

JAPANESE-AMERICAN LITERATURE AND
THE BLACK POWER MOVEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The 1960's was one of the transition periods in American history. Americans, especially young people of every race, began questioning the validity of the American values. Black people, particularly, had changed drastically.

Despite Civil Rights Laws and the Civil Rights Movement beginning in the 1950's, black people were still forced to live in an economic and social dilemma. Being frustrated and surfeited with insincere promises and arguments, young black activists had changed their tactics from "assimilation" to "confrontation." When Stokely Carmichael and his associates employed the slogan "Black Power" in 1966, a shift of major importance had occurred. They saw themselves as changing from an inferiority complex to strong declarations of racial pride and cultural pride and from passive acceptance of the status quo to positive assertion of self-determination.

With the dawn of the 1960's, black writing also changed from frequent mere protest to political assertion with racial and cultural pride. Black writers began to express

their feelings not to white readers primarily but rather to black people in order to "liberate" them.

On the other hand, Japanese Americans, in spite of the infamous World War II detention camps, had acquired middle-class status and largely won their rights as American citizens by the 1960's, while blacks still suffered from discrimination and oppression. Young Sansei (third generation Japanese Americans), however, were guaranteed middle-class status by their parents. Having more chances to have higher education, and watching the blacks' shifts from integration to separatism, they too began questioning the validity of "assimilation," because no matter how hard they tried to become white, they could not be identified as white Americans either by themselves or by white Americans. Finally, with other Asians in America, Sansei created a new slogan, "yellow power," in the late 1960's.

With the rise of the yellow power movement of the late 1960's, Japanese-American writing also changed from the usual reflection of the camp experience to a new search for self-identity with racial and cultural pride.

It is the purpose of this thesis to survey the influences of black power movement of the 1960's on Japanese-American writing, considering the histories and the movements

of black and Japanese Americans in this period. In other words, the focus is on the similarities and differences of the literatures of these two races.

CHAPTER I

JAPANESE-AMERICANS BEFORE THE SIXTIES

The experience of Japanese Americans is unique in the history of American ethnic groups. The uniqueness has been painful. No other immigrant group has scaled higher walls of prejudice and discrimination than have the people of Japanese ancestry.

Japan's surprising attack on Pearl Harbor and the ensuing war inspired a harsh reaction against Americans of Japanese ancestry. The harassment and violence which had affected their entire period of residence in the United States were grossly intensified, and climaxed in the removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast into "relocation camps" in the interior. The majority of these people were American citizens by birth. It is not unusual to express hostility toward an enemy, but the reaction of white Americans against Japanese Americans during this period was demonstrably the product of long-standing racial feelings. Before this tragic internment in concentration camps, Japanese

immigrants had been denied the right to become citizens of America. They were also barred from owning or leasing land in California and in several other states. Marriage across the color line was prohibited. And in 1924 the American government, in response to great pressure from Californians, refused to grant any quota at all for Japanese immigrants.

By 1941 there had been occasional contacts between Japanese and Americans for almost two centuries. For example, it is attested that thirteen Japanese vessels were shipwrecked on the California coast between 1782 and 1856. Direct shipping between Japan and San Francisco was begun in 1855. But large numbers of Japanese did not begin to migrate to the United States until late in the nineteenth century because in Japan emigration did not become legal until 1886.

On the other hand, Hawaii had long been trying to get cheap laborers from Japan for its booming sugar plantations. The Japanese government thought it demeaning to send its people to the abuses of contract labor on foreign soil, but in 1868 finally yielded by granting passports to 150 contract laborers bound for Hawaii. Their ranks were rapidly augmented for several reasons. One reason was that the native Hawaiians were dying faster than they were being born. A second was that after serving out their five-year contracts on the

plantations, the Chinese laborers would either return to China or begin independent businesses in Hawaii. At the same time the social and political changes within Japan altered the pattern of emigration. Specifically, because of a famine, the economic situation was so critical that the government began to look abroad for relief and found it in Hawaii's plantations and in the need for labor on America's railroads, and elsewhere.

To California a very large percentage of Japanese came by way of Hawaii after their contract was over. Wages on the highly unionized Pacific Coast of the United States were substantially higher than Hawaii. The passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 had barred Chinese immigrants from America. It also encouraged cheap Japanese laborers both from Hawaii and directly from Japan.

Therefore, by 1924 approximately 140,000 people of Japanese ancestry were living in the United States, most of them on the West Coast. By 1940, because of the Exclusion Act of 1924, and because of departures, deaths, and a low birth rate, the population of Japanese Americans diminished to about 130,000.

