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A Desert Winter of Discontent...

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A Desert Winter of Discontent: Cultural Politics in the  
Gila River Relocation Center, 1942-1943

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On the Tuesday evening of January 5, 1943, a sumptuous New Year's banquet was spread before the invited guests gathered in the barracks mess hall of Block 16 in the Canal Camp of the Gila River Relocation Center in arid southcentral Arizona. Among the honored guests at the head table were four members of Canal's War Relocation Authority (WRA) administration: Luke Korn, the assistant project director; Morton Gaba, the assistant director of community services; W. E. Williamson, the director of internal security; and Francis Frederick, an associate director of internal security. Balancing the administrative personnel at the head table were four members of the interned Japanese American camp population: Charles Yonezu, captain of the wardens (i.e., internee policemen); Joseph Omachi, legal counsel; Kenzo Ogasawara, the editor of the Japanese section of the Gila News-Courier; and Mr. Omai, block chairman of Block 16.

Arrayed around the other tables in the mess hall were some 150 internees (both from the Canal camp and from the neighboring Butte camp, which together comprised the Gila River Relocation Center). Twenty or so of these internee guests were women who, along with the men, were very elegantly attired; virtually all were affiliated with one or more of three Canal organizations--the Kenkyu-Kai (study or investigative group); the Engeibu (dramatic society); and the Sumo Club.

The host for the evening was a prominent member of the Kenkyu-Kai who, however, held no official place in Canal's chain of command. His name was Kiyoshi Tani. A graduate of Japan's prestigious Waseda University, he now acted at the Gila center as reporter and distributor for the Rocky Nippon, a semiweekly Japanese



American newspaper whose publication offices were located in Denver, Colorado. It was Tani who had personally compiled the guest list from among the more than 13,000 residents who called the Gila River center their wartime home.

To start the evening's festivities, which commenced at about 7:30 p.m., Tani himself delivered a welcoming speech in Japanese. Herein he expressed his pleasure, on behalf of the Rocky Nippon, that so many of those invited had seen fit to attend, adding that he hoped they would eat heartily of the upcoming meal and enjoy thoroughly the after-dinner entertainment. He then called upon Assistant Project Director Korn to say a few words. Korn, after extending Project Director Leroy Bennett's apologies for missing this gala affair, announced that a new administrative facility for the Canal camp would soon be ready for occupancy, explained that Canal's appointed personnel were always receptive to discussions with internees on matters affecting their individual and corporate problems, and communicated his hope that those living in Canal would receive the best attention and service. This ended the speechmaking and set the stage for the dinner.

And what a resplendent repast the diners had catered for them by the special staff of internee cooks Tani had hired for the occasion. As one of the honored guests, Joseph Omachi, later recalled: "The main course of the dinner itself was fried chicken, a delicacy which had never been served at any time [before] . . . at this project, [while] mock turtle soup, pineapple and cottage cheese salad, vegetables, fruits, apple pie, jello, soda water and coffee supplied the trimmings." Additionally, these Western dishes were supplemented by an assortment of traditional Japanese ones.

Moreover, while helping themselves to this elaborate dinner, the guests were treated by Tani to bourbon highballs. Not only did he see that everyone present was served with these highballs and that bottles of bourbon and soda water were placed on each table for refills, but Tani also made his way over to the head table and personally



poured the drinks for those seated there, remarking with a sly smile as he did so: "Have some Japan tea."

As the meal progressed, it was periodically punctuated by toasts to one of the older male Kenkyu-Kai members present, Chota Hirokane. Overall, a mood of revelry and celebration pervaded the evening which, after a lengthy and tiring program of entertainment, finally came to a close about 11:00 p.m.<sup>1</sup>

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The foregoing scene, drawn from the World War II concentration camp experience of evacuated Japanese Americans, abounds in interpretive possibilities. Certainly one interpretation would be to see in this event validation that in the camps harmony and good will prevailed between the WRA administrators and the interned Japanese Americans. Consonant with this interpretation is the idea that the Japanese Americans, however much they deplored their evacuation and incarceration, appreciated nonetheless their kindly liberal keepers in the camps and were committed to a policy of cooperation with administrative directives. While such an interpretation is soothing to the consciences of those committed to seeing all historical experience in America, however horrendous, emerge ultimately in the guise of progress, it is not an interpretation capable of bearing close scrutiny. It was precisely this sort of interpretation toward occurrences like the incident depicted above at Canal, though, which dominated the literature on the camps through the 1960s.<sup>2</sup>

An alternative interpretation of the incident, one which owes less to chauvinistic imperatives, is that it represented a strategic species of cultural politics mounted by a portion of the interned population against the white WRA leaders and their accommodationist accomplices among the Japanese Americans. This type of



interpretation resonates with the resistance historiography which quickened into vitality in the early 1970s and has gained momentum since that time.<sup>3</sup>

It is in the interest of extending and deepening this resistance historiography that the present essay is addressed. In 1977, the leading spokesperson for resistance scholarship, Gary Okihiro, after reviewing the progress to date of revisionist writers and noting the barriers impeding their interpretive path, offered this advice: "What is needed are a number of micro-studies which demonstrate the historical validity of . . . [our] claim." This microstudy pertinent to the Gila River center should be viewed as a response to Okihiro's expressed need.<sup>4</sup>

The key documentation upon which this particular monograph is based consists of an array of unpublished studies written by Robert F. Spencer, a University of California-sponsored Japanese American and Resettlement Study (JERS) anthropologist stationed at the Gila center, and his corps of Japanese American research associates on the project. Working under the absentee direction of Berkeley sociologist Dorothy Swaine Thomas, this team of young and inexperienced social-science researchers assembled a remarkable documentary record of one of the most turbulent periods in the camp's history, the winter months of 1942-1943. While much of the record they compiled suffers somewhat in the area of ethnographic sophistication, it is nonetheless quite notable for its breadth of coverage and degree of candor. Somewhat surprisingly, this record has not heretofore commanded the systematic attention of historians concerned with the camps.<sup>5</sup>

Particularly for those interested in the topic of resistance within the camps, however, this neglect has not been salutary. For not only does the record provided by the Gila research team permit the reconstruction, in telling detail, of so colorful an event as the New Year's dinner depicted at the outset of the present study, but also it facilitates the placement of that event within the context of resistance activity both



at the Gila center and throughout the other nine WRA camps. Moreover, the documentation in question promotes an enlarged understanding of the relationship of resistance activity in the camps to a special brand of cultural politics practiced there whereby the function of politics was largely moral, psychological, and cultural and wherein to commit oneself politically became a form of personal and collective salvation.

So as to capitalize upon this rich sociocultural documentation, a methodological approach adapted from a late development in the field of American culture studies is employed as an analytical and explanatory tool. The tack taken involves treating the dinner given by Tani at the Canal camp not merely as an interesting historical event but rather as a "representative paradigm drama." Some definitions are in order. Here "paradigm" refers to an exemplary cultural act within a given community. As for "paradigm drama," this metaphor is drawn from the theater so as to point up the dynamic, transactional nature of a cultural act, the continual dialogue between actors and audience. Finally, "representative paradigm drama" is meant to convey a cultural act, like the Tani dinner, which dramatizes the "inherent possibilities in a cultural situation . . . which spotlight[s] changing boundaries of what is possible for a person or a group at a particular time and in a particular place and in a particular milieu."<sup>6</sup>

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The first order of business is to return to the New Year's dinner at Canal and subject it to a strategic reading so as to transcend the mere telling of a story and open up a cultural situation. Maybe a suitable place to enter this "cultural text" is with the recipient of all the toasts at the banquet. So far only his name (Chota Hirokane), his age (elderly); and an organizational affiliation (Kenkyu-Kai) have been



established. What is not yet known is why Chota Hirokane had been invited to attend the Tani dinner on January 5, 1943, and the reason for his being repeatedly regaled throughout the evening. Maybe by finding out answers to these questions the lean impression of the event under scrutiny can be converted into a thicker comprehension of its contextual significance.

