the mimeograph

Constitutional wrongs. Even as I was serving in my country's army, my parents were interned behind barbed wire... I want to know why!" Thomas Kinaga said, and Paul Oda much the same thing. Phil Shigekuni read a statement by the Nisei Medal of Honor winner—he won the Medal of Honor in Korea, not in Europe with the 442nd. Shigekuni, a member of the original John Tateishi JAACL redress committee, read the medal of honor winner's military record into the record of the commission. We've heard it before. What does it say about damage to Japanese America done by the executive order? Jim Kawaminami, president of the 100th/442nd Association, formerly of Amachi, was next after the applause.

The 100th/442nd Association president was winding up to pitch

the poor pitiful people. We've heard stories like this before. The Great Depression. The Bonus Marches. The Hobo Jungles. Riding the rods. The Okies abandoning the great Dust Bowl. Hardship. Ruin. Pulling on the bootstraps. The families following their soldier husbands and fathers, from camp to camp. Victim after victim. Soldier victims. Terminal Island victims. Issei victims. Pity me. Applause. Pity me. Pity me. Applause. Pity me, or else! Wild applause.

Vice chairman Lungren looked stoned, drunk, holding back nausea, mindblown and out of it. The crowd was in control. The victims and their mob. Of course they are victims. And of course the more they've repeated these stories from college campus to church meeting, from one kind of Asian American conference to Japanese American pilgrimage, the more aware they become of neither being heard nor understood.

The Japanese Americans at the L.A. hearing, in the audience and at the witness table were indulging themselves. Lungren five or six beats too late mumbles into

doing a study on the camp anthropologists and sociologists for years. He finds all their social science "fishy." They and their Nisei "informants" and "assistants" manipulated behavior, created Issei fanatics, they reported the fanatics to military intelligence officers posted at the camps. The shoddiness of the published scientific work and the egregious violations of scientific methods and ethnics are defended rather than denied by the former camp social scientists, not emeritus and the "establishment" of their disciplines Suzuki's scholarly articles exposing the excesses and patriotically-motivated violations of scientific ethics have been kept out of the "American Anthropologist" by the former mad scientists of the camps.

The books by the former camp social scientists that Suzuki's work and research cast doubt upon, include Leighton's "The Governing of Men," Thomas and Nishimoto's "The Spoilage" and "The Salvage," Rosalie Hankey Wax's, "Doing Fieldwork," the Community Analysis Section reports to the War Relocation Authority and the result-

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incomprehensible in the flakey theatrics raised by all the performers. Applause.

Arthur Goldberg leaned back in his thickly-uphstered chair to make a brief statement before he left the L.A. hearings early, because of his slipped disc. He was disturbed by the "hatred" he saw on the faces of the crowd today. He said he wanted to remove the hatred, "Dilon Myer is not a racist," he said, and mentioning his long friendship with Myer. He said Myer was a "victim of circumstance. He had an impossible situation foisted on him. He didn't do as well as he wanted. They were camps. Don't quibble over the word, 'concentration.' They were camps. Japanese Americans were forced into camps, on as short as 24 hours notice. Massive property loss. Financial ruin. Mental anguish. Family insecurity. American citizens were imprisoned without being charged or given a hearing

in clear violation of the constitution. The basis for imprisonment was race. Those are the facts.

"I make an appeal," Goldberg continued. "Let's get rid of this hatred. Let's get rid of this division..." Goldberg carried on for 20 or 30 rambling grandfatherly mellowing minutes. He was the great grandpa scolding his beloved grandchildren, giving them a lesson in manners. He was also, indirectly, scolding Lungren for a sloppy hold on his gavel. Lungren was defeated, crestfallen. Perhaps it was jetlag. All he could do was drop flosssweat and and look around the room like a lost boy in need of his mother.

Goldberg repeated the facts of short notice, property loss, financial ruin, no habeas corpus, no charges, no hearings, mass imprisonment in many and wonderful ways. The plain facts took wonderful forms in his contemplative old man's drift, like plain bread and American cheese whip becoming an array of charming canapes. The crowd loved him. He cared. He loved them. And they gave him a standing ovation. After all his mellowing lessons in manners, the audience was still out of control. The chair was still weak and the hearings still unfocused.

—FRANK CHIN