Since their numbers were small at first the Japanese were seen to pose no real threat to white Americans,

economically or otherwise. During the early years most Issei (literally "first generation," i.e., those born in Japan) worked as rural laborers or urban wage-earners. However, Japanese moved so rapidly up the social and economic ladder to the middle class that white workers and white society began to express antagonism against them. For instance, the market value of California crops produced by Issei was six million dollars in 1909. By 1919, in one decade, it had risen to over 67 million dollars, a bit more than ten percent of the state's total cash value of crops.¹ Such results of great exertion by Issei provoked the whites to anger because the Japanese were escaping the role of the exploited and becoming competitors, as operators of farms and as businessmen.

In consequence white Americans intensified their hitherto casual oppression of the Japanese. The informal and casual injustices were supplemented by a formidable variety of legislative injustice, economic discrimination, social ostracism and hypocritical rationalizations.

First of the rationalizations was the whites' conviction that it was impossible to assimilate Japanese into

¹Bill Hosokawa, Nisei: The Quiet Americans (New York: William Morrow, 1969), p. 61.

American society. George Harvey in Harper's Weekly put the argument thus:

For the Japanese in the United States will be Japanese. They will not become Americans. They will neither wish to merge with our people nor shall we wish to have them. Our capacious hospitalities are equal to the accommodation of a good many of them. They are clean, well mannered, and industrious; better folk by far in many particulars than a great many other newcomers. But they are not our kind, and will not merge. They belong to Asia. Their hearts are there; their interests are there. In this country we believe that they will always deserve good treatment, and that they will get it. But if there ever is danger that any part of the country will be overrun with them as Hawaii has been, there can be no doubt that proper and peaceable means will be taken to avert that danger.²

After forty years the same position was taken by Lt. Gen. John L. DeWitt, who as the Commanding General of the Western Defense Command directed the 1942 relocation:

I don't want any of them here. They are a dangerous element. There is no way to determine their loyalty. ...It makes no difference whether he is an American citizen, he is still a Japanese. American citizenship does not necessarily determine loyalty....³

A Japanese is a Japanese. This fallacious tautology was white Americans' basic justification for discrimination

²George Harvey, "Comment," Harper's Weekly, December 1, 1906, p. 50, quoted in Lewis H. Carlson and George A. Colburn, ed. In Their Place: White America Defines Her Minorities, 1850-1950 (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1972), p. 231.

³Investigation of Congested Areas, Hearing before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Naval Affairs, House of Representatives, 78th Cong., 1st sess., April 13, 1943, pp. 739-740. Quoted Ibid., pp. 244-245.

against Japanese in education and labor unions, and for denying them the privileges of becoming citizens, and owning land.

During the 1890's, labor leaders started to organize the anti-Japanese movement to exclude Japanese from labor unions. In 1905 the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League was formed in California. Later, it would be renamed the Asian Exclusion League and expand its interests to areas other than labor, such as housing.

By 1893 efforts were being made officially to segregate Japanese children in public schools. On May 6, 1905, the San Francisco School Board announced it would send Japanese pupils to an enlarged Oriental school to save white children from the Asian race.

White racists grasped every conceivable argument attacking Japanese in the hope of eradicating the Japanese community from America. For example, charges of immorality were leveled at the Japanese over their "picture brides." "Picture brides" was a common practice in Japan at that time, but it was also a phenomenon fostered by the shortage of Japanese women in America. American disapproval of "picture brides" involved the ironic inconsistency that the 1872 anti-miscegenation law in California forbade marriage between

Japanese and Caucasians.

Over the years, many Japanese had sought naturalization and only a few were granted citizenship, usually in the East. The Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization decreed in 1911 that only whites and Africans were allowed to apply for citizenship. In 1922 the Supreme Court confirmed the Japanese ineligibility for citizenship. Not until passage of the Walter-McCarran Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, was this law revised.

In 1913 the California legislature passed an Alien Land Act which was aimed primarily at the Japanese. It provided that aliens who were excluded from citizenship were also excluded from owning land. They could lease it for a maximum term of three years. Naturally the Issei began to deed their land to their offspring Nisei ("second generation," who were American citizens by right of birth). The California legislature responded in 1920 with another law which prevented this.

In 1924 the California Department of American Legion, the American Federation of Labor, the Grange and the Native Sons of the Golden West, four of the state's most powerful organizations, successfully pressured the U.S. Congress into a permanent ban on any further immigration from Japan.

In general, after 1924 the anti-Japanese sentiment seems to have become less overt, but the fact that Japanese Americans did not have the same rights as other Americans was brought painfully into focus by the shock of Pearl Harbor.

On February 19, 1942 President Roosevelt issued Executive Order No. 9066 regarding all persons of Japanese ancestry, citizens and aliens alike, who lived within 200 miles of the Pacific Ocean. It authorized the military to remove them into certain places in order to avoid the dangers of espionage and sabotage. No charges were made against them. Their guilt was that they were related, however remotely, to the enemy. Soon after, without any record or evidence of sabotage, espionage or fifth-column activity, General DeWitt ordered the complete evacuation of the Japanese Americans. No such action was ever taken against Italians or Germans. In a Congressional hearing General DeWitt explained the discrepancy as follows:

Mr. Bates. You draw a distinction between Japanese and Italians and Germans? We have a great number of Italians and Germans and we think they are fine citizens. There may be exceptions.

