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Oishi, Gene Y.

1985-1989

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June 17, 1985

Gene Oishi, Managing Editor
Action Line
344 N. Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Dear Mr. Oishi:

Your article in the New York Times Magazine is the most moving and most perceptive statement I have ever read on the incarceration of the Japanese Americans. In the past few years, many of my colleagues, friends and neighbors have told me that they had never heard of the evacuation. Your article will certainly enlighten them.

As you may know, I spent almost two years in the camps, six months at the Gile Center and 14 months were at the Tule Lake Segregation Center. In 1981 I was encouraged to interview and obtain the life-histories of some of the people who had been confined at Tule Lake. Some of the experiences they told me about were so terrible that after the interview I sometimes just sat down and cried.

At present I am working on a historical account of the stigma and rejection they experienced. The one bright spot in many of their accounts is the assistance and support given them by a few staff members who were devout Christians and by Wayne Collins. I'm enclosing a rough draft of the beginning of the article and one of the interviews. (This respondent preferred to answer my questions in writing.) If you would be interested in seeing more of this material, please let me know.

Thank you again for writing THE ANXIETY OF BEING A JAPANESE-AMERICAN. As one of my respondents said, "May it never happen again."

Sincerely yours,

Rosalie Hankey Wax
Professor Emerita

RHW:jd

GENE Y. OISHI
1901 Dixon Road
Baltimore, Maryland 21209

June 27, 1985

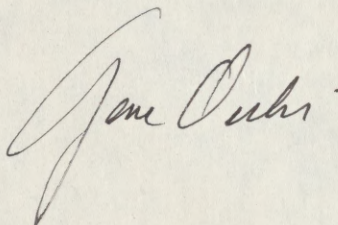
Dear Dr. Wax:

Thank you for your letter and your kind comments regarding my article in the New York Times Magazine. I would be very interested in reading your article when you have completed it, and I would very much like to ~~like~~ see any other material you care to share with me. I found the Thomas Kikuchi account extremely interesting. It was the first I read of someone who was actually deported to Japan and who was able to return. You mention in the draft of your article that you took notes during your stay at Gila and Tule Lake. Did you save them? If is possible, I would very much like to read them. As you might know, it is difficult to get Japanese to talk about camp life. Even those who are willing to talk about the experience have repressed so much that they soon run out of things to say. You were perhaps able to make observations and to remember things that are still too painful or frightening for internees. I would be especially interested in your notes on Gila, which is the camp I was at.

I have recently completed an autobiography that focuses on the camp experience, but it deals more with the Japanese community as it was before the war and the psychological and emotional aftermath of the war and internment. One day I would like to write a book, perhaps a novel, dealing exclusively with the camp. As far as I know, nobody has succeeded in writing anything that probes very deeply the internment. Everything I have read sticks to factual information and those accounts that attempt to get at feelings and personal experiences seem guarded, ~~xx~~ repressed and ultimately rather shallow. I can understand that, for it is only in past few years, after more than ten years of thinking and trying to write about the camp experience, that I have finally been able to say that the camps were terrible, hateful places and that I suffered. After the war, most of us had difficulty even feeling indignant about the experience. It struck me that it was mainly white people who seemed ~~to~~ the most outraged by the treatment of Japanese Americans. It was a great relief for me when I discovered that third-generation sansei were able to feel indignation and outrage about what happened to their parents. It made me feel rather proud to hear sansei speak their minds so openly--unafraid.

Again, thank you for your letter. I would be very appreciative of any other material you care to show me.

Sincerely,



Department of Anthropology



WASHINGTON
UNIVERSITY
IN ST. LOUIS

July 11, 1985

Gene Y. Oishi
1901 Dixon Road
Baltimore, Maryland 21209

Dear Mr. Oishi:

I was happy to hear from you. I heartily agree with you that the camp experience was so traumatic for many of the Nisei that they cannot bring themselves even to think about it. Indeed, I do not know why some of them, in 1981 and 1982, told me in detail about many of their agonizing experiences. One woman, who had had a severe mental disturbance after leaving Tule Lake, said, at the end of our talk, I have told you things I never told my psychanalyst."