To realize this aim, however, an extended backwards reading of the cultural text must be undertaken so as to correlate the dinner with another event that occurred in the Canal camp a little more than a month earlier, the brutal beating of a Canal internee by the name of Takeo Tada. On the evening of November 30, 1942, Tada was waylaid by five other internees and severely battered about the head and left arm with clubs wielded by his assailants. Of these, Tada was able (or at least chose) to identify only one man, Chota Hirokane. Upon being taken in for questioning by the camp's Internal Security Department, Hirokane, an Issei (first-generation Japanese American) father of seven children, readily acknowledged his guilt. He confessed that he had acted alone, though with the full consent of the community and for their collective welfare, and that his action had been inspired by a desire to bring to the attention of the camp administration the grievances of the particularly disaffected Issei population. Within the next few days, a hearing was held for Hirokane within the camp, his guilt affirmed by verdict of Acting Project Director Robert Cozzens, and a six-month sentence in the nearby Pinal County jail (with all but one month suspended upon good behavior) meted out to him. On January 5 of the ensuing year, Hirokane was released to the Canal camp where he was treated, as the toasts to him at the Tani dinner that evening testified, not as a hit man but rather as a returning hero.<sup>7</sup>

It seems quite evident as to why Hirokane's avowed complicity in the beating of Tada had elevated him to the status of a cultural hero: Tada was seen as a traitor in the eyes of the camp community. A Nisei (second-generation Japanese American) by



birth, Tada belonged to that category of Japanese Americans who, because they had been sent to Japan by their Issei parents for their education, were classified as Kibei. Unlike most of the Kibei, however, whose cultural and linguistic background predisposed them toward an identification with the ideas, beliefs, and values of the Issei, Tada thought and behaved like the typical Nisei. A prewar graduate of Fresno State College, located in the agricultural heartland of central California, he was at the time of the evacuation employed in Los Angeles as the secretary of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce, a position which involved him in constant interaction with representatives of the non-Japanese commercial and civic communities. This is no doubt why, after his arrival at the Turlock (California) Assembly Center on May 17, 1942, he was appointed by the Wartime Civilian Control Administration (WCCA) manager there as one of four members on the Center Council, whose main role consisted of being liaisons between Turlock's administration and internees.<sup>8</sup>

Interestingly enough, another appointed member of the Center Council at Turlock was Joseph Omachi who, it will be recalled, would later occupy one of the seats at the head table during the Tani dinner. A Nisei graduate of the University of California and its Hastings College of Law, Omachi had been a practicing attorney in the California community of Stockton before his internment at Turlock Assembly Center. At Turlock, he coupled his duties on the Center Council with being chairman of the Public Welfare and Sanitation Department, in which position he had close contact with Takeo Tada. This was because Tada was assigned to the department as a foreman with particular responsibility for the development and execution of clothing allowance policies. It was while serving in this capacity that Tada's troubles began.

How these troubles came about is too convoluted a tale to convey here except to say that Tada became a victim of circumstances during the chaotic summer months of 1942 when the majority of the Turlock Assembly Center population was transferred



to the Canal camp of the Gila center and the reins of administrative leadership passed from the WCCA to the WRA (i.e., from a military to a civilian agency). During this interval of double transition, a sizeable portion of the transferees were deprived of duly expected clothing issues. Since Tada was associated in their minds with the matter of clothing requisitions, it was widely held that it was owing in great part to his negligence that they had been denied allotments which, as they later discovered in the Gila center, had been received by transfers from other assembly centers.

Moreover, Tada earned the deepened enmity of Turlockians at this same time because the confusion attendant upon the impending transfer to Gila also contributed to many internees being shorted their share of the coupon books used for making purchases at the center store. This situation was especially endemic among the large contingent of bachelor Issei and Kibei men housed in the single-men barracks. When the project director informed those affected that the supply of books had been exhausted and that no more would be forthcoming, Tada was assigned the thankless task of translating this grim news in Japanese to those not conversant in English. So angered were the bachelors by this news that they "pushed over the small booth that had been used for the issuance of coupon books and threatened the administration building." Once again, Tada was linked in the minds of the Turlock internees with the frustration of their fortunes.<sup>9</sup>

Upon Tada's transfer to the Canal camp in Arizona in late July of 1942, a hangover of community hatred followed him there. Continually taunted by the others from Turlock (representing more than 3,000 people, or approximately sixty percent of Canal's population) about his alleged role in bringing on their misfortune, it was even rumored that he, along with others, might have profited by the policies pursued at Turlock (a rumor whose credibility was augmented by the allegation that Turlock's former director had been convicted for bribery and graft and was currently in prison).



For a few months at Canal, while the community adjusted to the desert heat and struggled with alleviating a severe housing shortage, Tada was spared the full fury of his accusers. But this situation changed once the camp became more settled. By September voices were being raised demanding an explanation from Tada as to what had transpired at Turlock. In response, Tada enlisted the aid of associates like Joseph Omachi to assist him in convincing the camp population of his innocence of any wrongdoing. The scorn for Tada was so great, however, that not only were his explanations turned aside with a deaf ear, but those such as Omachi who insisted that Tada was not culpable "were regarded with contempt and . . . branded as being in conspiracy to the alleged wrong."<sup>10</sup>

Nor did Tada's assorted involvements in Canal in any way lessen community animosity toward him. Indeed, virtually every aspect of his participation at Canal exacerbated his notoriety. A signal case in point was his selection by the camp administration to the post of chief internee assistant in the Community Activities Section (CAS) of the camp's Community Services Division. This position entailed his having primary responsibility for supervising the development of entertainment activities and the formation of organized clubs among the internees. One unavoidable problem connected with this job which contributed to heightening Tada's unpopularity was an acute lack of needed equipment and supplies. Had it not been for Tada's troubles with clothing and coupon books at Turlock, however, this shortage might charitably have been construed by those at Canal as falling outside his province of control. But a perspective once formed, especially in the crucible of communal passion, is extremely difficult to revise. Thus, the Canal community tarred Tada with the Turlockian brush and assigned blame for the shortage to favortism, neglect of duty, and probable malfeasance on his part.<sup>11</sup>



While the last two of these charges had been the chief causes for Tada's castigation at the assembly center, in Canal he was held most accountable for the sin of favoritism. A prime example of his favoritism was his supposed differential treatment of two internee groups, the University Club and the Kibei Club. Whereas the University Club was granted official recognition by CAS and provided with a recreation hall in which to hold their meetings, the Kibei Club was accorded neither recognition nor a place to meet. Ultimate responsibility for Kibei Club nonrecognition rested with Tada's two Caucasian superiors in CAS, Morton Gaba (who headed up community services in the Canal camp) and Luther Hoffman (who presided over community services for the entire Gila center), but it was Tada who had to communicate and defend their policy decision to the Kibei Club petitioners. In fact, on the very evening of his beating, Tada had gone to a gathering of the Kibei Club dutifully to explain precisely what steps were required before their petition for formal recognition would be honored: (1) to accept an administratively appointed executive secretary to coordinate their affairs; and (2) to conduct their proceedings in the English rather than the Japanese language.