General DeWitt. You needn't worry about the Italians at all except in certain cases. Also the same for the Germans except in individual cases. But we must worry about the Japanese all the time until he is wiped off the map....⁴

⁴Ibid., p. 245.

In other words, since Italians and Germans are whites, they can assimilate into white society, but Japanese cannot.

In the late spring of 1942, six months after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, some 110,000 men, women and children, 70,000 of them American citizens, were uprooted from their homes and planted in "relocation centers."

The evacuees were removed temporarily to the "assembly centers" built with stalls and then into the ten "concentration camps." These camps were located in such places as Gila and Poston, Arizona; Rohwer and Jerome, Arkansas; Heart Mountain, Wyoming; Minidoka, Idaho; Topaz, Utah; Granada, Colorado; Manzanar and Tule Lake, California. All except the two Arkansas sites were in semi-desert country.

Eventually, in the case of *Korematsu vs. United States*, the Supreme Court upheld the relocation decision. Fred Toyosaburo Korematsu, a native of Oakland, California, was a shipyard welder who had lost his job after Pearl Harbor, appealed against relocation up to the Supreme Court, on the grounds that his rights as a citizen were violated. Unfortunately, Korematsu lost the case and was found guilty of remaining at home, with his name changed, after everyone else of Japanese ancestry in this "prohibited area" had been hustled off to an "assembly center." Justice Hugo Black delivered

the Court's opinion in the following terms:

To cast this case into outlines of racial prejudice, without reference to the real military dangers which were presented, merely confuses the issue. Korematsu was not excluded from the Military Area because of hostility to him or his race. He was excluded because we are at war with the Japanese Empire, because the properly constituted military authorities feared an invasion of our West Coast and felt constrained to take proper security measures, because they decided that the military urgency of the situation demanded that all citizens of Japanese ancestry be segregated from the West Coast temporarily, and finally, because Congress, reposing its confidence in this time of war in our military leaders--as inevitably it must--determined that they should have the power to do just this. There was some evidence of disloyalty on the part of some, the military authorities considered that the need for action was great, and time was short. We cannot--by availing ourselves of the calm perspective of hindsight--now say that at that time these actions were unjustified.⁵

After World War II, Japanese Americans were ruined economically. Their property had been lost, sold and stolen without their permission.

In spite of this heartbreaking new start, Japanese-American Nisei, by using an accommodative process--education, training, patience, and hard work, acquired middle-class status by 1960.

⁵"Korematsu vs. United States," U.S. Supreme Court Report, U.S. 760, No. 22, December 18, 1944. Quoted Ibid., pp. 246-247.

CHAPTER II

JAPANESE-AMERICAN CREATIVE WRITING

BEFORE THE 1960'S

I was born in slavery in Feb. of 1942. In the spring of that same year 110,000 persons of Japanese descent were placed in protective custody by the white people of the United States. Two out of every three of these were American citizens by birth; the other third were aliens forbidden by law to be citizens. No charges had been filed against these people, nor had any hearing been held. The removal of these people was on racial or ancestral grounds only. World War II, the war against racism; yet no Germans or other enemy agents were placed in protective custody. There should have been Japanese writers directing their writings toward Japanese audiences.¹

Before the decade beginning in 1960, and even today, the Japanese-American writers, both Issei (immigrants) and Nisei (first generation native Americans), are virtually unknown in America. They exist, however, and a few have been writing serious literature. Unfortunately, with rare exception, their works have not been published, or, once published, have been neglected. Understanding the causes of these two

¹Don L. Lee, Directionscore: Selected and New Poems (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1971), p. 29.

phenomena, the paucity of writers and their inadequate publication, significantly increases appreciation of Japanese-American writings before the sixties.

Concerning the number of writers, as Roger Daniels has said, most Japanese immigrants came to the United States not searching for political, ideological or religious freedom as some immigrants did, but rather to attain an economic status which they could hardly dream of in Japan at the time.² In addition to this factor, the basic function of immigrants, the condition of their being admitted in the first place to the country, was to be accepted. This meant in effect to be useful to the society. The Japanese immigrants, therefore, plodded away to make fortune as well as to be useful to the society. But usefulness, as David Suzuki explains, was confined to the field of economic productivity:

It is preferable that future generations be dedicated to such careers as business and engineering, either as part of the Asian community or as individuals. Since these are basically 'service' professions, i.e., those which do not actually determine what society as a whole will think, any creativity in these fields will do no harm to the white power structure.³

²Roger Daniels, "The Issei Generation," in Roots: An Asian American Reader, ed. by Amy Tachiki, et al. (Los Angeles: A project of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1971), p. 138.

