

From Graveyard to Baseball: The Quest for Ethnic Identity in the Prewar Japanese Immigrant Community in the Yakima Valley

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I

INTRODUCTION

FOR OVER forty years since the word “ethnicity” was allegedly used for the first time in America by Warner and Lunt in their *The Social Life of a Modern Community* in 1941, the term has undergone rapid proliferation while carrying with it a mist of ambiguity and confusion.¹

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¹ W. Lloyd Warner and Paul S. Lunt, eds., *The Social Life of a Modern Community* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941):

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Whereas there is a claim that four out of five social scientists leave the term "ethnicity" undefined in their writings,² the search for a more accurate and pragmatic definition of the term continues.

Schermerhorn provides the following definition of ethnic groups in his *Comparative Ethnic Relations* which is regarded as one of the most comprehensive and theoretical approaches to ethnicity.

An ethnic group is . . . a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood. Examples of such symbolic elements are: kinship patterns, physical contiguity (as in localism or sectionalism), religious affiliation, language or dialect forms, tribal affiliation, nationality, phenotypal features, or any combination of these. A necessary accompaniment is some consciousness of kind among members of the group.³

This relatively inclusive definition of an ethnic group represents a significant departure from the traditional anthropological conceptualization of ethnic groups as biologically, culturally, and linguistically distinct categories with a membership which identifies itself and is identified by others. On the other hand, Schermerhorn's definition provides no implications of interrelationship between the proposed four definitional characteristics of an ethnic group: 1) common genesis (real or putative), 2) shared history, 3) symbolic cultural representations, and 4) self-identification.

Reviewing recent studies of various dimensions of ethnicity in the United States, it is apparent that the emphasis has increasingly shifted from the externally distinguishable cultural differences to the internally and subjectively defined aspects of ethnic group processes, thus paying greater attention to the investigation into the "consciousness of kind among members of the group" contained in the above definition by Schermerhorn.⁴ Such a change is partly based on the observation that

² Wsevolod Isajiw, "Definitions of Ethnicity," *Ethnicity* (1974), Vol. 1, pp. 111-24.

³ R. A. Schermerhorn, *Comparative Ethnic Relations: A Framework for Theory and Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 12.

⁴ For a general review of the contemporary theoretical issues related to American ethnicity, see Stephen Thernstorm *et al.*, eds., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); Werner Sollars "Theory of American Ethnicity, or: '? S ETHNIC?/TI AND AMERICAN/TI, DE OR UNITED(W) STATES S S1 AND THEOR?'," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 33, (1981) pp. 257-83; and William Petersen, *et al.*, *Concepts of Ethnicity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

ethnicity continues to play an important role in the organization of groups in the American social structure, despite the earlier and much popularized notion that such factors as the Americanization of the cultural contents of different ethnic groups, the reduction in legal and social discrimination on the bases of one's biological and cultural origin, and the increased social mobility of individuals would eventually lead to the dissolution of ethnic groups.

For instance, Bell argues that compared to class, ethnicity "has become more salient because it can combine interest with an affective tie. Ethnicity provides a tangible set of common identifications—in language, food, music, names—when other social roles become more abstract and impersonal."⁵ Similarly, Cohen observes that Americans who are third or more generation immigrants, having lost their original language and many of their traditional customs, have "continuously re-created their distinctiveness in different ways, not because of conservatism, but because these ethnic groups are in fact interest groupings whose members share some common economic and political interests and who, therefore, stand together in the continuous competition for power with other groups."⁶ In discussing the persistence of ethnic-based forms of social identification and conflict, Glazer also writes that while the trends of modernization are expected to make original ethnic identities weaker, "in mass society there is the need in the individual for some kind of identity—smaller than the State, larger than the family, something akin to 'familistic allegiance.'"⁷

Thus, rather than being a given set of rigidly defined categories, ethnic groups seem better understood as generative organizational units serving certain specific purposes which are commonly shared and considered important by their members. It appears further that the nature of the purpose for the existence of ethnic groups may or may not be utilitarian: some groups may be organized to obtain a larger economic and political share in the system and others for the emotional satisfaction derived from sharing "togetherness" and feeling "at home."

⁵ Daniel Bell, "Ethnicity and Social Change," in Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, eds., *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 169.

⁶ Abner Cohen, *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 191-92.

⁷ Nathan Glazer, "The Universalisation of Ethnicity," *Encounter*, Vol. 44 (1975), p. 16.

Another important influence which has brought about new interpretations of ethnicity was Fredrik Barth. In the introduction to his *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Barth writes that the sharing of a common culture, which has been given central importance in anthropological literature of ethnicity, is better understood as “an implication or result, rather than a primary and definitional characteristic of ethnic group organization.” In advancing his thesis that it is “the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses,” and providing the definition that ethnic groups are “categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves,” Barth claims:

It is important to recognize that although ethnic categories take cultural differences into account, we can assume no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and cultural similarities and differences. The features that are taken into account are not the sum of ‘objective’ differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant.⁸

Thus, directing our attention away from the overt cultural forms of ethnic groups to their organizational boundaries, Barth emphasizes the importance of questioning the organizational requirements which make ethnic distinctions emerge and persist in complex poly-ethnic societies. He further advocates studies which investigate the “interconnection between the diacritica [of cultural traits of an ethnic group] that are chosen for emphasis, the boundaries that are defined, and the differentiating values that are espoused.”⁹

It is clear that Barth’s focus on ethnic boundaries has significant relevance to the aforementioned observations that ethnic groups in the United States persist despite the increasingly similar content of their objective cultures. The question remains, however, as to whether ethnic groups in contemporary America are the results of such homogenizing forces as industrialization, advancement in the distribution of social justice, and mass education and information media promoting further diffusion of mainstream American culture. In order to determine the validity of the argument that American ethnic groups are indeed “not a survival from the age of mass immigration, but new social forms,”¹⁰ it requires a broad historical investigation of ethnic relations in a variety

⁸ Frederik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969), pp. 11; 15; 10; 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁰ Cohen, *Custom and Politics*, p. 191.

of social contexts. This leads further to the general question of what internal and external forces define ethnic boundaries and what processes of selection are applied to the multitude of cultural traits and symbols for the maintenance of such boundaries.

The following study will examine the case of a Japanese immigrant population in the Yakima Valley in central Washington State during the first four decades of the twentieth century. Under a stratified poly-ethnic system which entailed gross legal and social injustices, both the external pressure for Americanization and the internal motivation for retaining ethnic identity were equally at work in the Japanese community. The basic question which the study addresses is whether there is any meaningful relationship between the nature of excluding forces from the outside world and the "consciousness of kind" that was generated within the ethnic group. Employing the definition of ethnicity and some of the perspectives advanced by Barth, this paper will trace the historical development of this particular minority group, while paying special attention to the symbolic marks of their ethnic identity which emerged out of the complex interplay between various forces across the ethnic boundary.

II

EVOLUTION OF THE JAPANESE ETHNIC COMMUNITY IN YAKIMA

The Yakima Valley, an expanse of more than one million fertile acres of land in the extremely dry regions of central Washington, remained a desert wasteland until the later decades of the nineteenth century. After large-scale irrigation projects began to divert water from the Yakima River across the valley in the 1870s, however, the inhospitable land of barren hills and sagebrush was rapidly turned into rich fields of opportunity.

The Yakima Valley was one of the last promising frontiers in the American West: it was "new and optimistic, firmly structured to shelter the values of ambition and discipline and self-reliance and to offer opportunities which were perhaps without parallel."¹¹

Around the year 1889 when Washington was given statehood, the

¹¹ Norman H. Clark, *Washington: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976), p. 70.

Japanese were among the newcomers who poured into this land of promise. The first recorded Japanese immigration to the Yakima Valley was in 1891.¹² Thereafter the valley saw a steady increase in the number of Japanese who came originally as agricultural laborers or railroad section hands and decided to settle there. Soon after the turn of the century, the Japanese also began to operate small businesses in the town of Yakima with a population around 3,000, which was the center of this booming agricultural region.