It was pervasively and perfervidly believed in the Canal community, perhaps with some justification, that Tada in this instance was not merely the transmitter of administrative policy but rather the individual who, through his suggestions, had been instrumental in its conception. It was certainly consistent with his general outlook that he should look favorably upon a group like the University Club and hamstring the operations of one like the Kibei Club. After all, the University Club had a membership of some thirty-five to forty Nisei, most of whom were university graduates like Tada himself. Moreover, the orientation of the membership tended, like his own, to be aggressively American, as seen through the club's active promotion of such causes in camp as the Americanization program, the camouflage net factory (a war industry with employment restricted to citizen workers), and enlistment in the Army's Military



Intelligence Japanese Language School (whereby volunteers would be trained to place their sharpened Japanese language skills at the service of the American war effort against Japan). Still further, many of the men and women in the University Club had held prewar membership in the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), a group which during the evacuation had come to be generally reviled by the evacuees for allegedly having gone so far in their accommodation with government authorities as to supply them with the names of those in the community, particularly Issei and Kibei, whom they regarded as subversive or potentially subversive to the American cause. So great, in fact, was the animosity toward the JACL by the time of the community's incarceration in assembly centers that many of the leaders were tagged with the pernicious lable of inu (dog; informer) and threatened with or administered beatings, while the WCCA administration was obliged prudently to adopt a policy disallowing formal organization by JACL chapters.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast, the Kibei Club, which could boast a membership of between two and five hundred Kibei men and women, was an organization dedicated to the promotion of the Japanese cultural heritage. Owing to their limited English language skills and relative unfamiliarity with American political and social processes, they were relegated for the most part by the administration to a decidedly second-class status within the internee supervisorial structure. This was especially the case for those Kibei who had returned to their native land from Japan in the years just prior to the outbreak of World War II. Partly because of frustration and resentment over being spurned and placed on the defensive, the membership of the Kibei Club came to champion things identifiable with the Japanese way of life--language, literature, customs, communal practices, and cultural arts. Disgruntled with the general disinterest in or disaffinity for their Japanese heritage exhibited by many Nisei (and "renegade Kibei" like Takeo Tada), those active in the Kibei Club forged a close alliance with



now volunteered themselves at Canal as workers in the camouflage net factory and as teachers for the Army Intelligence Japanese Language School.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps because of his bilingual abilities, his experience as a member of the Center Council at the Turlock Assembly Center, and his popularity among the Nisei residents of his block, Takeo Tada was elected as the representative for Block 9 on the Temporary Community Council. The person tapped to chair the Canal council was Dr. William Furuta, a bacteriologist who had earned a doctorate degree from the University of Illinois and while interned at Turlock had been Tada's supervisor. Moreover, Tada's fellow councilman at Turlock and defender of his actions there, Joseph Omachi, was appointed by the Canal administration to chair a special constitutional commission charged with drawing up provisions for a permanent community council. It is worth noting, too, that Teizo Yahanda, an Issei graduate of the University of California and an outspoken advocate of both the JACL and Nisei political leadership in the camp, was active in council affairs and served on a committee of the constitutional commission chaired by Omachi.<sup>15</sup>

By way of foreshadowing, it has already been mentioned that Omachi would be found at the head table during the Tani dinner. But it should be stated here that, had they not declined Tani's invitation, Omachi would have had both William Furuta and Teizo Yahanda to share his table with him that winter evening. Still another potential occupant of the head table was Luther Hoffman, Tada's aforementioned reigning chief in the camp's Community Services Division, under whose supervision and with whose sanction the Temporary Community Council functioned. Hoffman was among the most vocal supporters in the Canal administration on behalf of a citizenship requirement for council membership. Like Furuta and Yahanda, however, he demurred from accepting Tani's dinner invitation. Nonetheless, Morton Gaba, his representative in Canal and a



man who also let it be known that he favored an all-citizen council, was one of Tani's honored New Year's guests.<sup>16</sup>

Although the Temporary Community Council was the only officially recognized representative body during the early period of Canal's existence, it was not the most powerful internee political organization. Months before its formation in October of 1942, during the scorching summer days when Canal was only beginning to take on the semblance of a settled community, each residence block (comprising roughly 250 to 300 people) either elected or had appointed by a block delegation a temporary block manager to look after matters associated with the physical well-being of the block and to meet the needs of the families residing there. In almost every instance the person filling this position was a male Issei, a fact consistent with the Japanese cultural theme governing age and gender expectations for people commanding authority in the community. Unlike the members of the Temporary Community Council, block managers were regarded as part of the camp work corps and received a small stipend from the government for their services. It was understood that these temporary block managers were, after November of 1942, to have their posts confirmed through a general election in their respective blocks. But in most instances, such elections were never held, and the same individuals simply continued discharging duties on a permanent basis.

Notwithstanding the intention of the WRA and the camp administration to restrict block managers to nonpolitical functions and to reserve all political power to the citizen representatives on the Temporary Community Council, in practice what happened was that "the office of block manager became virtually a political one in the community and . . . in the hands of the block manager rested the disposition of community affairs and the execution of the details of community government." This state of affairs came about in two ways. The first way was through the activities of



the block councils and the second was through applying pressure, via the block councils, upon block representatives to the Temporary Community Council.<sup>17</sup>

In each block a group of invariably older Issei men coalesced around the block manager to constitute a block council. This council served as the block's moving political spirit through controlling the decisions made in periodically held block meetings, which were generally conducted in Japanese and attended primarily by Issei. While many Nisei attended these meetings, their participation was limited. This passivity was partially because they were unable to express themselves freely and unabashedly in Japanese and partially owing to the meetings being transacted in a patriarchal Japanese fashion wherein the tendency was for "the older men to come forward to voice themselves and to [then] look with scorn and annoyance on those younger people who attempted to make themselves heard."<sup>18</sup>

Though it was the block council which decided when such meetings were required, the meetings themselves were called for and presided over by the block chairman, who not infrequently was the same person as the block manager. Unlike the block manager, this person occupied an unpaid position; like the block manager, however, the chairman was almost without exception an older Issei male (such as Chota Hirokane, the alleged assailant of Takeo Tada, who held this position in Block 7). In any event, the chairman worked closely with the manager and both were regarded as potent political forces in their block.

Since, however, the manager, chairman, and other members of the block council were obliged to elect a citizen representative to the Temporary Community Council for deciding upon matters pertaining to the entire community, they sought to instruct this representative on how to vote on council issues. When councilmen resisted guidance by voting independently or in deference to the desires of the camp administration, the Issei leadership in the block resorted to criticism and censure, both directly and



indirectly though the neighborhood and the family. A handful of councilmen disregarded this pressure for awhile, but ultimately even these recalcitrant few chose to comply or tendered their resignation from the council.

Still the existence of the Council rankled the Issei leadership in the camp. When in September its projected creation and planned composition was communicated by the WRA, a resolution to extend eligibility on the Community Council to noncitizens was drafted by dissenting Issei and circulated among the population of the entire Gila center. Although this resolution succeeded in securing the support of twenty-one blocks, the WRA rebuffed the resolution on the grounds that: (1) the Nisei required a demonstration by the government that their American citizenship was not valueless; and (2) the Nisei were generally more Americanized than the Issei, thus making it more likely that "the general character of the action taken by the community council will be more in keeping with American institutions and practices."<sup>19</sup>

And it was the general character of the action taken by the Temporary Community Council which continued to disturb the Issei leadership. Whereas they could control the voting of the councilmen, they could not prevent the camp administration from placing before the Council issues whose very character were deemed offensive and contrary to the general welfare of the community. One such issue was the proposed camouflage net factory. This proposal was objectionable to the Issei for several related reasons. First, Issei as aliens were not permitted under international law to be engaged in war work; second, Nisei employed in the factory were enabled to earn as much as triple the wages they received previously within the stringent wage structure prevailing for center employment; third, the displacement of Nisei workers from their center employment in places like the block mess halls meant that these physically demanding jobs for the most part would have to be discharged by less robust Issei women; and fourth, work in the net factory by Nisei was wrong because it would



aid in "the killing of their cousins in Japan." Although the councilmen were under a great deal of community pressure to repudiate the net factory, they had the idea forced upon them through administrative pressure from the project director and the Employment of Division. That a benefit from the net factory would accrue to the community in the form of a revolving fund made up from monies earned by its Nisei workers was not a point satisfactorily communicated by the councilman--in great measure because the community either was not willing to listen to such a scheme or believed that its allocation by the Temporary Community Council would fall into the existing pattern of preferential treatment. So it went also with other issues foisted upon the Community Council by the camp administration such as the recruitment of volunteers for the Army language school.<sup>20</sup>

Nor did it enhance the image of the Council to have such issues featured and accorded support as they regularly were in the pages of the center newspaper, the Gila News-Courier. Part of the problem was the nature of the paper itself, which served as little more than a mouthpiece for communicating WRA and center administration policies while simultaneously spotlighting strictly Nisei social activities and concerns. Another part of the problem was the editor, Ken Tashiro. Born in New England, Tashiro was an older Nisei of about thirty-five years of age who lacked a speaking knowledge of Japanese until after graduation from high school. More damaging to his reputation in the Issei view, however, was Tashiro's close association with Larry Tajiri, editor of the JACL's official organ, the Pacific Citizen. Moreover, Tashiro was one of the principal leaders of the JACL chapter in Gila's Butte camp (and the first chapter to be chartered within any of the ten WRA centers).<sup>21</sup>