³David Suzuki, "Asian Art in the North Country," Gidra, October, 1971, p. 6.

Under those circumstances, neither the whites nor Japanese Americans encouraged young Issei and Nisei to move into the fields of art or writing. Issei Japanese sent their offspring to college expecting their future generations would be dedicated to such careers as businessmen, engineers, doctors, and so on.

For the publication of Japanese-American authors, quaintness became the basic criterion for creative expression. White society has expected the Japanese American to maintain his cultural heritage and to write foreign verse. In contrast, white newcomers were required to conform perfectly to American idiom and style. "Uniqueness" and "quaintness" were essential for the survival and success of Japanese-American writers, because their publishers and their public demanded they be acceptable to white society, regardless of its demands. But Japanese Americans were expected to be creative within the framework of values and viewpoints established by the majority, the white Americans.

A: The Nature of Issei Writing

In spite of social and economic pressures, a few eccentric Issei and Nisei devoted their time to writing. In the case of Issei writers especially, differences in culture and language were added to these pressures as causes of

struggle and alienation. But illustrating the combination of East and West, they were well accepted and momentarily influenced American writing with "the quaintness of the Orient." Noguchi, Tsuneishi, and Fujita are the best examples.

Yone Noguchi, who was born in Japan in 1875, came to the United States and wrote poems of unique form. It was he who exemplified the search for new forms of expression. The following poem reflects his conversion of the traditional form and image of Japanese verse into English:

Four Haiku

I

Is it not the cry of a rose to be saved?
Oh, how could I
When I, in fact, am the rose!

II

But the march to life----
Break song to sing the new song!
Clouds leap, flowers bloom.

III

Sudden pain of earth
I hear in the fallen leaf.
"Life's autumn," I cry.

IV

The silence--leaves from life
Older than dream or pain, --
Are they my passing ghost?⁴

⁴Yone Noguchi, "Four Haiku," in Speaking for Ourselves

Shisei Tsuneishi, was born in 1888 in Japan and came to America at the age of nineteen. He followed the same trend as Noguchi using Haiku form to make his work popular:

Five Haiku

I

(at Evergreen Cemetery)
Dandelion flowers;
how many good friends of mine
sleep here, I wonder!

II

On awaking from
midday nap, I found myself
back in America.

III

(at Wupatki National Monument, Arizona)
Indians met their doom
at this very spot, I heard ---
wild flowers in bloom.

IV

Look, a green spider
upon the pink hollyhock,
chewing a bee alive!

V

Though old, I still harbor
unrealized dreams within me,
as the new year returns.⁵

ed. by Lillian Faderman (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1969), pp. 224-225.

⁵ Shisei Tsuneishi, "Five Haiku," Ibid., pp. 226-227.

Jun Fujita, a friend of Noguchi, also wrote exotic poems and published his work in magazines such as Poetry. In the following poem using traditional Japanese Tanka form, he expressed the loneliness of living in foreign land:

To Elizabeth

Against the door dead leaves are falling;
On your window the cobwebs are black.
Today, I linger alone.

The foot-step?
A passer-by.⁶

B: The Nature of Nisei Writing

With regard to the nature of Nisei writing, nearly every work published involves the shock of Pearl Harbor and the experience of concentration camps; Mine Okubo's Citizen 13660 (1946), Monica Sone's Nisei Daughter (1953), John Okada's No-No Boy (1957), Daniel Inouye's Journey to Washington (1967), and Yoshiko Uchida's Journey to Topaz (1971). Before the war in 1941 Toshio Mori planned to publish his only book, Yokohama California, in which he painted the life of Japanese immigrants and their descendants just prior to World War II with a optimistic look to the future. But it was ironic enough that the publication was postponed eight

⁶Jun Fujita, Tanka: Poems in Exile (Chicago: Covici-McGee Company, 1923), p. 52.

years, partly because he was in a concentration camp.

Generally speaking those war time stories end with a very optimistic view of American democracy as well as with success stories of how Japanese Americans endured and overcame the camp tragedy with courage, patience, dignity, and loyalty. Behind the curtain of the success stories, however, there is a strong search for self-identity. The camp experience of World War II particularly forced Japanese Americans to question their identities. In Nisei Daughter, when Monica Sone and her family were put into Camp Harmony, she questioned her identity as follows:

I remembered the wire fence encircling us, and a knot of anger tightened in my breast. What was I doing behind a fence like a criminal? If there were accusations to be made, why hadn't I been given a fair trial? Maybe I wasn't considered an American anymore. My citizenship wasn't real, at all. Then what was I? . . . I was certainly not a citizen of Japan as my parents were.⁷