A decade had barely passed, since the first Japanese settled in the Yakima Valley, when a movement toward organizing a voluntary ethnic association took place among the Japanese population of approximately 60. The young and self-confident Meiji men felt that “in order to bite into the white society, two conditions are necessary: solidarity of the compatriots and self-discipline of the individuals.”¹³ Interestingly, the first activity in which these Japanese immigrants made a collective effort was the establishment of a Japanese public cemetery in 1904. During the previous year, three Japanese individuals had jointly purchased three blocks of land in Tahoma Cemetery run by the city of Yakima. By the end of 1904, eight Japanese, who had immigrated from four different prefectures, were buried in the graveyards.

It is commonplace in the literature of Japanese Americans to suggest that most of the first-generation Japanese immigrants came to the United States with a “sojourner’s mentality” of making a quick profit to take back to their home villages in Japan after a few years of hard labor.¹⁴ Such, however, appears not to have been the case with the

¹² Yakima Nihonjin-kai, *Yakima Heigen Nihonjin-shi* [The History of the Japanese in the Yakima Valley] (Yakima, WA: Yakima Nihonjin-kai, 1935) [cited hereafter as Yakima Nihonjin-kai], p. 16. This history was compiled by the Yakima Japanese Association in commemoration of its thirtieth anniversary. Being a self-told history by some of the major builders of the Japanese immigrant society in the area, the book represents a highly subjectively reconstructed history and is flawed by some incongruities and inaccuracies. Also important is the fact that the writing reflects the interpretations of the community history from the viewpoint of the mid-1930s, when the immigrant generation was in the process of regaining self-confidence through the physical and social maturation of their second-generation children. With these caveats, the book is extensively used and quoted in this paper as a valuable as well as fascinating account illuminating the nature of ethnic consciousness of the Japanese immigrants in Yakima in the prewar years. All the citations from this Japanese-language book are translated by the author.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁴ For example, see Harry H.L. Kitano, *Japanese Americans: The Evolution of a*

Japanese settlers in Yakima. According to the records of *Yakima Heigen Nihonjin-shi*, the establishment of the Japanese cemetery was an expression of an ethnic-based determination. Declaring that “grave markers are the symbol of the advancement of the race (*minzoku hatten*),” the Japanese immigrants recalled:

Those who decided to make the Yakima Valley their last home were our compatriots whose goals were perseverance, resilience, and the progress of the race. The great determination to construct the cemetery as the foundation of progress was thus made by our early settlers. The Yakima Indians once took their bows and arrows against the whites who attempted to usurp the land of their ancestral graves. . . . Even though the severely outnumbered Indians had no chance of victory and were finally conquered by the whites, their heroic resolution to “protect the ancestral graves” is nothing but a great lesson to be remembered for a thousand years.¹⁵

Because of the commonality of not being white and therefore not being incorporated into the white society and the importance placed in ancestral worship, the Japanese seem to have felt great sympathy and affinity toward the native Indians in the area. However, due to the vast differences in many other aspects such as the cultural origin and economic status between the two, the Japanese began to develop their own sense of peoplehood and thereby its own ethnic institutions.

In Japanese farming villages where the majority of the immigrants had come from, the center of the social organization was usually the Buddhist temple: it kept a personal register of all the births and deaths of the villagers, and was the place where every person was to be buried and their souls tended by the generations to follow. The Japanese in Yakima, though they had originated from villages of diverse locations in Japan and were therefore likely to have belonged to different religious denominations, banded together to establish a para-village, para-prefectural cemetery in their land of immigration. These people who had previously identified themselves by their prefectural origin were now lumped together under the single category of “compatriots” (*dōhō* which literally means brothers and sisters originating from the same mother).¹⁶ The Japanese immigrants also shared, it appears, the

Subculture (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1976, Second Edition), p. 39 and Robert A. Wilson and Bill Hosokawa, *East To America: A History of the Japanese in the United States* (New York: William Morrow, 1980), pp. 44–46.

¹⁵ *Yakima Nihonjin-kai*, p. 21.

¹⁶ In *Yakima Heigen Nihonjin-shi*, a relational term *dōhō* is far more frequently

sense of distinctiveness, both from the white settlers and the Indian residents in the Yakima Valley, and the sense that their destiny on this alien land would be strongly affected by their identity as Japanese. Besides having a common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, nationality, physical features, language, and a myriad of other cultural elements, the Japanese in Yakima came to share a “consciousness of kind” shortly after their settlement had begun. The establishment of the Japanese graveyard was thus an agency which transformed who had formerly been “*Kumamoto-ken-jin*” (people from Kumamoto Prefecture) or “*Hiroshima-ken-jin*” (people from Hiroshima Prefecture) into “*Nihon-jin*” (Japanese). Moreover, the first-generation Japanese pioneers were symbolically drawing their ethnic boundary when they demarcated in Tahoma Cemetery those three blocks of burial ground to be used exclusively by their compatriots.

If ancestral worship was the issue upon which ethnic solidarity initially emerged among the Japanese settlers, it also provided the first bone of contention for the community. The Japanese were soon divided into two factions upon the question of cemetery administration. After a few years of antagonism, however, members of the two groups decided to ignore their minor differences in opinion and reunited under the common goals: “progress of the race” and “building of the compatriot community.” In the spring of 1906, they chose March 3, the date of the Japanese peach festival, to celebrate the beginning of the newly organized North Yakima Cooperative Association (*Kita Yakima Kyōwakai*). The first activity which the new association coordinated was to raise a relief fund for the farmers in the northeastern district of Japan which had suffered a major crop failure. The 49 dollars collected by the Association was sent to Japan via the Japanese Imperial Consulate in Seattle as a token of “sympathy for the misfortune of the compatriots in the motherland.” On April 3, the members met again to celebrate the legendary founding of Japan by Emperor Jimmu back in 660 B.C. After a ceremony in which they sang the Japanese national anthem, the participants toasted the occasion in *sake* and enjoyed Japanese dances and comic storytelling. The celebration of this historical

used than a categorical term *Nihon-jin* (Japanese) to designate Japanese people and those in the Yakima Valley community in particular. In translating *dōhō* into English, “compatriots” is uniformly used in this paper rather than such alternatives as “fellow countrymen” or “brethren.”

date was recorded as a “a great event worthy of special note at the outset of the amalgamation of the compatriots.”¹⁷

To once again draw upon Barth’s discussion of ethnic groups as organizational units, the cultural contents of ethnic dichotomies are analytically of two orders which include 1) overt signals or signs such as dress, language, or general style of life, and 2) “basic value orientations: the standards of morality and excellence by which performance is judged.”¹⁸ The efforts to create the consensual standards of morality were much in evidence in the activities of the voluntary ethnic organization of the Japanese in Yakima from its beginning years. As soon as the Cooperative Association was established, the members realized the necessity of a moral reform “in consideration of the honor of the race.”¹⁹ Specifically, their effort to enhance the public moral led the Association to adopt a resolution to liquidate prostitution in the Japanese community as well as to refuse further entry of persons related to the business. Further in 1909, the Association made a decision to discourage Japanese individuals from gambling. Besides being a moral enforcer of the community, the Cooperative Association began to function as a diplomatic organ to represent the Japanese in the Yakima Valley in their dealings with the outside world. Problems concerning the Japanese in the area were brought to the attention of the Association by white residents, and its decisions were considered as a unified voice of the entire Japanese community. As the Association increasingly assumed the role of a self-government of the Japanese in the area, the members realized the need to legitimize its status. Consequently, the North Yakima Cooperative Association sought and received state approval to be incorporated as a legal body.²⁰

With the establishment of a central organization to represent and protect their interests, what types of relations did the Japanese develop with the majority white society composed of English, German, and various other ethnic groupings? Barth also points out that categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend upon an absence of mobility, contact, and information between the members of different groups, but are “quite to the contrary often the very foundations on which embracing social systems are built.”²¹ Now that the boundaries of ethnic distinc-

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26.

¹⁸ Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, p. 13.

¹⁹ Yakima Nihonjin-kai, p. 59.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 58–63.