The situation involving Tashiro and the News-Courier points up a larger phenomenon--the feeling of frustration on the part of the Issei that "practically all of the key positions at the project under the administration were being manned by the



Nisei and Kibei . . . . [and] that the younger element in the community were being given positions of responsibility out of proportion to their ability and experience and that those positions should be filled by more capable Issei workers."<sup>22</sup>

This problem had its roots in the assembly centers. At Turlock, for example, only one of the four members of the Community Council appointed by the WCCA administration was an Issei, and that individual was a woman predisposed to view matters from a Nisei perspective. And the problem was extended at Canal where not only the newspaper editor but the internee head of such crucial areas as housing, clothing, and recreation all held citizen status. While this situation corresponded with WRA policy, it often produced unfortunate consequences. A striking example was the selection by the Gila administration of two men for the crucial position of central block manager for Butte and Canal. Since the person holding this job was expected to coordinate with the block managers all matters connected with the physical conditions of their blocks, he necessarily had to be someone the managers respected and trusted. As it turned out, neither appointee could command either respect or trust. At Butte, the post was given to an older Hawaiian-born Nisei, Henry Miyake, who was an active leader in the movement to establish the JACL chapter there. At Canal, the central block manager was an Issei, but he was the earlier mentioned Teizo Yahanda, whose involvement with the Temporary Community Council and his consistent advocacy of cooperation with the camp administration caused him to be ignored by the block managers.<sup>23</sup>

By November of 1942, it was apparent to the disaffected Issei leadership that they needed to take more drastic action than protesting formally to the government and applying informal advice about voting to the Temporary Community Council representatives. It was one thing to ignore Central Block Manager Yahanda, but in the meantime problems falling within his province persisted: living quarters remained



inadequate, stoves were still not forthcoming, food was not what it should be, clothing allowances continued in arrears, and toilet and washing facilities were abominable. It was general welfare issues like these which the Issei leaders believed should properly be occupying the time and attention of the Temporary Community Council and the camp newspaper, not such divisive and inflammatory items as the camouflage net factory, the Army language school, and the JACL. The problems suffered by the community would never have happened, it was argued, if the government, the Army, the WRA, and the camp authorities had possessed the wisdom to work through the natural leadership of the Japanese American community rather than through an artificially created "leadership" of inexperienced, incompetent, and misguided citizen appointees like Takeo Tada and his crowd.<sup>24</sup>

If, to steal and modify a phrase from Christopher Lasch, up to this point the Issei had offered political solutions for what were essentially cultural problems ( i.e., the destruction of traditional community arrangements), they were now prepared to offer cultural solutions for an overarching political problem (i.e., being at the mercy of external forces over which they had little control). One cultural solution was the somewhat passive act of assigning generalized blame for their plight to the United States as a country while simultaneously seeking succour through romanticized recollections of their early lives in the villages of rural Japan. This solution cauterized the wound in the heart and served in some measure as a means of regaining a sense of personal inner wholeness.<sup>25</sup>

A more vital and active cultural solution to the Issei problem, however, was strategically and systematically to create a new sense of community by using the cultural resources at their disposal. If as a result of social



engineering they had been victimized by institutional arrangements undermining their personal and collective identities, what was now called for was a brand of cultural politics which at one and the same time refashioned their institutions into recognizable traditional forms and brought about a transformation of identity. Specifically, the Caucasian administration and their internee accomplices needed to be educated to a more humanistic point of view. To bring this about, though, some unattractive means would have to be employed. As one historian has properly observed, "cultural politics is not . . . a completely attractive phenomenon . . . [since] tribalism does things . . . from which it is natural to recoil." But the ends sought in this instance were moral. If the psychological division within the Canal population was to be healed, what needed to be ushered in was a more traditional Japanese cultural order wherein communal responsibility was exalted over personal aggrandizement. To create such a community, the Issei had to affect consciousness as well as political arrangements, a goal which could be realized more readily through appeals to internalized cultural impulses than to any explicit ideology.<sup>26</sup>

It is precisely in this sense, then, that one can grasp the seemingly spontaneous emergence of the Kenkyu-Kai in Canal during the late fall of 1942. While this study or investigative group constituted of Issei and Kibei probably took root in the Turlock Assembly Center at the time of the complaints over the clothing and coupon books, it was the crisis at Canal that called forth the Kenkyu-Kai's fullest potential as a political-cum-cultural pressure group. Although total membership for the group defies exact enumeration, the available documentation suggests that more than five hundred men, mostly Issei family heads, were included in its ranks. Mere numbers, though, are deceptive—for two reasons. On the one hand, most of the



membership was passive, with the activities of the Kenkyu-Kai largely controlled by a few Issei leaders (much as in the block meetings). On the other hand, the influence of the Kenkyu-Kai, especially at critical moments, radiated out from its active nucleus to encompass not only its own membership but a considerable portion--perhaps even the majority--of the total camp population.

The preponderant influence of the Kenkyu-Kai came about in part because its membership overlapped with and interpenetrated a medley of other formal and informal internee groups emphasizing Japanese cultural forms and practices--e.g., the Engeibu (dramatic society), the Sumo Club, the Bungei-Kai (literary society), the Kibei Club, the Zen Buddhists, the Judo Club, the Goh-Shogi organization (Chess and Checker Club), and assorted gambling houses. In addition, the Kenkyu-Kai could mobilize the support of the staff of the camp's large Mess Operations staff, since it was dominated by Issei.<sup>27</sup>

A more powerful reason for the Kenkyu-Kai's pervasive influence in Canal was the nature of that camp's population. Unlike the neighboring Butte camp which was compounded of people drawn from a mixed urban, suburban, and rural background with cultural allegiances more evenly distributed between traditional Japanese affiliations (e.g., Buddhism and kenjin-kai or prefectural organizations) and more modern, Americanized ones (e.g., Christianity and the JACL), in Canal the overwhelming majority of the population derived from rural areas (California's Sacramento delta and San Joaquin valley) where the hold of Japanese behavior was evident not only among the Issei and Kibei but also the Nisei. Because of this cultural hegemony, it was much easier for the Kenkyu-Kai leadership to mobilize massive support when the situation required them to do so--support which cut across lines of class, gender, generation, and geographical origins.<sup>28</sup>



As for that leadership, since it was of a sub rosa sort, it cannot accurately be ascertained. The best that can be said is that the Kenkyu-Kai's most visible spokespersons were three older Issei men. The first of these was a man by the name of Fujimoto, who was not only an adviser to the Kibei Club and head of the Sumo Club but also a person with a reputation for being antiadministration and anti-Nisei leadership. The second was Chota Hirokane, the man regaled with toasts at the Tani New Year's dinner, and the third Kiyoshi Tani himself, the most avowed and loquacious of the trio.<sup>29</sup>

In line with its name, the animating purpose of the Kenkyu-Kai was to study or investigate the conditions of the Canal camp so as to come up with some suitable recommendations respecting improvements in housing, mess operations, and other areas involving the community's general welfare. Consistent with this objective, the Kenkyu-Kai did submit to Acting Project Director Robert Cozzens "a written notice signed by about 500 Gila residents to the effect that the WRA proposal for limited self-government with a council composed only of United States citizens was doomed to fail because of the inexperience of the eligible members [along with] . . . a plan under which they would organize a system of government for the center, with some details as to assorted phases of community government that needed attention." The nucleus of the group putting forth this notice included Chota Hirokane and numbered among its most zealous supporters Issei men dwelling in Canal's bachelor barracks.<sup>30</sup>

Another campaign on behalf of change which corresponded with the one above was the Kenkyu-Kai's efforts to convince the administration that a separate newspaper should be published in Canal to balance the biased coverage disseminated in the Butte-based News-Courier edited by JACL leader