This neither-American-nor-Japanese sensibility is well described in John Okada's No-No Boy. In the story, being American or Japanese would seem the only options, but the hero rejects both, and works toward defining Nisei in terms of an experience that is neither Japanese nor American. Though No-No Boy ends with "No" Japanese and "No" American, other

⁷Monica Sone, Nisei Daughter (Boston: Columbia University Press, 1953), p. 177.

writers, by justifying and quibbling, disguise themselves in order to be acceptable to white values, and in order to flow back into the mainstream:

. . .I don't resent my Japanese blood anymore. I'm proud of it, in fact, because of you and the Issei who've struggled so much for us. It's really nice to be born into two cultures, like getting a real bargain in life, two for the price of one. The hardest part, I guess, is the growing up, but after that, it can be interesting and stimulating. I used to feel like a two-headed monstrosity, but now I find that two heads are better than one. . . . I am going back into its mainstream, still with my oriental eyes, but with an entirely different outlook, for now I feel more like a whole person instead of a sadly split personality.⁸

In this fashion, most Japanese-American Nisei writers try to assimilate into the mainstream even though they meet with severe racism of the white majority. In other words, Nisei writers can't go beyond the bounds of war-time stories because they believe that only the path for survival as minority writers is into or in the mainstream. David Suzuki, explaining the struggle and difficulty of minority writers, said:

The Asian is allowed to be creative within the conventional framework of values established by white society or he can imitate the forms of some foreign, i.e., Asian (but not European), society, but what he can't do is to challenge the values of white society as a whole.⁹

⁸Ibid., pp. 236-238.

⁹Suzuki, "Asian Art," p. 6.

If the writer did challenge the values of white society, he would lose many readers both Japanese Americans and others, if indeed his work would be published at all. An instance of this is the instantly forgotten work, No-No Boy, as evidenced by the fact that fifteen years after its publication, the first edition of 1,500 copies has not sold out. Without support of the Japanese community, therefore, authors had to continue writing the quaint and exotic works as whites required.

Of the few other published authors, Hisaye Yamamoto, who was born in 1921, is among the most talented. It is notable that she worked for the Los Angeles Tribune, a black weekly, for ten years. Her stories are about Japanese Americans and she exposes tensions of a socially oppressed, and emotionally depressed minority group. Her works have appeared in other ethnic presses, as well as such prestigious journals as Partisan Review, Carleton Miscellany and Kenyon Review. Unfortunately, to date she has published no book.

As a whole, both Issei and Nisei writers created their works within the framework of values and viewpoints established by white society. In other words, their works were always quaint, unique and foreign for white Americans.

CHAPTER III

THE BLACK POWER MOVEMENT

In spite of the Emancipation which promised freedom to black people, they have been fighting and struggling ever since to get full rights and privileges as Americans. Unfortunately it has been necessary to enact federal civil rights laws seven times, and still the struggle continues.

A: Circumstances of the Beginning of the Black Power Movement

The end of World War II created a new climate for ending discriminatory practices because of two reasons. At first, the United States not only won the war but consequently became the leader of the so-called free world. Politically, economically, and ideologically as well, America felt obligated to take on world-wide responsibilities. The race problem at home, therefore, was regarded as seriously damaging to the government. The executive branch of the federal government, therefore, exerted considerable influence toward eradicating the gap between creed and practice in American

democracy. The courts also ruled frequently in favor of the advancement of the status of the blacks.

On the other hand, black organizations, especially the N.A.A.C.P. observing sensitive areas of the government, began to press vigorously upon the government, especially by carrying case after case to successful litigation in the federal courts. Among the results were the Supreme Court's decision in the case of Shelly vs. Kraemer, striking down restrictive covenants in housing, and the series of cases leading up to the decision of Brown vs. Board of Education, which ruled that racial segregation in public schools of the nation was unconstitutional.¹

The interaction of these decisions with other forces seemed to create a better place for black Americans, but in fact, blacks in the South still sat in the back of the bus, ate in segregated facilities, and were politically disenfranchised through the white primary elections and the poll tax. Even in the North segregation existed according to custom, if not by law, and most blacks were forced to live in economic hardship. What is more, the National Association for the Advancement of White People, with national headquarters in

¹Langston Hughes, Fight for Freedom: the Story of the NAACP (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1962), pp. 119-125.

Washington, D.C., and the white Citizens' Councils, were organized to maintain the power of white supremacy. In 1956, also, a group of senators and representatives from southern states presented to Congress a document entitled "The Southern Manifesto: Declaration of Constitutional Principles," in which they condemned the 1954 Decision as a usurpation of the powers of individual states. On the whole, while the blacks were "free" by law, in actuality the society was closed to them in myriad ways.

B: Rise of Black Power

Basically three strategies have dominated the history of the black struggle. They are integration, separation, and national liberation. The consistent goal, however, has always been complete freedom.