²¹ Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, p. 9.

tions were clearly drawn by the organization of a voluntary association of Japanese settlers in Yakima and by its consequent legal incorporation, the inter-ethnic interactions between the Japanese and white residents of the area began to be structured. The building of harmonious relations with the local whites being one of its primary policy objectives, the Association decided in 1909 to participate in the Independence Day celebration in the larger community. Further, when President Taft made a visit to Yakima during the same year, the Association coordinated reception activities with the Yakima Chamber of Commerce, and presented to the President a bouquet of flowers “to express the sincere feelings of welcome shared by Japanese residents.” The effort toward constructing friendly relations with white members of the community was also encouraged by official diplomats of the Japanese government. For example, when Ambassador Kogorō Takahira came through Yakima immediately before the presidential visit, he was greeted by the representatives of the Cooperative Association and responded to their hospitality with a speech of encouragement: “To achieve your goals, rid yourselves of the insular mentality of the Japanese, concentrate on the building of a spiritual harmony with the whites, bear in mind thrift and diligence, and each be strong-minded.”²²

The above observations suggest that although the Cooperative Association came to provide an organizational vessel to institutionalize the relations across ethnic boundaries, such relations were limited primarily to formal and ritualistic occasions. A major portion of the Association’s activities was devoted to intra-community affairs and the protection of its members. While the Cooperative Association began as a loosely structured voluntary organization to symbolize self-identification of the Japanese immigrants in the Yakima Valley, its internal cohesiveness and protective nature became increasingly strengthened by the pressures coming from outside. As anti-Japanese feelings among white residents began to manifest themselves, and also as voluntary ethnic organizations were established in various other Japanese immigrant communities throughout the Pacific Northwest, members of the North Yakima Cooperative Association decided in 1911 to change its name to the North Yakima Japanese Association (*Kita Yakima Nihonjin-kai*), thereby further reinforcing its ethnic identification.²³

²² Yakima Nihonjin-kai, pp. 62–63.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

III

STRUGGLE FOR LAND IN THE "BURNING HORSE" FRONTIER

As the Japanese immigrant population expanded to broader areas in the Yakima Valley, the name of their ethnic association was changed again in 1913 to the Yakima Japanese Association (*Yakima Nihonjin-kai*). The particular area where a greater number of Japanese farmers began to settle was the Yakima Indian Reservation. By 1915, there were some 500 Japanese around the reservation town of Wapato. One of the important reasons for the concentration of Japanese on the reservation lands was a legislative measure preventing the Japanese from owning land. The constitution of the state of Washington prohibited the ownership of land "by aliens other than those who in good faith have declared their intention to become citizens of the United States."²⁴ Japanese immigrants, who were categorized as "aliens ineligible to citizenship" under the U.S. naturalization laws, were not entitled to own land in Washington and thus were relegated to leasing, or share cropping land. Many Japanese found it easier to acquire greater acreage of lease land for farming on the Yakima Indian Reservation, since the federal government which administered the reservation was encouraging the leasing of reservation land at low cost in exchange for land improvements to benefit the Indian residents.²⁵

Even though Japanese farmers could thus obtain leases on large tracts of land on the Indian reservation, these were usually less desirable pieces of land "cut into sloughs by old River channels and the cultivable land lies in irregular parcels not well suited for general farm crops."²⁶ White farmers had preferred other tracts of land where they could develop large-scale commercial fruit orchards. However, since the Japanese could usually acquire only short-term leases ranging from

²⁴ Eliot Grinnel Mears, *Resident Orientals on the American Pacific Coast, Their Legal and Economic Status* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928), pp. 179–80. Quoted in Gail M. Nomura, "Yakima: Japanese Issei Pioneers on the Burning Horse Frontier" (Paper presented to the Asian Studies on the Pacific Coast Conference, Fairbanks, AK, June, 1983) [cited hereafter as "Yakima"], p. 3.

²⁵ Ernest Melvin Loudon, "A Study of the Federal Government Indian Land Politics and the Yakima Indian Confederation, 1855–1934". (M.A. thesis, Washington State University, 1967), pp. 64–90. Quoted in Nomura, "Yakima," pp. 4–5.

²⁶ C. R. Whitlock to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 17 May, 1935, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Yakima Agency (Record Group 75, Federal Archives and Records Center, Seattle). Quoted in Nomura, "Yakima," p. 7.

one to three years, “they could not afford the years of investment in orchard growing to make their investment bear fruit literally.” Yet, these farmers made the best of such disadvantages and “found through experimentation that tomatoes, melons, onions and other truck crops grew well in the sandy loam of the river tracts.”²⁷

The name Yakima means “beautiful land” in the Indian language of the region, but the Japanese often used the ideographs for “burning (*yaki*) horse (*ma*)” when they wrote the word in Japanese. The desert land of Yakima, which reached a temperature of 115 degrees Fahrenheit in summer, must have indeed seemed to them to be a land “hot enough to burn a horse.”²⁸ Ito writes of the Issei, or first-generation Japanese, pioneers’ memories of their hard and hot days of clearing the sagebrush desert in the early decades of this century:

It was scorching hot when I got here. All the people who worked outside suffered from cracked nostrils. They used to jump into the irrigation ditches to cool off, and then go back to work, but in about five minutes their clothes were dry again.²⁹

As a result of their hard work from the early morning till late at night, the Japanese farmers on the reservation came to dominate the vegetable and melon production of the Yakima Valley, and with the improved means of transportation with refrigerated boxcars and a growing demand from the markets in the East and on the Pacific Coast, they were able to make thousands of dollars per acre at times.³⁰ In fact, a Japanese immigrant in Wapato recalls: “A certain year I made big money from my five acres and I was the first in Yakima district to buy a Chevrolet (for \$1000) and a piano.”³¹ Many Japanese managed to purchase automobiles, and others made their triumphant journeys back to their home villages in Japan to show off their wealth. This was the period during and immediately following World War I, and it was the golden era for the Japanese potato and hay farmers on the Yakima Indian Reservation.

The success of the Japanese, nevertheless, did not continue without

²⁷ Nomura, “Yakima,” pp. 4; 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²⁹ Kazuo Ito, *Issei, A History of Japanese Immigrants in North America*. trans. by Shinichiro Nakamura and Jean S. Gerard. (Tokyo: Japan Publications, 1973) [cited hereafter as *Issei*], p. 427.

³⁰ Nomura, “Yakima,” p. 7.

³¹ Ito, *Issei*, p. 431.

causing negative repercussions. After having tamed the “burning horse” frontier of Yakima, the Japanese were faced with the even greater challenge of taming the hostilities of white residents in the area. Similar to many other communities on the Pacific Coast where Japanese made a steady progress in agriculture, claims were heard among the white farmers on the reservation that Japanese were monopolizing the most fertile parcels of land, despite the facts that the success of Japanese were made on the lands which white farmers had not even wanted and on the types of products which they had not desired to grow.³²

It is important to note that the first person who mobilized the anti-Japanese feelings among the white farmers into an organized action was a German minister/farmer named Benz. Having experienced imprisonment as an enemy alien during World War I, Benz is likely to have attempted to divert the anti-German sentiment, which swept throughout the United States during World War I, into the newly rising animosity toward the Japanese. Using a local newspaper, Benz criticized Japanese immigrants for their low standard of living, excessive female and child labor, for paying exorbitant rents for the lease-land and thereby creating unfair competition, and for their lack of contribution to the local economy.³³

Members of the Yakima Japanese Association felt that even though most of such criticisms were ungrounded pretexts to condemn the success of the Japanese, they found some “appropriate advice” contained in them. In April of 1917, the Association set forth the following recommendations: 1) The resident Japanese should, as much as possible, purchase foods from the local white stores so as to contribute to the local economy, and an English translation of this resolution be placed in the English-language newspaper, 2) the Japanese Association should coordinate the rental-fees and tracts of the lease-land, and negotiate with white farmers’ organizations with regard to the rent and the prevention of leasing competition, 3) the president of the Japanese Association should request the employers of Japanese sugar beet laborers to carefully supervise their moral conduct so that they will not cause unsavory incidents related to gambling and drinking, and 4)

³² Nomura, “Yakima,” p. 9.