Ken Tashiro. It was the intention of the Kenkyu-Kai, moreover, to have as the editor of this alternative paper an Issei with considerable prewar journalism experience—notably, Kiyoshi Tani. While this request was pending, however, the Kenkyu-Kai urged Canal residents to ignore the News-Courier and read instead the Rocky Nippon, a Japanese vernacular newspaper published in the "free zone" of Denver, Colorado (and to which, as mentioned beforehand, Tani was presently attached as camp correspondent and distributor).<sup>31</sup>

But the Kenkyu-Kai followed other, less indirect and democratic, methods in pursuit of their purpose. In the words of JERS analyst Joseph Omachi: "Instead of pursuing study and research into matters of community welfare this group began investigating certain individuals among the evacuees who were employed in the more important positions at the center, picking out alleged faults and criticism based principally upon unfounded rumors rather than upon confirmed facts." Omachi was hardly an uninterested or disinterested observer since he, as the chairman of the Constitutional Commission and the chief internee counsel in Canal, was one of those under surveillance by the Kenkyu-Kai. What really bothered Omachi, however, were the consequences of this sort of investigative work. "By such methods," he continued, "the group had made up a so-called 'black-list' citing the names of a number of persons [including himself] to be 'taken care of.'"<sup>32</sup>

The roster of names comprising this blacklist is revealing. Heading up those named was Takeo Tada, whose notoriety has already been established in connection with his activities both at Turlock and in Canal. But it should be added here that he was also reviled in the community for still other reasons than those thus far adduced. There was, for instance, his general demeanor, which was said to be anything but self-effacing and Japanese-like. Complaints



coursed through the community to the effect that Tada "showed off too much" and acted like he was a "big shot." Alternatively, it was charged that Tada attempted to flatter both aliens and citizens alike so as "to gain their conformity to the rules of Canal's Caucasian administration."<sup>33</sup>

As for specific sins of commission, it was rumored that Tada had tricked a number of Nisei and Kibei into enlisting as students in the Army language school by intimating that he himself was also volunteering his services. When it turned out that Tada was still in camp after the others had departed for the school, however, it was assumed that he had once again acted in bad faith. Actually, Tada assuredly had volunteered for the school, but as a teacher and not as a student. Since teachers were scheduled to report somewhat after the students, Tada had not been dissembling. Nonetheless, it seemed to the community that indeed Tada had deceived and betrayed them.

Then, too, it was known that Tada had persistently sought to persuade his superiors in the CAS to deny formal recognition not only to the Kibei Club, as noted earlier, but also to the Issei Dramatic Club, the Engeibu. And even after such recognition was extended to this group, Tada managed through his influence to restrict their place of meeting to an open-air area of the camp. Given this group's intimate connections with the Kenkyu-Kai, such actions were guaranteed to blacken further Tada's name in the community.

Immediately following Tada on the blacklist prepared by the Kenkyu-Kai were two individuals whose presumed apostate activities have earlier been detailed: Teizo Yahanda, the Issei supporter of the JACL and the Temporary Community Council, and Dr. William Furuta, the Nisei chairman of the council. But the next name on the list was that of Tada's friend and roommate, Charles



Yonezu. While his association with Tada certainly contributed to his lack of community popularity, Yonezu was also disliked for quite separate reasons.<sup>34</sup>

Part of Yonezu's unpopularity probably stemmed from his role as recreation head at Turlock, but what really galvanized it in the mind of the community was his appointment and subsequent activities as captain of the wardens in Canal camp. Although his appointment to this position in early October was effusively heralded by W. E. Williamson, Gila's director of internal security—"A fitting and proper man for a man-sized job."—the selection of Yonezu seemed to some observers to be a decidedly odd one. What was questioned was not so much his ability to discharge his onerous duties but his apparent eager inclination to do so.<sup>35</sup>

At the time of Yonezu's appointment, Chief Williamson was putting the finishing touches on his reorganization of internal security for the Gila center, and the placement of Yonezu at the head of the sixty-plus wardens who made up Canal's police force complemented nicely his plans for "a model police organization of a purely impersonal and objective nature." The wardens, most of whom were Nisei, strongly resisted Williamson's "rather grandiose ideas" in that he seemed to be "forgetting the close association under which the various members of the Warden forces must live with the other residents of the community." Nonetheless, Williamson schooled the wardens in modern criminological procedures, outfitted them in khaki uniforms, and provided them with cars and horses to patrol the camp—all of which coincided neatly with his training while a student at the University of California Police School.<sup>36</sup>

If Williamson's actions were resisted by the Nisei wardens, they were opposed even more vigorously by those in the force who were Issei, Kibei, and Hawaiian Nisei. Less Americanized and, hence, less attuned to bureaucratic



authority structures, these men were unwilling to see themselves socially distanced from the rest of the community. So, too, were Williamson's innovations denounced by his own associate chief, Francis Frederick, who had served as a guard in New York's Dannemora Prison before being employed by the WRA. It was his contention that "Williamson's organization was modeled along metropolitan police lines and [was] not applicable to a community of concentrated population such as a relocation center." Because of his views, Frederick soon found favor with many of the wardens, who thereafter supported him in his protracted struggle against Williamson.<sup>37</sup>

One who apparently did not question either the judgment or the authority of Williamson, though, was Charles Yonezu. And it was precisely because he did not that his name was to be found on the blacklist put out by the Kenkyu-Kai. Like his close associate Tada, it seemed patently obvious that he was more concerned with self-promotion and social control than the well-being of the Canal community.

Rounding out the blacklist were Joseph Omachi (whose relationship with Tada and role on the Constitution Commission have already been outlined), Goro Yamamoto, George Kawahara, and a miscellany of less prominent, largely Nisei, supervisors relative to employment, outside leaves, and the like. Since both Yamamoto and Kawahara were later to be found among the special guests at the Tani dinner (though neither was seated at the head table), it should be remarked here that Yamamoto was Tada's chief assistant in CAS who, though a Kibei himself, strongly seconded his superior's nonrecognition policy toward the Kibei Club, while Kawahara, an older Hawaiian Nisei, was the assistant to the individual whose name appeared directly below Tada's on the blacklist, Central Block Manager Teizo Yahanda.



According to the relevant documentation, it was the intention of the Kenkyu-Kai leadership to have all of the individuals included on the blacklist assaulted simultaneously. But apparently Chota Hirokane, either acting alone or in concert with several others, jumped the gun on the evening of November 30 by attacking Takeo Tada just after his departure from a meeting of the Engeibu (where he had been taken to task by the dramatic group for "his neglect or refusal to pursue various requests and demands made to him as a staff member of the Community Activities Section)."<sup>38</sup>

Following identification by Tada, Hirokane was arrested by the Department of Internal Security, to whom he willingly allowed that he was the sole culprit. The evening after his arrest, petitions were circulated among the Canal population condemning his conviction and demanding the removal of Takeo Tada from his camp position. These petitions were rumored to have been signed by ninety percent of the camp's adult population. Furthermore, the Kenkyu-Kai convened a mass meeting and in an impassioned speech delivered by Kiyoshi Tani let it be known that it was prepared, should Hirokane be convicted and severely sentenced, to administer more beatings to suspected accommodationists and set in motion a general strike of the sort recently enacted at Poston, the other WRA center in Arizona. Tani emphasized that Hirokane had committed his act for the benefit of the entire community and had been driven to violence because it seemed to him the only way in which the Issei and Kibei could focus the attention of the camp administration on the many problems afflicting them.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, differences as to both the conduct of the investigation into the Tada beating and the hearing scheduled for Hirokane broke out among the WRA staff. On the one hand, Acting Project Director Robert Cozzens,



Assistant Project Luke Korn, and Project Attorney James Terry were anxious, with Hirokane's confession in hand, to call a halt to the investigation and proceed forthwith to a closed hearing whose findings could serve as the basis for swift sentencing. Contrastingly, the Internal Security Department leaders, particularly Associate Director Frederick, felt the investigation required due deliberation (so as to guarantee that all of Tada's assailants would be apprehended) and the hearing transacted as an open community forum whose purpose was not merely to establish guilt but to illuminate the grievances prompting Tada's beating and the blacklist.<sup>40</sup>

With respect to the investigation, the Cozzens-Korn-Terry position prevailed. But on the matter of the hearing, it was the strategy urged by Fredericks which eventually was followed. At first Cozzens, who under WRA policy was accorded sole determination in criminal actions, opted for a closed hearing. When it was communicated to him, however, that this arrangement was anathema to the community and would surely be the cause of more violence to erupt, Cozzens changed his mind and announced that Hirokane would be accorded a public hearing.