Unfortunately, most of my fieldnotes on Gila are lost. When I moved from Gila to Tule Lake, I left most of my notes with Dorothy Thomas in Berkeley. Subsequently, when I moved to Chicago, I found that I'd left these particular notes in Berkeley. I wrote and asked for them but Dr. Thomas said she didn't have them. I was angry at the time, because these notes contained many interviews with evacuees who were going to be sent to Tule Lake. I found one statement, however, which I quote on p. 9 of the article I'm sending you -- MAY IT NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN. I do, however, have copies of all my notes and reports on the shooting of Satoshi Kira, who, on December 1, 1943, walked out of the Gila camp and was shot by a sentry. You might find them of some interest, so I'll have them copied and sent to you.

After reading your letter I think you might also be interested in what people told me about their experiences when I talked to them in 1981 and 1982. So I'm sending you the latter part of my report on this project which I called, "The Survivors Speak." It contains many verbatim statements and life histories. I myself learned a number of important things I had not known before. (I have not been able to find a publisher for this report.)

I'll be sending you a copy of my article on social rejection in a week or two. It's not quite finished.

I wish you all success in your writing. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Rosalie H. Wax
Professor of Anthropology/Sociology
Emerita

GENE Y. OISHI
1901 Dixon Road
Baltimore, Maryland 21209

July 25, 1985

Dear Dr. Wax:

I apologize for my tardiness in acknowledging receipt of the papers you were kind enough to send me. I have not read them all yet, but what I have read gives me some new perspectives on the camps. I hope you won't mind if I keep them for a few months. If you need them back right away, let me know and I'll make copies of them. In fact, I intend to make copies anyway, if you don't mind.

It is a pity that your field notes were lost. They would have been very valuable. I recently got a call from George Brown, who is now a doctor in New York. He and his brother were in Gila because their parents were anthropologists working for the WRA. You probably knew them. In any event, Dr. Brown will be visiting me next week in Baltimore, so I am looking forward to exchanging views about the camp experience with him.

Again, thank you for sharing your papers with me. I am looking forward to reading your article.

Sincerely,

Gene Oishi

*Bob
Wax
7/28/85*

GENE Y. OISHI
1901 Dixon Road
Baltimore, Maryland 21209

November 19, 1985

Dear Dr. Wax,

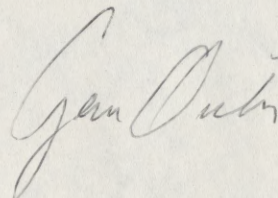
I apologize for being so slow in returning your notes, but somehow I never got around to copying them. Our machine is either broken down or in use for official office business.

In any event, I got them copied, so I am returning the originals to you.

I have not read through all the notes, but what I have read is extremely interesting and should be of great help if I can get myself to start writing on the subject again. I have just finished an autobiography which focuses on the Japanese experience so I am at the moment a little burned out. It will take me several months to recover.

Thank you for your generosity in sharing your notes with me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Gene Oishi".

Gene Oishi
1901 Dixon Road
Baltimore, Md., 21209

January 9, 1989

Dear Dr. Wax:

While cleaning out my desk, I came across your letter of August 22, 1988, which I had set aside. I had intended to answer it immediately, but other matters intervened and I forgot about the letter until I came across it again today.

I want to thank you for your very kind remarks about my book. I am especially appreciative because the book is being largely ignored, and when it is read it seems to be misunderstood. Many, if not most, readers read the book very narrowly, as if the story I am telling has no significance beyond what it tells about me. The reaction of many sympathetic readers is: "Poor Gene Oishi. How cruelly he has suffered, but it's really time for him to put the past behind him and take a more positive view of life." The book is about me in the same way Huckleberry Finn is about a boy named Huckleberry Finn. Incidents in my life are the vehicles for addressing issues and raising themes that go beyond the life of a single individual and even a single ethnic group.

The reception in Japan seems to be better. A Japanese publisher has bought Japanese language rights and will be bringing out a Japanese edition within a year.

I am currently working on a series of short stories about a boy named Hiroshi. I hope to have them published as a collection.

Again, thank you for your letter. I find it very encouraging.

Sincerely,
Gene Oishi