³³ Kazuo Ito, *Hokubei Hyakunen Zakura* [Hundred-year-old Cherry Trees in North America] (Tokyo: Nichibō-shuppan, 1973) [cited hereafter as *Hokubei*], p. 230; Yakima Nihonjin-kai, p. 169.

to enhance the morality of the resident Japanese, an enlightenment movement should be launched, in addition to distributing detailed instructions. Such strategies advanced by the Association were recorded as an “extremely wise move to utilize the force of the enemy to generate solidarity and self-discipline of the friends.”³⁴

Spurred by the anti-Japanese campaign on the West Coast in the aftermath of the war, the Washington State Legislature in 1921 followed the example of California in passing anti-alien land laws which prohibited not only land ownership by aliens who were ineligible for citizenship but also illegalized their leasing, renting, and sharecropping of land. As a result, Japanese were virtually dispossessed of their land in Washington except on the federally administered Yakima Indian Reservation where the state law did not apply. Nevertheless, encouraged by the passage of the alien land laws, white farmers of the Grange, returning white soldiers of the American Legion, and white businessmen of the local banks in Wapato gathered forces to reignite a large-scale exclusionist movement to drive the Japanese out of the reservation land. Members of the American Legion made an appeal to the “Americans First” motto:

Give Americans the first chance. We have laid down our lives for our country. While we were fighting on the front, the Japanese prevailed on the fertile lands on the reservation in an attempt to take away our opportunities. All loyal Americans, come and take sides with the veteran soldiers who have sacrificed themselves on the battlefield.³⁵

Some local banks had also harbored enmity against Japanese farmers who, deprived of long term investment opportunities, had frequently remitted their hard-earned money back to their home villages in Japan. Despite the efforts of the Japanese Association and the Japanese government to appease the exclusionist movement, these anti-Japanese groups actively lobbied the Senators and House members from the state, and ultimately succeeded in pressuring the U.S. Department of Interior, which administered the Indian affairs, to officially apply the Washington State anti-alien land laws to federal lands in the Yakima Indian Reservation in March 1922.³⁶

³⁴ Yakima Nihonjin-kai, pp. 169–171.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 173–174. (This quotation is translated from the Japanese translation given in the book.)

³⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior Circular No. 1768, February 27, 1922, Record Group 75. Quoted in Nomura, “Yakima,” p. 10.

Greatly shaken by the above federal decision, members of the Yakima Japanese Association gathered to discuss possible counter-measures. The best they could do, however, was to recommend that the Japanese help one another to cultivate land, "try to Americanize their style of life, and purchase daily commodities from local merchants as much as possible."³⁷ Unable to renew the leases, many Japanese farmers were forced to leave the reservation permanently. Even those who managed to remain by subleasing land from white farmers were always under the anxiety that they might have to move out at any moment.

This was the time when the survival of not only the Japanese on the Indian Reservation but of the entire Japanese ethnic community was at stake. In May 1924, a new immigration law was passed in the U.S. Congress, which struck another disastrous blow against the already depressed morale of the Japanese in the Yakima Valley. A major aim of this law was to exclude Asian immigration, but because Chinese immigration had already been banned since 1882, the law made Japanese a select group that was denied both citizenship and immigration privileges.

IV

AMERICANISM VS. ETHNIC IDENTITY

Ever since the organization of their ethnic community in the first decade of the twentieth century, the utmost preoccupation of the Japanese Issei pioneers was how to protect the "honor of the race." If these immigrants had remained in their small villages in Japan and never come to the United States, it would perhaps never have occurred to them that "the honor and dignity of the race" were on their own shoulders. The pages of the Issei-written history of *Yakima Heigen Nihonjin-shi* (1935) are filled with the expressions of the immigrants' determination to defend to the last the honor of Japanese peoplehood and to perpetuate their presence on the American soil. Yet, living in a society which deprived them of land and possibilities for receiving reinforcements from their homeland, thereby stripping them of valued opportunities to enjoy the sense of honor and pride, the Japanese con-

³⁷ Yakima Nihonjin-kai, pp. 91-92.

stantly felt the need to claim their cultural worth and uniqueness.

It is not surprising then that one of the first activities which the Yakima Japanese Association conducted after the passage of the anti-Japanese immigration law in 1924 was to renew the efforts of its cemetery committee. The Association documented the event:

To mourn for the dead who preceded us and to keep their graves clean have been our traditional customs since the establishment of the Japanese Association. Whereas the Association has always selected the members of the Cemetery Committee for serving the necessary duties, in order to raise funds for such services and to propagate the fine custom to the compatriots at large, a grand variety show was held on October 27, 1924 under the sponsorship of the Cemetery Committee.³⁸

While the graveyard was the subject around which ethnic solidarity of the Japanese in Yakima first emerged two decades earlier, it again served as a symbol in generating and heightening ethnic consciousness at the time when the very survival of the group itself was in question. In other words, this was *their* way of articulating their distinctiveness as an ethnic group, whereas the Washington State Alien Land Law and the federal immigration laws represented the pronouncements from the majority society as to who the Japanese were and where they belonged.

When the Japanese were desperately searching for signs of hope and encouragement, however, the exclusionists in the Yakima Valley were preparing themselves for another wave of anti-Japanese agitation. Under the monoculture system resulting from the long snowy winter, while farmers in the slack season usually joined forces against the Japanese as if it were an annual social event. On January 26, 1925, 600 white residents, including members of various farmers' associations, gathered in Wapato to reignite the movement against Japanese farmers remaining on the Indian reservation. A decision was made at the meeting to urge the State Governor and the Secretary of Interior to further intensify the enforcement of the Washington State Land Law on the reservation land.³⁹

At a request of the Yakima Japanese Association, Japanese Consul Ōhashi in Seattle made a visit to Yakima to pacify the exclusionist forces as well as to lift the spirits of the frustrated and despairing Japanese residents. After meeting with the representatives of the white

³⁸ Yakima Nihonjin-kai, p. 97.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

business community and the local press, the consul spoke to the members of the Japanese Association to urge their awakening. He stated:

. . . because most of the Japanese people today lack the Japanese spirit (*yamato-damashii*), which is the spirit of self-sacrifice, the future of the race is in great danger. If only there were two thousand of those with the true Japanese spirit, such a thing as anti-Japanese movement should not even take place.

Concluding that the recent exclusionist actions in the Yakima Valley were caused by economic competition combined with racial hatred, the consul pointed out that the Japanese who had maintained little contact with the white community were partly responsible for the situation. He further warned the Japanese audience that “although it is a good thing to rise early in the morning to work, working till late at night or having the wives and children work near the highways and other conspicuous places should be avoided.”⁴⁰

The Issei wrote of the consul’s inflammatory speech as “the voice of encouragement of a Zen Buddhist to the compatriots in an extreme crisis” at the beginning of a section entitled, “Found a Way Out of a Fatal Situation” (*Shichū ni katsu o etari*) in their history.⁴¹ What inspired the Isseis in Yakima with new life was the reconfirmation of their ethnic roots as symbolized in such words as *yamato-damashii* or *nippon-minzoku* (Japanese race) contained in the speech. To maintain and reinforce ethnic pride, which was constantly threatened by the gunfire of discrimination by the majority society, the Japanese needed the reinvigoration of their spiritual energy. Occasional visits by Japanese diplomats in Seattle and officers of the Japanese Imperial Navy also brought them a renewed sense of pride and continuity. Although many of these immigrants were already determined to make America their permanent home, they were technically citizens of Japan and these visitors from Japan served to revitalize the umbilical cord which connected this ethnic group to the country of their origin some 5,000 miles away.

Despite intermittent slogans of adopting the American way of life, voiced particularly during the times when the anti-Japanese sentiment was high in the white community, the major efforts of the Japanese

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 194–194; 210.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

Association were thus directed toward keeping their ethnic society basically "Japanese." This strategy, however, became somewhat problematical for the Japanese immigrants when a greater number of their second-generation, or Nisei, children became an integral part of their community; the first census taken by the Yakima Japanese Association in June 1924 indicated that more than 42 per cent of the total ethnic Japanese population of 580 in the Valley were American-born.⁴²

In the general assembly of the Association on January 18, 1925, the members agreed that a reform of their collective life was a major issue of the community and decided to look into the subjects of proper guidance and the Japanese language education of their native-born children. This was the first time the question of the second generation received the central attention of the Issei-dominated Japanese Association. The members felt that the discussion of these two issues bespoke their renewed determination to maintain a permanent residence in the Yakima Valley. Furthermore they confirmed the goals of "breaking down the misconception of white superiority through demonstrating the excellence of the second-generation citizen children" and "educating the children so that they will contribute to the industries of America and become persons of peace as members of the untiring Japanese race."⁴³ These two goals, however, contained an apparent contradiction; the Issei parents wished their children to contribute to the larger American society while becoming members of "the untiring Japanese race." The ambivalence which the Issei felt toward the education of the Nisei requires a closer analysis.