Before the slogan of Black Power arose, integration was the major strategy. In 1955, when Mrs. Rose Parks of Montgomery, Alabama, refused to give up her bus seat to a white man, boycotts of all Montgomery's buses led by Dr. King, Jr. and two other preachers materialized. Southern blacks began to show that they were running out of patience. The boycott planned for one day, finally lasted for 382 days. One of the features of non-violent direct action was that it brought civil rights protests out of the courts and into the

streets, bus terminals, restaurants, and voting booths. This civil rights movement, which relied heavily on the American political process and represented an innate faith in protective power of the federal government and in the moral capacity of the white American, seemed to improve some conditions. But in the following years little changed in the South. As the movement went on, therefore, some young activists began to doubt non-violent tactics of resistance and lost faith in the power of the federal government, because despite passage of the civil rights legislation of 1964 and legal support for integration, blacks not only met with greater violent Southern resistance, but also were deceived by the federal government. Gradually, but inevitably, a gap developed and widened between the strategies of older civil rights leaders and young activists. At the same time, beginning with the 1964 Harlem riot, the racial battle ground shifted dramatically out of the South and into the Northern ghetto.

It is difficult to assess accurately the importance of such riots, but a fact is that some blacks moved toward the acceptance of violence as a form of protest: "Most blacks reject violence as a means of securing their rights, but many blacks nonetheless believe that the riots helped rather than

hurt their cause."²

When Stokely Carmichael, then Chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and his associates employed the slogan of "black power" in 1966, a shift of major importance had occurred. It seems that the independence of African countries from colonial domination in the mid-sixties contributed to the concept of "black power," by associating the plight of American blacks with the concept of colonialism. In a book entitled Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America, Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton write:

Black Power. . . is a call for black people in this country to unite, to recognize this [African] heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for black people to begin to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations and to support those organizations.³

And they explain their goal as follows:

The goal of black self-determination and black self-identity, Black Power--is full participation in the decision making process affecting the lives of black people, and recognition of the virtues in themselves as black people.⁴

²Thomas R. Dye, The Politics of Equality (New York: The Bobb-Merrill Company, Inc., 1971), p. 207.

³Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 44.

⁴Ibid., p. 47.

In other words, independence not only meant escape from political control and overt colonialism, but also meant cultural as well as political autonomy. At the same time, the successful revolt against colonialism abroad demonstrated to black Americans that people supposed to be culturally and technologically backward can triumph over ostensibly superior powers if they are united.

This belief encouraged young activists and instilled a new sense of pride and dignity into black people's minds. The consequent revolt also stimulated a reexamination of the nature of the American racial situation and of the links between black subjugation in Africa and America. Beyond this aspect, it provided an ideology and a direction for resolution of the racial struggle of blacks in the United States. Failure of American foreign policy in Vietnam, likewise, helped blacks to reexamine the principles and practices of American politics and society.

In short, young black activists realized at this stage, as Ron Karenga pointed out, that "the basic weakness of integration as a strategic model was its refusal to deal with the question of power..."⁵

⁵Ron Karenga, "A Strategy for Struggle," The Black Scholar 5:3 (November 1973): 10.

Now, instead of an integration strategy, black nationalism became a focal point for a new philosophy for freedom. Two strategic models, separation and national liberation have arisen from this philosophy.

Black nationalists believe that "they ought to rule themselves and to shape their own destinies, meaning that they aspire to establish and to control their own social, economic, and political institutions."⁶ But the basic difference between the strategies of integration and separation is that the separatist proposes some form of withdrawal from American society. The Nation of Islam was the most important black separatist organization, and perhaps the most powerful spokesman for the Nation of Islam and one of the articulate leaders of the black masses was Malcolm X. He was assassinated in 1965 but his thinking continued to influence young activists significantly. He taught pride in blackness, advocated racial solidarity, stressed the black's African heritage, and urged black people in America to link their struggle with that of their African brothers.

On the other hand, advocates of national liberation argue for:

⁶Dye, The Politics of Equality, p. 136.

recognition of and creative response to the objective conditions of our social existence and calls for struggle here and now, alliance with Africa, the Third World and all progressive peoples, and for the revolutionary engagement of blacks in constant confrontation and negation of the oppressive conditions which every day in a merciless multitude of ways cripple and kill them.⁷

This national liberation movement was the intellectual basis of the Black Power movement, and differed from separatism mainly because it did not argue that the most significant freedom would require total divorce from the American social order. This position proved to be very convincing to many blacks and to many young Asian-Americans as well.

⁷Karenga, "A Strategy for Struggle," p. 11.

CHAPTER IV

THE YELLOW POWER MOVEMENT

A: Circumstances of the Japanese-American Community in 1960

By 1946, Japanese Americans were finally released from the infamous internment camps, but they had to go through many hardships. Some chose to relocate in the East, Midwest or South, but most of them headed for the West-coast once more, where anti-Japanese feeling and heartbreaking sights greeted many returners. They lost almost all property which they had acquired and built up before the War and now they had to devote themselves to beginning anew from nothing.