This hearing, which occurred on December 3 and lasted for four hours, was held in a small barracks apartment ordinarily used for Temporary Community Council meetings. In attendance at the packed-to-capacity meeting aside from Cozzens, Hirokane, and Project Attorney James Terry, who handled the prosecution for the administration, were the members of the Temporary Community Council, Williamson and Frederick from the Department of Internal Security, and about forty internees (though an additional 750 internees were crowded around the apartment and periodically had news of the proceedings inside passed out to them by speakers in the form of general announcements).



The hearing unfolded in two separate, but related, stages. The first half hour was devoted to a detailing of the specific reasons behind the beating of Tada, with stress placed upon his negligence at Turlock. During the balance of the hearing, the focus shifted from Tada's alleged transgressions to discussion of the many causes for dissatisfaction among the internees--clothing shortages, crowded housing conditions, inadequate mess supplies such as sugar and meat, difficulties involving intercamp travel, and the exclusion of Issei from the Temporary Community Council. Each of these problem areas were advanced by contingents of outraged Issei as contributing causes to the assault on Tada.

Because Cozzens was concerned that the proceedings of the hearing could be accidentally or intentionally misconstrued and lead to a general strike or even a riot, he decided after the hearing to inform the crowd that in the evening he would hold a general meeting in the open-air auditorium situated in the center of Canal camp. Meanwhile, he followed advice given to him by Frederick and "made arrangements with the Military Police in companies surrounding the camp, and other groups in Phoenix to enforce military law in the contingency of a general strike."<sup>41</sup>

That evening approximately one thousand, mostly Issei men (women of both generations were almost totally absent) gathered to hear what Cozzens had to say. He first explained that the WRA was a civilian agency created specifically to remove the feeling among the internees that stringent control of them was necessary, that it was an agency dedicated to democratic free speech, and that it existed to serve the Japanese American community. Next, he scotched the rumor to the effect that, because his office was located in Butte, he was not interested in what went on in Canal. Not only did he have



representatives in Canal, but residents of Canal were always welcome to make requests of and air problems with him. Moreover, he was willing to listen to any arguments about any issues so that an equitable solution could be reached and made the basis of policy.

His next point was that the talk circulating about a general strike would only succeed in doing harm to the community by confirming those in American society who already questioned their loyalty. It was bound also to hurt those Japanese Americans living outside the camps. And still further, it would damage WRA Director Dillon Myer's ambitious relocation plans by retarding the development of external employment for the evacuees. As for those in the community who preferred to exchange their lives in the United States for residence in Japan, they need only complete the necessary repatriation forms available to them.

Cozzens next turned to the afternoon hearing. He allowed that he now had greater insight into the grievances which led up to the beating of Tada but let it be known that acts of violence would not be justified under any circumstances. Canal was to be a community of law and order, not chaos. Accordingly, respect should be shown the wardens, since they were there to serve the community, as were those engaged in other constructive capacities within the camp hierarchy. It was wrong that because these positions were largely filled by Nisei that these people should be subjected to intimidation. "These Issei," scolded Cozzens, "who work against them, who criticize them, and who threaten them, should feel most ashamed of themselves. They are the older men, the wiser people of the community, and they are the ones who should advise, guide, and control the reins of leadership. Some of them have



been a dissatisfied element among the community, and should be severely censured."

The acting director then took up one of the dissatisfactions which had reverberated throughout the camp over the past few months and been reiterated with emotion at the Hirokane hearing—the shortage and delay of clothing allotments. Some of the problem here, said Cozzens, was traceable to the WCCA; the WRA could not be held responsible for the mistakes and misdeeds of a separate, military agency. But he did promise that all internees in the camp work corps would be given cash payments within the week to compensate them and their families for clothing allowances outstanding since their transfer to Canal the previous summer.

Finally, Cozzens touched upon the item which the audience had assembled to hear—the disposition of the Hirokane case. He had not reached a decision yet, but would do so once he had carefully considered all of the facts in the case. His decision would be irrevocable; he was not about to be "high-pressured" by any individual or groups of individuals to change that decision. "[The] Issei are the leaders," said Cozzens in conclusion, "and they should lose the respect of the community at large if they stoop to acts of violence."<sup>42</sup>

The immediate response to the Cozzens address was mixed. Whereas the more Americanized Nisei leadership was generally pleased by the director's strong stand against intimidation and violence, they had misgivings about the authoritarian, undemocratic tone of his remarks and his expressed emphasis upon Issei leadership. As for the dissident Issei and Kibei, they found Cozzens's tone reassuring. This, they felt, was how leadership ought to be discharged. Now, at last, they knew where they stood. And they also



appreciated hearing that the clothing matter was to be cleared up and that the director was open to their suggestions and arguments. Most of all, however, they were gratified by his recognition of Issei leadership in the camp community; this is what they had been saying all along. Still, they were determined not to drop their guard until they heard what sort of sentence Cozzens had in store for Hirokane.

During the two-day hiatus between Hirokane's hearing and his sentence, the camp remained in a state of intense excitement. Word went out from the Issei-Kibei contingent that in the event of a harsh sentence they were prepared to instigate a full-scale strike, replete with burning down the controversial Community Services canteen and beating still more internee staffers suspected of currying favor with the administration. At the same time, the Nisei group was formulating plans of their own for a strike should the sentence be too lenient.

On the day following the hearing, the matter was placed before the Temporary Community Council for consideration. But in light of the Tada beating and the threats to many of the other councilmen, they made it clear that they were unwilling to take a corporate position which could be interpreted as a repudiation of the community at large. In fact, the only two individuals willing to take a definite stand condemning Hirokane and the Kenkyu-Kai were the blacklisted pair of Dr. Furuta and Teizo Yanada. Both stated that "no amount of pressure could take them away from directing their efforts toward what they believed the best interests of the community." As for the majority of the councilmen, rather than risk reprisals, they handed in their resignation.<sup>43</sup>



Another set of resignations was tendered by the wardens. Immediately following Hirokane's apprehension, "feeling in the community against any denominations of pro-administrations tactics became intense . . . [causing] the wardens . . . [to be] boy-cotted and snubbed." In order to demonstrate to the community that they favored their desires as against those of the administration (as well as to avoid being censured and/or clubbed) the wardens had resigned en masse. Although Chief Williamson had not accepted their resignations, the gesture had successfully placated the community. But Williamson's actions did not stem the tide of resignations. Still, as with the councilmen, a blacklisted member expressed an unwillingness to back down--Charles Yonezu. Indeed, Captain Yonezu went so far as to organize a Nisei vigilante committee and to call for "a pitched battle if this were necessary between Issei and Nisei."<sup>44</sup>

And then came the announcement that Cozzens had sentenced Hirokane to six months in jail, with all but one month to be commuted. This news pleased neither faction, though it fell short of the worst suspicions of both. Nonetheless, the Kenkyu-Kai leadership was of the opinion that the sentence was too stiff, and they drafted a petition to that effect to be communicated to Cozzens. Additionally, and more menacingly, "there was much agitation in both communities and a large delegation called upon the Acting Director in an attempt to have the verdict set aside [and] upon his refusal they threatened a march of 5,000 persons from Canal to Butte." Moreover, emboldened further by radio reports of the riot at the Manzanar camp in eastern California, "they called on the services of a group of women supporters to go around from room to room, and using coercive tactics [they] obtained signatures of hundreds of women residents to . . . [the] petition to reduce Hirokane's sentence on the



ground that he had acted for the good of the community." This petition did not produce the desired end, though, and Hirokane was duly removed from Canal and incarcerated in the county jail at Florence, Arizona.<sup>45</sup>

But during the month in which Hirokane served out his shortened sentence, Canal was abuzz with changes. Resignations continued to roll in from the representatives to the Temporary Community Council, and there was talk that to avoid further erosion of the body's prestige perhaps the prudent course was for the council to resign as a group and request that a reelection of members be held. As for the Constitutional Commission, they shelved all plans for the time being as to having their proposal for a permanent community council brought before the residents for ratification.