In a broader framework of ethnicity in American society, it is true that such a loyalty conflict between American and ethnic identities was not unique to the Japanese-American population. To conceptualize the symbolic interplay of these two propositions, Sollors uses the theory of American kinship developed by Schneider,⁴⁴ and argues:

American identity alone . . . takes the place of a relationship "in law" (like "husband, wife, step-, -in-law, etc."), leaving ethnicity to fill the place of relationships "in nature" ("the natural child, the illegitimate child, the natural mother etc.") and "by blood" ("father, mother, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, etc."). In American social symbolism, . . . ethnicity functions as

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 296; 213.

⁴⁴ David M. Schneider, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

a relationship of “blood” and “nature,” whereas national identity may be relegated to “the order of law.”⁴⁵

For many ethnic groups in the United States, “the law” and “blood” could coexist in parallel and it was thus possible to be simultaneously a loyal citizen of the country and a member of an ethnic minority. For other groups, however, these two imperatives were mutually antagonistic and it required a special solution to make a meaningful connection between the two.

Sollors suggests that German Americans experienced this dilemma during World War I.⁴⁶ In the case of Japanese immigrants, the conflict was further exacerbated by the critical importance of accomplishing inter-generational continuity. Since many Japanese farmers had left the reservation land after the enforcement of the Alien Land Law and no more new immigrants were coming in after the passage of the 1924 Immigration Law, the size of the Japanese ethnic community in Yakima was reduced to only 197 households.⁴⁷ The only way for the first-generation Japanese to reconstruct their agricultural enterprise was to regain access to land through their American-born Nisei children who could not be denied citizenship, so that when the Nisei reached maturity, they were able to own directly or lease land for themselves as well as for their Issei parents. Yet, since the average age of the Issei men was as young as 44 in 1925 and further since they had started their families late, most of the Nisei children were still too young to assume such responsibilities. The Japanese in Yakima had to wait another ten long years before they could begin to recover their heavy losses.

Furthermore, being concerned over their increasing degree of dependence on the Nisei, the first-generation Japanese, whose proficiency in English was limited, regarded the teaching of the Japanese language to their English-speaking children as a question of vital importance to guarantee effective communication between the two generations. Also, in order for the Nisei children to fully understand the merit of studying the language, the parents felt it necessary to accompany the language education with efforts to implant ethnic pride in the minds of the Nisei. In May 1925, the Japanese Association held the first education committee meeting, in which two major questions were on the

⁴⁵ Werner Sollors, “Theory of American Ethnicity,” p. 271.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Yakima Nihonjin-kai, p. 98.

agenda: 1) “the virtue of teaching Japanese and English simultaneously,” and 2) “the method to inculcate in the minds of the children the idea that the Japanese are superior to other races.”⁴⁸

Yet, vacillation of the Issei between the two seemingly irreconcilable goals of citizenship education and ethnic training is evident in various sections of *Yakima Heigen Nihonjin-shi*. For example, in March 1926, after it had decided to establish the Parents Association to coordinate efforts among local public schools, the Japanese language school, and individual families, the Yakima Japanese Association adopted a resolution concerning the general principles of the education of the Nisei. The first guideline of the resolution read:

We recommend that the national flag of the United States be always raised during meetings of the Parents Association and Japanese language classes.

[Note] Since the Nisei are American citizens, their education should be based on the principle of “American first and Japanese second.” Thus care must be taken not to confuse the minds of the children and invite misunderstandings.⁴⁹

On the basis of the above agreement that the teaching of Japanese language should be promoted “without interfering with the citizenship education,” the Yakima Japanese community established the Wapato Japanese Language School in November 1926 with the objective of “getting the Nisei in touch with the beautiful spirit of the Japanese race and building their characters through the study of Japanese language.”⁵⁰

Thus the Isseis spoke in one breath about giving priority to the idea of the Nisei as American citizens, in another, about instilling in them “the beautiful spirit of the Japanese race.” Yet, whatever kind of excellence the Nisei demonstrated was more readily tied to the latter: the sense of ethnic identity and pride, which was combined with the feelings of retribution for past and present injustices. For example, in the midst of the Nisei education movement in 1926, the first two Nisei university students from the Yakima Valley graduated with outstanding grades. Nisei high school students also graduated with honors. The proud Issei documented the occasion:

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

Our graduates struck the children of “superior” whites dumb with astonishment. The whites were amazed; the Japanese were ecstatic. No matter how arrogant the Americans may be, they were aware of the self-contradiction of condemning the excellence of the young citizens of America. They must praise the Nisei children with applause; they must be thankful to the Japanese fathers and mothers who have produced fine American citizens. Under this logic, the excellence of the Japanese Nisei became an absolute fact, and the long years of hardship of the Issei were finally rewarded for the first time.⁵¹

V

THE WAPATO NIPPONS BASEBALL TEAM

In addition to the academic achievement of the Nisei children, what excited the Japanese ethnic community in the Yakima Valley since the early 1930s was, interestingly enough, baseball. During the Nisei education movement, the community felt the increasing need for institutions which would aid the socializing of the youth, and consequently the Yakima Valley Japanese Youth Club (*Yakima Barē Nihon-jin Seinen-kai*) was organized in 1926. At the beginning, the Issei advisors wished the new club to promote reading among the youth, and thus established a library. However, the young and outdoor-oriented Nisei youths soon turned the reading club into an athletic club. The Issei wrote of this unexpected transformation with pride: “The energetic youth turned to sports and combined their *bushidō* spirit with American sportsmanship.”⁵² The sport which attracted the greatest interest of the athletic Nisei was baseball, which had long established its indisputable status as “America’s national pastime.” What is particularly intriguing about the Nisei baseball activity in Yakima is the unusual enthusiasm it generated among the Issei who were, as we have already seen, torn between the need to Americanize their children and the desire to transmit “Japaneseness” to them. Also important, for the purpose of this study, is all the inter-ethnic feelings which were projected, either overtly or subtly, to the inter-ethnic games involving the Nisei players.

A few years after the founding of the Yakima Valley Youth Club, a Nisei baseball team was organized in 1928. The name of the team was,

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 289.

symbolically, the Wapato “Nippons.” By 1930, the Nippons were powerful enough to enter the Mt. Adams League composed of each six teams in the upper and lower divisions in the Yakima Valley. The only other non-white team on the League was the Reservation Athletic Club of native Indians. Most of the Nisei players of the Nippons had acquired their baseball skills through playing in the ethnically-mixed high school team: the Wapato High School baseball team consisted of many Nisei players who later played for the Wapato Nippons while their white teammates became stars of the Wapato Town team. The Nisei and the whites thus came to play against each other in separate teams when they graduated from high school.⁵³

Playing with white teams itself was not unusual for the Nisei baseball teams in the Pacific Northwest. For example, the Nippon Athletic Club and Taiyō Club of Seattle Nisei played against white teams in the Star League and the Inter-City League respectively. The performance of these teams, however, left much to be desired.⁵⁴ By contrast, the Wapato Nippons successfully competed against older, more experienced teams in the Mt. Adams League. In 1931, they finished second in the League and in 1933, the team tied for first place, losing only in the play-off series.⁵⁵ In the section entitled “Baseball Team Reigning Supreme In the Valley” (*Heigen ni ha o tonaeru yakyū-dan*), *Yakima Heigen Nihonjin-shi* proudly recorded:

The Nippons baseball team distinguished themselves . . . in various games in the Valley winning the admiration of the spectators with their brilliant skills and fine sportsmanship, and the performance of the vigorous sons of Japan drew a groan from the fans. In the championship game in 1934, they have unhesitatingly exhibited the power of the invincible team and won the grand silver cup. After marching through the compatriot fans and supporters, the team attended a victory party and drummed up the high spirits for all the compatriot Niseis.⁵⁶

The Mt. Adams League championship victory over Wiley City by the Japanese-American team in July 1934 was a critical event not only for the Japanese but also for the entire community of Wapato. The local

⁵³ Gail M. Nomura, “Wapato Nippons: Japanese American Baseball Teams in the Pacific Northwest.” (Paper presented to the Pacific Northwest American Studies Association, Pullman, WA, April, 1984) [cited hereafter as “Wapato”], pp. 1-2.

⁵⁴ Ito, *Issei*, p. 237.

⁵⁵ Nomura, “Wapato,” p. 2.