With great efforts of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), however, Japanese Americans began to retrieve their rights as Americans. For example, in 1952, the controversial McCarran-Walter Immigration and Naturalization Act was passed and the category of aliens ineligible for citizenship ended.

More importantly, in 1948 President Harry Truman signed the Japanese American Evacuation Claims Bill which was

an attempt to repay some of the financial losses borne by the Japanese Americans. The Federal Reserve Bank estimated the total loss for evacuees at \$400,000,000, but by the deadline, January 3, 1950, 23,689 claims had been filed asking \$131,949,176. The final claim was paid late in 1965. In all, the government had authorized payment of \$38,000,000 to 26,560 claimants.¹ Of course these repayments by the government did not meet Japanese Americans' expectations again, but they regarded the payments as a welcome symbolic gesture of sympathy and remorse by the government for its treatment of them. As Mike Masaoka of JACL observed; "This was not a generous program, but it represents a major triumph for the evacuees and the JACL, which pushed for compensation, in that Congress recognized the error of the evacuation and the justice of the claims."²

By 1960, the economic and social status of Japanese Americans had risen rapidly because of their use of an adaptive process--education, training, patience, low expectations, and hard work until opportunities were available. For example, in 1940, more than a quarter of all Japanese American males were laborers, while in the 1960's, the proportion had

¹Hosokawa, The Quiet Americans, pp. 445-446.

²Ibid., p. 447.

dwindled to about five percent. In 1960, fifteen percent of them were classified as professional; the proportion can be compared with the five percent of blacks who were professionals. Yet in 1940, only 3.8 percent of Japanese Americans had been professionals. Income, too, rose beyond that of other minorities. According to a survey of the California State Civil Service, the median civil service income for Oriental employees, primarily Japanese Americans, was \$7,400 a year in 1960. On the other hand, the black median income was \$4,300, and that of all other minority groups was \$4,600.³

Japanese Americans, by this time, had acquired middle class status. But as Mr. Hosokawa stated in his book Nisei, "it was in this period also that as though conscience-stricken over past injustices, America became deeply preoccupied with the problems of all minorities. Its concern was focused on the most visible of all, the Negroes."⁴

B: The Rise of Yellow Power

The third generation of Japanese in America, known as the Sansei, because they were guaranteed middle-class status

³Harry H. L. Kitano, Japanese Americans: The Evolution of a Subculture (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), pp. 47-48.

⁴Hosokawa, The Quiet Americans, p. 473.

by the hard work of their parents, Nisei, had more chances to have a higher education. They also had increased contacts with the non-Japanese culture, where they encountered white students' involvement in racial issues and the black's shift from integration to separatism. Therefore, they began questioning the validity of their traditional values and white-centered American values.

When Sansei were just watching the black-and-white struggle from the sidelines, they became aware that there was the misconception that:

Freedom and equality have to be earned from the white community that sits in judgment, dispensing justice magnanimously when it so pleases, and that these privileges are not God-given, inalienable rights, as eloquently stated by the founders of the United States.⁵

Therefore, Nisei's attitude of trying to gain complete acceptance by denying their yellowness, disturbed Sansei more than ever. So even before Bill Hosokawa published his book Nisei: The Quiet Americans in 1969, many people, especially Sansei, objected to the long established epithet, "quiet" simply because it symbolizes the obedience of Japanese Americans to the white community's expectations.

Some Japanese Americans realizing that as members of

⁵Daniel Okimoto, American in Disguise (New York: Walker Weatherhill, 1971), p. 53.

the same "yellow" race in America, other Asians shared problems similar to their own, decided to unite with them to create a new power, "yellow power," in the late 1960's. Amy Uyematsu described the "yellow power movement" as follows:

A yellow movement has been set into motion by the black power movement. Addressing itself to the unique problems of Asian Americans, this 'yellow power' movement is relevant to the black power movement in that both are part of the Third World struggle to liberate all colored people.⁶

In her article, The Emergence of Yellow Power in America, Uyematsu emphasizes two problems of Asian Americans. One was a problem of "self identity." She believed that "In the process of Americanization, Asians have tried to transform themselves into white men--both mentally and physically. Mentally, they have adjusted to the white man's culture by giving up their own language, customs, histories, and cultural values. They have adopted the 'American way of life' only to discover that this is not enough. Next, they have rejected their physical heritages, resulting in extreme self-hatred. Yellow people shared with the blacks the desire to look white. Just as blacks wish to be light-complected with thin lips and unkinky hair, 'yellows' wanted to be tall with

⁶Amy Uyematsu, "The Emergence of Yellow Power in America," in Roots: An Asian American Reader, ed. Amy Tachiki, et al. (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1971), p. 9.