Other notable changes also marked this month. A crisis of authority gripped the Department of Internal Security, with the upshot being a large turnover of wardens plus the further reduction of their status in the Canal community to that of "glorified messenger boys" and, somewhat more ominously, "administrative stooges."<sup>46</sup>

Concurrent with these changes, community dissatisfaction spread from the Canal to the Butte camp. There parallel groups and actions emerged with sudden fury. The most powerful of Butte's dissenting groups were the Kyowa-Kai (Issei Peace Society) and the Gila Young People's Association (Kibei Club). These two closely connected organizations, while avowing as their purpose the promotion of the general welfare of the community, were viewed suspiciously by the Butte administration and its internee associates for simultaneously supporting a myriad of Japanese cultural practices and activities and repudiating all Western cultural ideals and forms. Moreover, these two groups were perceived as principally responsible for the rash of



recent threats and the compilation of a blacklist containing the names of individuals, mostly JACL leaders, marked for assault.<sup>47</sup>

Still another change which occurred during this month was the arrival of a new project director at the Gila center, Leroy Bennett. After being briefed for a few days, Bennett assumed command in mid-December of what was a very volatile community. Already during the past few weeks two other western centers, Poston and Manzanar, had experienced, respectively, a protracted strike and a bloody riot. Gila had teetered at the brink of catastrophe itself and the communities of both camps, particularly Canal, had been suspended since in a state perilously close to flash point.<sup>48</sup>

This, then, was the prevailing situation in the Gila center when, during the waning days of 1942, a select number of administrators and internees were notified that they had been invited to attend a New Year's banquet sponsored by Kiyoshi Tani and the Rocky Nippon and scheduled for the evening of January 5.

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Having travelled full circle in a journey of inquiry back to the cultural text, the Tani dinner, which set it in motion, it is now possible to analyze that event as a representative paradigm drama and appreciate its significance as a particularly potent and protean expression of cultural politics. Accordingly, the remainder of this essay will be devoted to sorting out meaningful answers both as to the dramatis personae involved in the cultural production and to such other dramatistic details as its staging, props, audience, and raison d'etre.



Since it is of fundamental importance, it seems that the last of these needs to be addressed first. Moreover, it is an area where the relevant documentation contains some leads. For example, one of the internee guests of honor, Joseph Omachi, in a report written less than a month later, sought to make sense out of why the dinner was staged. "The dinner," explained Omachi, "was apparently meant to be a good-will gesture to forget the past and to cement better relationships with the administrative and evacuee leaders [but] it appears to me . . . that the dinner was a clever publicity stunt for Tani's paper [the Rocky Nippon] and a move for general community recognition." A different contemporaneous interpretation was offered by the four administrators who accepted Tani's invitation (Korn, Gaba, Williamson, and Frederick): "[The dinner was] a testimonial on the release of Hirokane from prison."<sup>49</sup>

While neither of these explanations are entirely wrong, I find them amiss in emphasizing political, economic, or personal motives while overlooking entirely the cultural dynamics undergirding and imparting meaning to the dinner. I am persuaded that it makes much more sense to view the dinner as a cultural transaction wherein Tani and the Kenkyu-Kai simultaneously communicated and consecrated a new set of cultural arrangements for the Canal camp.

Looked at in this context, the explanations offered by the participants take on added meaning. This can be seen clearly in the case of the shared conviction of the Caucasian administrative personnel. They were correct in their assessment but they quite missed the point of the testimonial. The toasts paid homage less to Hirokane as an individual than to the traditional Japanese cultural principle embodied in his behavior—i.e., "that the welfare of the group is far more important than that of any single individual." Because this principle is diametrically opposed to the American cultural strain of individualism, the administrators mistook the gesture of cultural affirmation as an attempt either to martyr Hirokane or show up the administration.



Moreover, Hirokane was honored because in his very personage--an older Issei father of seven and a block chairman--he reaffirmed still another traditional Japanese cultural principle, one whose violation by the administration lay behind the beating of Tada: i.e., "[that] society is an ordered social hierarchy in which status is ascribed largely on the basis of biologically determined factors of sex, age, and generation."<sup>50</sup>

That Omachi should interpret the dinner as a means whereby Tani attempted simultaneously to publicize himself and stimulate sales for the Rocky Nippon perhaps reveals more about Omachi's value orientation than Tani's motives; it also provides a clue as to why Omachi occupied a place of prominence on the Kenkyu-Kai's blacklist. It is true that Tani earned a percentage of the Rocky Nippon's camp sales and that in the interval between the Tada beating and the banquet these sales had soared. But the monies received from such sales were used by Tani to subsidize the New Year's dinner. It would seem, then, that the real significance of the Rocky Nippon was neither economic nor personal but cultural. For a long time Tani and the Kenkyu-Kai had been agitating for their own newspaper, one which would resemble more those which the Issei had grown accustomed to reading in prewar days--i.e., bilingual but with much bigger Japanese-language sections than English ones. Only recently, in fact, they had lobbied the administration for an expanded Japanese-language section for the preponderantly English-language Gila News-Courier (which explains why the News-Courier's Japanese-language editor, Kenzo Ogasawara, was seated at the head table during the Tani dinner). For Tani and the Kenkyu-Kai the media was important not merely as a means to mold the community's opinion but also as a mirror to reflect its cultural composition and character.<sup>51</sup>

Although Omachi discounted the explanation of the dinner promoted by Tani and the Kenkyu-Kai--"a good-will gesture to forget the past and to cement better relationships with the administrative and evacuee leaders"--there existed cultural



reasons for crediting it. In the month that had elapsed since the Tada-Hirokane affair, Canal's cultural arrangements had come to conform much closer than previously to the cultural pattern cherished by the community's Issei leadership. Part of the reason for this was the aforementioned diminished role of the Temporary Community Council. Already weakened by the resignation of some of its regular members, it became virtually leaderless when its chair and dominant member, Dr. William Furuta, who had earlier resolved to fight for his principles and the council's authority, decided that he was not getting the support of either the administration or the people and so tendered his resignation. Moreover, within a short while, his successor as chairman also resigned. And the council was further crippled because in some of the blocks replacements could not be found for those representatives who had resigned, thereby leaving the council underrepresented. Naturally, the net effect of these changes was to strengthen and solidify the already considerable power of the Issei-dominated block councils.<sup>52</sup>

Another change carrying with it cultural consequences pleasing to the Issei leadership involved the personnel of the Community Activities Section. After his beating, Takeo Tada, who was scheduled to leave camp shortly for the military language school anyway, determined that it would be wise for him to stay out of the line of community fire and thus resigned his position as the internee head of CAS. A similar calculation prompted the resignation also of Tada's coblacklisted chief assistant, Goro Yamamoto. Because no second-generation aspirant dared risk community wrath by applying for these vacated positions, the heads of CAS, Hoffman and Gaba, were obliged, however reluctantly, to appoint Issei replacements. With a greater say now both as to the sort of clubs and organizations to be granted recognition and facilities and the type of recreation and entertainment to be



emphasized and funded, the cultural grip of the Issei on the community was further tightened.

Administrative actions also played a part in this process. Not only were back clothing allowances filled as promised by Cozzens, but also attempts were made to rectify the problems relative to housing, transportation, employment, and food--all of which had been brought out in the open by the Issei at the time of Hirokane's hearing. Moreover, only recently the new director, Leroy Bennett, had announced that hereafter Luke Korn, his assistant director, would be moved from the Butte camp to new administrative offices located in Canal where he "would have full charge of the administration of the colony." All of these developments the Issei could attribute to a new disposition on the part of the administration to heed their advice and concede their authority in the community.<sup>53</sup>

Since things in Canal were going their way, then, there was good reason why Tani and the Kenkyu-Kai might want to set aside memories of an earlier, less satisfactory period of camp life and consecrate the new cultural order in Canal through inviting the old guard to "break bread" with them at their expense. But their motives for the dinner went beyond magnanimity. Omachi's skepticism was not entirely misplaced about their expressed willingness to "forget the past." They were, in fact, not altogether prepared to forget the past when it threatened to insinuate itself into the present, as it had of late, in the form of countercultural actions perpetrated by some of the "administrative and evacuee leaders." Thus, it does appear that part of the reason the Tani dinner was staged was to warn selected guests seated at the head table that, unless certain ominous developments ceased, community retaliation would be imminent.