⁵⁶ Yakima Nihonjin-kai, pp. 288-291.

newspaper, which customarily gave the front page coverage to the all-white Wapato Town team, headlines their article “Nippons Win Championship” on the top of the front page:

Wapato wins a pennant! Yes, sir, after all these years of patient waiting the Nippons went out and won a pennant for Wapato in the Mt. Adams League, composed of 12 teams. It was the first Mt. Adams League pennant to ever be won by Wapato—as the Wapato Town team has generally played in the Valley League. But a pennant is something to be proud of no matter what league it is won in and Wapato is getting considerable advertising due to the prowess of this year’s Nippon team. The Japanese boys not only play good, fast, hard and clean baseball, but have won a reputation for themselves as fine sportsmen both on and off the playing field.⁵⁷

Even though the Wapato citizens unanimously congratulated the victory of the Nippons over teams from other towns, their support was divided generally along ethnic lines when a baseball fever swept over the town as the all-white Wapato Town and the Wapato Nippons confronted each other in a three-game series, which was expected to “give both teams a fairer chance to prove its superiority.” Having won the league championship, the Nippons were expected to have “plenty of support from Japanese rooters throughout the valley and some of the white fans will also favor the Nippons to win.”⁵⁸ Although the Wapato Town team won the town championship in the third, deciding game, the second game of the series on August 19, 1934 had an unexpected turn of event. A Japanese vernacular paper in Seattle reported the event with much enthusiasm:

For this game, the Wapato white team prepared themselves for a guaranteed victory by recruiting a pitcher and many other players from the Yakima and Toppenish teams and even buying off the umpire. In contrast to such disgraceful conduct of the white team, the Japanese team was made up of authentic Nippon boys of Wapato, and was playing a close game without raising any objections to the unfairness of the umpire. In the top of the ninth when the score was 6 to 3 in favor of the Wapato [Town] team, the Wapato, probably coming to the end of their devil’s luck, suffered an unusual accident: their pitcher had a serious injury and was rushed to a hospital. After losing the pitcher, the Wapato team refused to continue the game. On the other hand, the Japanese team not only declined the chance of victory

⁵⁷ “Nippons Win Championship,” 2 August, 1934, *Wapato Independent*; see also “Nippon Ready for Faster League,” *ibid.*

⁵⁸ “Wapato and Nippons Will Play,” 9 August, 1934, *Wapato Independent*.

that was due to them but also offered to donate all of the gate money to the injured player and promised to play a benefit game for him on the following Sunday. All the citizens were touched by the pureness of the heart, gentlemanship, and sportsmanship of the Nippons.⁵⁹

Judging from the above various newspaper accounts, the players of the Nippons were perceived as “the Japanese boys” in the eyes of the whites, and as “the vigorous sons of Japan” in the eyes of the Japanese Isseis. It is possible, however, that the Nisei players themselves considered that they were playing “their” national game as “American citizens.” Yet, in the poly-ethnic community in the Yakima Valley which experienced intense antagonisms against the Japanese, as we have already seen, the ethnic status of the Nippons appears to have been given greater emphasis than their citizenship status.

In 1935, the Wapato Nippons remained undefeated through the first half of the Mt. Adams League championship, and captured the lower division title for the second consecutive year. The playoff series to decide the league champion were to be played against the Regimbal team of Moxee which had won the upper division title of the league. Moxee was a town less than ten miles from Wapato, and was inhabited primarily by hop-growing French immigrants and their descendants. Being outside the Yakima Indian Reservation, the town had no ethnic Japanese. After the Nisei team had won the first game, the victory of the second game went to Moxee. The third, deciding game was scheduled in Moxee on Sunday, July 30, 1935. One newspaper reported the feverish excitement over the coming game:

The ol' Moxee town with its numerous French descent Americans is said to have bet its last shirts, much less last dollars and cents on their team to come through with another victory and in Wapato, the situation is reversed. Forgotten is the welfare of the watermelons, cantaloupes and tomatoes in the fields and of most interest is—Can Wapato win the deciding game? The whole town, including the white population, is agog over the series and betting is sky high.⁶⁰

The Wapato Nippons pulled a dramatic victory in the tenth inning with

⁵⁹ “*Wapato Nippon-dan no supōtsuman-buri hakujiin-shimbunshi ni zessan saru*” [Sportsmanship of the Wapato Nippons Praised by a White Newspaper], 30 August, 1934, *North American Times*.

⁶⁰ “Wapato-Moxee,” Frank Fukuda Scrapbook, Archives and Manuscript, University of Washington. Quoted in Nomura, “Wapato,” pp. 6-7.

the score of 5 to 3, and were crowned the league championship for the second successive year. The English-language Wapato newspaper reported on August 1 that "Wapato fans who witnessed the game say it was one of the best games they have witnessed this season."⁶¹

The joy of victory and the sense of pride shared by the citizens of Wapato across ethnic lines proved again to be short-lived, when, barely a month later, the Nippons delivered the Wapato Town an embarrassing defeat of 10 to 0 in the championship game of the town. The white sportswriter of the local paper wrote of the game with much remorse:

Many of the Wapato players had not had a baseball in their hands for a month and their lack of practice was much in evidence as the Wapato team made nine errors to lose to the Nippons, who were in midseason form, due to the fact that they had been playing regularly ever since the season closed . . . We are not trying to take any credit away from the Japanese team, for they have a fast and hustling ball club, which is rated as tough picking for any team in the valley and the editor of this article will do all in his power to help the Nippons get into the Valley league next year. Wapato had as strong a team in the field as it has had any time this season, but the boys were just not in shape and couldn't get going.⁶²

The Wapato Nippons was indeed able to enter the more prestigious Yakima Valley League in the following year. To celebrate their promotion as well as the entrance of the second Nisei team "the Yamatos" into the Mt. Adams League, the Yakima Valley Japanese Youth Club sponsored a Father-Son banquet in March 1936 at the Wapato Japanese Hall. The proud Issei fathers had ordered a special championship banner from Japan and presented it to the Wapato Nippons at the banquet "in recognition for the past showing of the team and the good spirit they have created among their American friends on the ball diamond."⁶³

⁶¹ "Nippons Win Championship," 1 August, 1935, *Wapato Independent*.

⁶² "Nippons Defeat Wapato Team," 29 August, 1935, *Wapato Independent*.

⁶³ "Wapato Father-Son Banquet on Sunday," *North American Times(?)*, 18 March, 1936, Harry Honda private collection, Spokane, Washington. Quoted in Nomura, "Wapato," p. 8.

VI

THE STAKES OF THE GAME

While the Nisei baseball players of the Wapato Nippons were making themselves heroes of their ethnic community, and occasionally of the entire town of Wapato, the relationship between the Japanese and the rest of the community in the Yakima Valley entered another threatening phase. An important factor which contributed to this turbulence was the Great Depression which swept over the nation in the 1930s. The Yakima Japanese Association reported the impact of the economic panic on the larger Valley society:

While white farmers became increasingly impoverished and many of them were eventually forced to abandon their land, only the Japanese managed to support their large families without begging for the relief from the county government. . . . Many Japanese could afford to lease better tracts than previously. All this caused misunderstanding and jealousy among the white farmers.⁶⁴

Following a racially-motivated incident in the central Washington town of Ellensburg in 1931, in which eight Japanese potato farm laborers were expelled by an armed mob of white jobless workers, six Japanese farms in Wapato became the target of arson and explosion by some white residents in the spring of 1933. Even though the Japanese had suffered a long history of discrimination and exclusion, this was the first time that direct actions were taken against their lives. In addition to the depressed economy, these incidents were related to the recent increase in the Filipino laborers in the area. At the beginning, white farmer's associations planned to expel only the Filipinos, but they eventually decided in January 1933 to drive out Japanese farmers as well, using the familiar exclusionist rhetoric that Japanese did not assimilate, maintained a low standard of living, and thereby created unfair competition.⁶⁵

In view of the general social tensions such as the above, was it indeed possible that baseball generated inter-ethnic harmony between the Japanese and the white societies? Nomura concludes that the Wapato Nippons "succeeded in bridging the gaps between generations and

⁶⁴ Yakima Nihonjin-kai, p. 204.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-125; 200.

cultures.”⁶⁶ True, the Nisei baseball team contributed to promoting the trans-generational continuity between the Issei and the Nisei. It is questionable, however, whether the cultures of the ethnic Japanese and the majority group were brought closer through the medium of baseball. For what primarily comes across through the aforementioned accounts of the Wapato Nippons is the manifestation of ethnic rivalry, rather than “the good spirit they have created among their American friends on the ball diamond.”⁶⁷

Taking into account our earlier contention that cultural homogenization does not necessarily result in the dissolution of ethnic distinction, it is plausible that baseball helped the acculturation of the Nisei, if not their assimilation into the majority society. In the literature of American sports, many writers assert that sports function as a major agency for Americanizing immigrants and foreigners.⁶⁸ In his study of the social significance of sport, Guttman defines sports as “‘playful’ physical contests, that is, as nonutilitarian contests which include an important measure of physical as well as intellectual skill.”⁶⁹ Several decades earlier, Huizinga summed up the formal characteristics of play:

. . . we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside “ordinary” life as being “not serious,” but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tends to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.⁷⁰

It is interesting to note further that Huizinga, while pointing out that play is an “illusion’ and temporary “interlude” in our daily lives, suggests the fluidity of distinction between “play” and “seriousness”: tension and uncertainty over the outcome of the game “increase enor-

⁶⁶ Nomura, “Wapato,” p. 8.

⁶⁷ “Wapato Father-Son Banquet on Sunday,” *loc. cit.*

⁶⁸ John Rickards Betts, *America’s Sporting Heritage: 1850–1950* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1974), p. 333; Benjamin Rader, “The Quest for Subcommunities and the Rise of American Sport.” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 29 (1977), p. 311.

⁶⁹ Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 7.

⁷⁰ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962, First published 1938), p. 13.

mously when the antithetical element becomes really agonistic in the play of groups," and the "passion to win sometimes threatens to obliterate the levity proper to a game."⁷¹ It is possible then that when a game is played between two parties whose social status is vastly different and who also see themselves as "different" from each other culturally, the game leaves its proper "playful" domain and something much more serious becomes at stake.

In the case of the Yakima Japanese, it appears that the "nonutilitarian" and "not serious" game of baseball served very serious ethnic purposes, and that the meanings attached to the Nisei baseball had direct relevance to the socio-cultural milieu in which the game was played. It should be remembered that the Nisei baseball team emerged out of the second-generation education movement which contained the conflicting messages of "Americanization" and "perpetuation of Japanese cultural heritage." The great expectation the "alien" immigrants placed upon the citizenship status of the American-born Nisei is expressed in a statement such as:

May our beloved Nisei replace the idle whites and fly high on the fertile land of Washington. May our Nisei inherit the farms, the fruit of the hardships of their respectful fathers and mothers.⁷²

At the same time, the Issei pioneers were desperately searching for the assurance that their offspring would indeed inherit the Japanese spirit and enhance the "honor of the race," which had a critical significance to them, yet they were no longer able to achieve themselves.

The Wapato Nippons crystallized such aspirations of the Japanese immigrants in the Yakima Valley. The victory of the Nisei on the baseball diamond was both absolute and spectacular: it was much more visible than the Nisei students who excelled their white classmates in academic competition, and was thus much more effective in creating mass excitement. The Nisei athletes, playing with good sportsmanship, challenged and defeated white teams in the most American of all the American sports, and most importantly, they were the "Nippons." It is no surprise that when there was an important match, "some 400 Japanese Americans attended out of a total Valley population of some 1,000." Issei farmers, who were used to working 18 hours daily on

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 11; 9; 47.

⁷² Yakima Nihonjin-kai, p. 259.

their lands, “quit work early every Sunday to spend the afternoon cheering their sons on to victory” during the busiest cultivating and harvesting times which coincided with baseball season.⁷³

Yet, for the Isseis who attended the games and rooted for their team, the Nisei baseball was perhaps more than a mere Sunday afternoon recreation. For those Japanese to whom the words “aliens ineligible to citizenship” were heard as “a whisper of the devil” and the anti-alien land law was felt “as cold as the ice,”⁷⁴ baseball was a very exceptional activity in which they were accorded equal rights and equal rules. What was at stake at the game was the “honor of the race,” for the honor and esteem won by the victor could be easily transferred to the group to which the winning team belonged. Thus, when the Nippons defeated their white opponents, the glory of their victory transcended the baseball field on one particular Sunday: it penetrated into the hearts of the Japanese and struck the very core of their ethnic consciousness. Manifestly, the Japanese rooters were promoting the public image that the Nisei were bona fide, fully Americanized citizens, and took pride in “the good spirit they created among their American friends on the baseball diamond.” Latently, however, they were recreating the sense of ethnic pride in themselves and confirming their belief that the Japanese could indeed prove their “superiority” to the whites when given the opportunity to stand on an equal ground.

Moreover, the Wapato Nippons signalled the birth of a new kind of ethnic identity. The players were neither totally American nor totally Japanese: they were the suntanned and rugged athletes of a pioneer working background. Since the Sunday games usually began at 2:30 in the afternoon, the players, who helped their parents run farms, “started work extra early on Sundays to pack the farm goods for Monday morning shipment.”⁷⁵ These “vigorous sons of Japan” excelling themselves in the native American sport of baseball were, in essence, a unique product of Japanese immigrant life in the Yakima Valley, as well as the symbol of their new Japanese-American identity.⁷⁶

⁷³ Nomura, “Wapato,” pp. 5; 3.

⁷⁴ Yakima Nihonjin-kai, pp. 250; 217.

⁷⁵ Nomura, “Wapato,” p. 5.

⁷⁶ Having observed that the Wapato Nippons struck a rare balance between American citizenship and Japanese ancestral heritage, it is extremely illuminating to find that the game of baseball played a similar role in other historical situations. For example, Rader reports a case in which “As late as the 1920s a French-Canadian faction in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, ‘resorted to the archetypical American game [baseball]’

Nevertheless, to the Yakima Japanese who rejoiced over the glorious moments brought about by the medium of baseball, the fact that the “good spirit” of inter-ethnic friendship and the Nisei baseball team “reigning supreme in the Valley” were both mere “illusions” struck home, when a war broke out between the country of their ancestral origin and their host country in December 1941. Six months later, the Japanese “aliens ineligible to citizenship” and their American citizen children were forced out of their farms and businesses in Yakima. They were herded into a Wyoming concentration camp, Heart Mountain, for the duration of the war, and few were able to return to their homes in Yakima Valley because of the hostilities of white residents.⁷⁷ Executive Order 9066, which uprooted and incarcerated the Issei and Nisei, was signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had said in 1939:

Baseball has become through the years, not only a great national sport but also the symbol of America as a melting pot. The players embrace all nations and national origins and the fans, equally cosmopolitan, make only one demand of them: Can they play the game?⁷⁸

VII

CONCLUSION

Based on the preceding observations, it is apparent that the pre-war Japanese immigrant community in the Yakima Valley maintained a high level of ethnic consciousness. In attempting to explain why, the relationship between the attitudes of the majority society toward the Japanese and the cultural idioms that were used by this minority group will also be summarized.

As we have already seen in an earlier section of this paper, the Japanese, actively rejected by the larger society, organized their own ethnic institutions to protect and promote their interests. Relegated to

as a means of preserving their community from the forces of assimilation.” (Rader, *op. cit.*, p. 361.) Equally intriguing is that, although the setting is Japan in late Meiji, Roden writes that the elite high school students of Japan played a newly introduced American game of baseball as a “righteous struggle for national honor” during the era when social tensions were mounting throughout Japan for the scheduled revision of unequal treaties with Western powers. (Donald Roden, “Baseball and the Quest for National Dignity in Meiji Japan,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 85 [1980] p. 521.)

⁷⁷ Nomura, “Yakima,” p. 11.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Betts, *America's Sporting Heritage*, p. 334.

cultivate less desirable land and later deprived of land itself, they had to resort to different means of earning a livelihood from their white neighbors.

With regard to the general characteristics of the Japanese Associations on the West Coast in the prewar period, the Nisei sociologist Kitano accords little credit to their social function, stating that they "had few contacts with the majority community" and thus "played a conservative role in regard to acculturation."⁷⁹ In view of the marked difference in the social and legal status between the Japanese and the whites, it is doubtful, however, whether acculturation and assimilation of the individual Japanese were achieved better without the presence of the Japanese Association. Rather the evidence from the Yakima Japanese Association speaks to the contrary: besides protecting and promoting the interests of their members, it helped to institutionalize the relations between the Japanese immigrants and the majority society of whites.