Most of these ominous developments had directly to do with the Department of Internal Security. Since the Tada episode, that department, as touched upon earlier,



had been experiencing a shakeup. But lately things had taken a definite cultural turn for the worse as far as the community was concerned. Put simply, Chief Williamson had begun purging from the department those wardens whom he distrusted (i.e., mostly Issei, but also Kibei and Hawaiian Nisei) and retaining those (i.e., Nisei) whose English-language facility was greater and whose loyalty he deemed not so questionable. When this purge resulted in further community support being withdrawn from the wardens, even the remaining Nisei started resigning from the department in twos and threes. Williamson's response was to replace them with younger, Christian Nisei. This policy provided the chief with wardens willing to execute his directives, but given the small percentage of Christians in Canal, it was "a very undesirable thing [for him] to do from the point of view of the community at large."<sup>54</sup>

The policy dovetailed, however, with another one of Williamson's which the community leadership found both culturally distressing and dangerous: "tracking down alleged subversive and pro-Japan elements in the community." This practice was vigorously opposed by Williamson's assistant, Francis Frederick, whom the wardens regarded as being more sympathetic to their situation and needs. Accordingly, they drew up a petition demanding that a separate internal security department be instituted in Canal with Frederick placed at its helm. When Williamson got wind of this petition, he exploded: "He didn't give a damn what they wanted. Things were going to stay as they were." Moreover, he redoubled his investigatory activities, nominally placing the reluctant Frederick in charge of uncovering subversives, but in reality turning over the responsibility of running his witch-hunt to his compliant warden captain, the blacklisted Charles Yonezu.<sup>55</sup>

Having established the rationale for the representative paradigm drama, a consideration of the principal actors is now in order. Chota Hirokane and Kenzo Ogasawara have already been accounted for and it seems obvious from the above why



Williamson, Frederick, and Yonezu were invited to the dinner. But an accounting still needs to be made for the cultural role played by the other dramatic leads. Since the available sources are not very helpful here, however, it is necessary to rely heavily on speculation and historical imagination for answers.

Luke Korn, the assistant project director in charge of the Canal camp, was likely invited to the dinner and asked to say a few words so as to invest the transfer of authority from the old to the new order with an air of legitimacy. His participation was particularly important since previously he had been one of the foremost advocates of Nisei leadership. And he conformed to the expectations of his role by delivering a speech which, appropriately enough, emphasized recent administrative concessions and underscored the new spirit of detente in Canal.

As for Morton Gaba, Canal's community services head, his participation was required to dramatize his department's capitulation to cultural reality. Whereas in the past both he and his superior, Luther Hoffman, had misplaced the fortunes of the internees in the hands of second-generation usurpers of legitimate community authority like Takeo Tada, recent CAS appointments signaled a step in the right direction. For his part in these appointments, Gaba merited the community's provisional applause.

Joseph Omachi's role in the cultural drama played out in Block 16 is best understood if seen in relation to that performed by another member of the cast seated near him at the head table, Block Chairman Omai. Whereas Omachi, in his position as the chairman of the Constitutional Commission, represented the superimposition by the American government and the WRA of an unnatural bureaucratic authority system on the community, Omai, as block chairman, stood for the traditional brand of authority conferred by the community on those who were considered its natural leaders.



One leading player remains--the host, Kiyoshi Tani. His role in the paradigm drama was that of cultural redeemer. A charismatic personality, Tani commanded the limelight not solely as a thespian but as one who in performing his part helped to heal the psychosocial division in the life of his community. This he did through reminding its members by the force of his own example that attempts to strip them of their cultural dignity and self-determination had to be resisted with resolve and resourcefulness. Thus, though Tani was quite capable of expressing himself in English, he chose to deliver his welcoming address at the dinner in Japanese. The administration, through assorted sanctions, had attempted to make the use of the Japanese language a source of shame; accordingly, Tani would flaunt it as a badge of communal pride.

What about the audience, which was comprised of the membership of the Kenkyu-Kai, the Engeibu, and the Sumo Club? As for the last of these groups, consisting of an estimated 176 members, it was said to be constituted of lower-class people and connected with gambling interests within the camp. It was rumored, too, that consistent with its role as strong-arm for the Kenkyu-Kai, several of its members had been with Hirokane during the beating of Tada. Of all the camp's organizations, it was the Sumo Club which the administration believed most dangerously pro-Japan. Already its president and a number of other officers had applied for repatriation. And only five days earlier, on New Year's morning, the club had sponsored a match prior to which the contestants and audience, including many Kenkyu-Kai members, "paused . . . to engage in several loud ban-zai and sing Japanese national songs." The presence of a large contingent from the club at the Tani dinner, therefore, contributed to the acute discomfort of the honored guests.

With regard to the Engeibu or dramatic society, this group, too, was regarded by the administration as a dangerous element with gambling connections. Unlike their



counterpart organization in the Butte camp, which was preoccupied with the restoration of pure Japanese dramatic art, the Canal Engeibu divided its attention between drama and politics, and often employed the former in the service of the latter. The membership of the Engeibu included Kibei as well as Issei, many of whom were leaders in Canal, such as Kiyoshi Tani. At the New Year's banquet, the Engeibu membership turned out in force. Viewed from their perspective, the dinner could be appreciated as a fine species of sociopolitical drama in which the central motif was the restoration of the community's traditional cultural order.<sup>56</sup>

The remainder of the audience was supplied by the Kenkyu-Kai. In spite of its substantial membership, it was said never to meet en masse but to dispatch its efforts through a myriad of informal subgroups. The administration had been led to believe that the group, feeling its mission accomplished, had disbanded following the Hirokane hearing. Yet their being assembled at the Tani dinner signified that, should the occasion demand it, they were quite capable of coalescing into a united front.

Before drawing the curtain on the cultural drama transacted in the Gila River Relocation Center in the winter of 1943, consideration has to be given both to its manner of staging and the props employed therein. Put simply, the staging was formal. Not only did the dinner commemorate perhaps the most ritualized of Japanese holidays, but all of the attendant trappings--the elegant dress of the participants, the elaborate entertainment provided, and the haute-cuisine--were reflective of what has been described as "the Japanese penchant for formalization." In this case, though, the formality exceeded mere cultural custom and served to publicize not only the arrival of a new year but also the onset within Canal of a new set of power arrangements.<sup>57</sup>

These new arrangements were symbolized by the principal props employed in the paradigm drama: the bottles of bourbon placed before the guests on every table. Not too long before, Chief Williamson had conducted an antiliquor crusade in the pages of



the camp newspaper, cautioning the internees that, since the center was constructed on land leased from the Pima-Maricopa Indian communities, it represented a federal offense to possess or transport alcoholic beverages on the premises. The conspicuous display and consumption of "Japan tea" at the dinner, therefore, represented a political statement saying, in effect: We will no longer be dealt with like subjugated wards of the government. We are now in control of this camp and we will break with impunity any laws which are not to our liking.<sup>58</sup>

Nor was this an idle boast. Speaking of the internee groups in attendance at the Tani dinner during this period of Canal's history, analyst Robert Spencer noted in one of his reports: "For a time these groups held the balance of power over and against the administration and its Nisei and liberal Issei backers." At the outset of this paper I indicated that by "representative paradigm drama" I had in mind a cultural act which dramatized the inherent possibilities in a cultural situation—an act which spotlights changing boundaries of what is possible for a person or a group at a particular time and in a particular place and in a particular milieu. When measured against this standard, one can appreciate precisely how the Tani dinner qualifies as a representative paradigm drama, for this cultural act did indeed dramatize for all those in attendance that the Canal concentration camp was now being run not by the WRA and its internee appointees but by the inmates. Things at Canal had gone as far as they could go.<sup>59</sup>