Yet, more than its practical utility, the critical role of the Japanese Association seems to be found in its moral function: the Association developed a social structure which provided the Japanese immigrants the source of esteem and emotional satisfaction which could not be derived from their interactions with the majority community. The Yakima Issei summarized the feeling of the Japanese settlers over the treatment they had received from the larger American society:

Exclusion of the Japanese was based initially on the same principle concerning colored races such as the blacks and the Chinese. However, in contrast to the Chinese who acquiesced in inhumane violence and the Chinese exclusion treaty which willfully disregarded international fellowship, we Japanese were defiant, achieved excellence, and our national background was powerful. That is why the Americans have directed, in a more concentrated and unscrupulous fashion, every possible persecution, humiliation, and machination against the Japanese. Yet, the self-contradiction in the rationale of the American exclusionists is that the Japanese must be excluded since we do not assimilate. Rejecting our naturalization rights, excluding the Japanese socially and economically and thereby closing our road to assimilation, the Americans still demand that we assimilate. Such is like tying someone's feet and then ordering him to run, and finally clubbing him to death because he cannot run. If it is not the absurdity of the Americans, how else can we make sense out of this contradiction?⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Kitano, *Japanese Americans*, p. 56.

⁸⁰ Yakima Nihonjin-kai, p. 154.

The above passage illustrates several important points: 1) the Yakima Japanese differentiated themselves from Chinese immigrants by their defiance, excellence, and superior national background, 2) the Issei attributed the exclusionism of the white society to the above characteristics of their group itself, rather than to their failure to assimilate, and 3) the Japanese were highly indignant over the incoherent attitude of the whites toward their assimilation. The Japanese Association was an organization to both institutionalize the sense of distinctness of the Japanese and mitigate their feelings of anger and frustration. It had its own hierarchy of statuses and offices which the members valued and could strive for, and organized social activities in which every Japanese was welcome to participate. Furthermore, these were the kinds of activities which the immigrants could identify themselves with and derive genuine pleasure from. Moreover, a major portion of the social calendar of the Japanese Association was patterned after festivals and rituals of their motherland, and these activities were scheduled for the dates of special cultural significance in Japan. All such activities supplied to the Japanese not only the sense of honor and continuity, but also important cultural symbols around which they could build and redefine their ethnic identity.

At the root of the ethnic consciousness of the Yakima Japanese, one can detect a continuous effort to confirm their common ancestry. Besides the importance placed upon the proper maintenance of the Japanese cemetery, the ritual idioms involving ancestral worship are further found in ceremonies related to the Japanese imperial family, which was regarded by the Japanese citizens as the divine, direct descendant of their original national founders. The Japanese immigrants congregated to perform special ceremonies for the birth, death, and enthronement of the members of the imperial family in the direct line of the Emperor.⁸¹ It thus appears that the Isseis made every endeavor to

⁸¹ In explaining the lower degree of assimilation of the ethnic Japanese in Peru as compared to the ethnic Chinese, Thompson points out that the Confucian ideology of filial piety among the Japanese extended ultimately to the Emperor who represented the unbroken line of sovereigns, while the universe of filial piety tended to be limited to close kinsmen among the Chinese, whose motherland experienced a cyclical rise and fall of dynasties. Japanese immigrants were, he argues, thus conditioned to identify themselves with larger groups and therefore maintained strong emotional or ideological ties with their homeland. A similar relationship may have existed between the enthusiasm over imperial worship and the maintenance of ethnic identity among the Yakima Japanese in the prewar years. (Stephan I. Thompson, "Assimilation and Nonassimilation of Asian-Americans and Asian Peruvians." *Comparative Studies in*

maintain marks of difference and a cultural refuge which would safely insulate some important parts of their culture from external confrontation with the white society, while demonstrating their familiarity with American institutional systems and cultural symbols in those domains of interethnic activities which would involve their immediate economic and political interests.⁸²

With regard to the selection of cultural symbols involved in minority situations, Barth suggests a sharply defined dichotomy of symbols, claiming that distinguishing cultural traits of a minority group are located in the non-articulating sectors of life, which "constitute a 'backstage' where the characteristics that are stigmatic in terms of the dominant majority culture can covertly be made the objects of transaction."⁸³ In the case of the ethnic Japanese in Yakima, however, the above relationship between the selection of cultural symbols and the spheres of their articulation appears much more fluid. As we have already seen, ethnic solidarity of the Japanese immigrants was organized initially in response to their exclusion from the majority society, and was reinforced at the times of severe inter-ethnic tensions. Yet, during the process of strengthening their self-defense against external persecutions, ethnicity for the Japanese came to represent something more than the conscious strategies of accommodation and survival in a hostile social environment. It increasingly assumed a self-fulfilling nature and a role of providing deep emotional satisfaction that they were unique and different from those outside the ethnic boundary. That is why these immigrants kept in close touch with their motherland, and transplanted and nourished parts of its cultural rituals and symbols.

It is important to note further that as the Issei gradually gained self-confidence through their economic survival, the maturity of the second generation, and the increasing display of military power of their native country, their distinctive cultural symbols came to slip out of the ethnic "backstage" into the wide-open "onstage" of inter-ethnic exchange. It becomes thus intelligible, for example, that even in the midst of

Society and History, Vol. 21 [1979], pp. 582-84.)

⁸² For instance, in the July Fourth and other community-wide celebrations, Japanese promoted public relations with the majority society by sponsoring floats decorated with American cultural symbols, such as the Liberty Bell. Even when Japanese symbols were used, they represented some significant relationship with the United States, as exemplified by the float built in the shape of the Powhatan, the first American vessel to carry the Japanese embassy to America in 1860.

⁸³ Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, p. 32.

animosity against the relative well-being of the Japanese farmers during the Great Depression, the Japanese Association donated and planted some 70 cherry trees on the Yakima City Public Cemetery in April 1932, and the Wapato Japanese Language School sponsored "Japan Night" inviting some 300 white educators, businessmen, and journalists from various areas in the Valley in the fall of 1934, and staged a grand manifestation of traditional Japanese folk songs and dances.⁸⁴ Furthermore, it helps us to make sense of the fact that when baseball came to symbolize the new Japanese-American identity for the full-fledged ethnic community, the name chosen for their first Nisei baseball team was "the Nippons," rather than some American name. When the Yakima Japanese formed their second Nisei team, the new team was given the name "Yamato," the ancient name to denote Japan.⁸⁵

In view of the preceding discussions, we may conclude that although exclusion from the outside world reinforces ethnic solidarity, it does not by itself constitute a necessary precondition for the existence and persistence of ethnic communities. The Yakima Japanese maintained a high degree of ethnic identity not simply because they had been excluded by the whites, but because they felt a strong need to reduce the wide gap between their self-image as the proud offspring of the divine Japanese Empire and the meager image they projected externally on the majority society, and further because they had the ability to recruit and create symbols which would support and vindicate their cultural worth and uniqueness. In a very crude and yet fundamental sense, it is perhaps the presence of "others," whom people choose to differentiate from those they identify as "people just like us," that makes ethnic distinctions and identities emerge and persist. Whereas contemporary Americans who perceive themselves as undergoing cultural homogenization are "constantly looking for new ways to establish their differences from each other,"⁸⁶ the social phenomena in which people

⁸⁴ Yakima Nihonjin-kai, p. 278.

⁸⁵ In sharp contrast to the tendency in Japan to give baseball teams English names, such as the "Tokyo Giants" or the "Hiroshima Carp," the Japanese immigrant group in America expressed in the team name their desire to claim and enhance their ethnic identity. It is perhaps for this reason that there were also Nisei baseball teams called "the Nippons" or given other archetypical Japanese names, such as "Fujis," "Asahis" (the rising sun), "Taiyos" (the sun), "Lotuses," and "Cherries" in other Japanese ethnic communities on the Pacific Coast.

⁸⁶ Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity." in Herbert J. Gans, et al., eds., *On the*

pursue and commit themselves to meaningful differences are likely to be traced back to the early years of mass immigration in America. As we have observed, the small Japanese immigrant group in the pre-war Yakima Valley sought to generate and glorify their ethnic identity by using various symbols ranging from graveyard to baseball in response to pressures from both inside and outside their ethnic boundary. Their history is hence a telling illustration of the ever vital importance of the quest for meaningful identity in the social processes of exclusion and integration.