with long legs and large eyes."⁷

Thus, Uyematsu agreed with the "black is beautiful" cry:

The 'Black is Beautiful' cry among black Americans has instilled a new awareness in Asian Americans to be proud of their physical and cultural heritages. Yellow power advocates self-acceptance as the first step toward strengthening the personalities of Asian Americans.⁸

The other was the question of political power. She said:

The emerging movement among Asian Americans can be described as 'yellow power' because it is seeking freedom from racial oppression through the power of a consolidated yellow people. As derived from the black power ideology, yellow power implies that Asian Americans must control the decision-making processes affecting their lives...⁹

Not like a united black people who comprise over ten percent of the total American electorate, the political power of yellows has little effect on state and national contests because the total populations of yellows is not even one-half percent of the total population. But she had no doubt that "Asian Americans are not completely weaponless, in the local political arena."¹⁰

Her reasons for advocating Asian Americans use of unity as a means of political power were cultural and economic:

⁷Ibid., p. 10. ⁸Ibid. ⁹Ibid., p. 12. ¹⁰Ibid.

White America praises the success of Japanese and Chinese for being highest among all other colored groups. Japanese and Chinese should feel fortunate that they are accepted more than any other non-white ethnic group, but they should not step out of place and compare themselves with whites. In essence, the American capitalistic dream was never meant to include non-white. . . . And the myth of Asian American success is most obvious in the economic and social position of Filipino Americans.¹¹

Miss Uyematsu concluded this position as follows:

Thus, the use of yellow political power is valid, for Asian Americans do have definite economic and social problems which must be improved. By organizing around these needs, Asian Americans can make the yellow power movement a viable political force in their lives.¹²

As a result of yellow power movement, Asian Americans induced the University of California at Los Angeles to institute the department of Asian American Ethnic Studies and also they began to publish movement journals such as Aion, Amerasia Journal, Gidra, and Getting Together to name a few.

In addition, the yellow power movement, which originated on the West Coast at the end of the 1960's, spread out to the East Coast, mainly the New York area, where Asian Americans, mostly Chinese Americans, also published the Asian American magazine, Bridge, to unite and educate Asian Americans of the East Coast.

¹¹Ibid., p. 13.

¹²Ibid.

CHAPTER V

NEW BLACK LITERATURE

. . .We want poems like fists beating niggers out of jocks or dagger poems in the slimy bellies of the owner-jews. Black poems to smear on girdlemamma mulatto bitches whose brains are red jelly stuck between 'lizabeth taylor's toes. Stinking whores! We want 'poems that kill.' Assassin poems, Poems that shoot guns. . . .¹

As Civil Rights Movement of the fifties shifted to the Black Power Movement in the sixties, following the ghetto riots of the middle-1960's, attitudes of black writers, especially of young poets changed drastically. It seems, as one sees in Baraka's poem above, that the major changes were in their treatment of themes and structures.

Concerning their treatment of theme, poems of young poets became not just protest, but rather searching political statements designed to further the cause of social, political and moral revolution.

¹Imamu Amiri Baraka, "Black Art," in Understanding the New Black Poetry: Black Speech and Black Music as Poetic References by Stephen Henderson (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1972), p. 213.

One of the leaders of the late sixties, Don L. Lee, who had been introduced to the larger black public by Dudley Randall's Broadside Press, which was founded in 1965, said:

The Black writer/poet is trying to raise the level of consciousness among his people. His message is joy and beauty, pain and hurt, and his ear is close to the dance floor. His work is not just 'protest,' but is a genuine reflection of himself and his people. After all, mere 'protest' writing is generally a weak reaction to person or events and often lacks the substance necessary to motivate and move people.²

As Stephen Henderson explains, "other professional poets have also played a significant role in stimulating young talent. Foremost among these is Don L. Lee..."³ Indeed, Don L. Lee (now named Haki R. Madhubuti) was one of the most imitated and influential poets of the time. Therefore the writer here will examine some characteristics of his poems which are representative of the era of the sixties.

To achieve social change and moral and political revolution, Lee, with much rage, wrote the following poem to define his attitude as a black and a poet:

- - - - -
 i ain't seen no poems stop a 38,
 i ain't seen no stanzas brake a honkie's head,

²Don L. Lee, Dynamite Voices I: Black Poets of the 1960's (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1971), p. 25.

³Stephen Henderson, Understanding the New Black Poetry, p. 185.

i ain't seen no metaphors stop a tank,
 i ain't seen no words kill
 & if the word was mightier than the sword
 pushkin wouldn't be fertilizing russian soil/
 & until my smiles can protect me from a night stick
 i guess i'll keep my razor
 & buy me some more bullets.⁴

In this poem, Lee also rejected traditional or mainstream esthetics and literary standards. He believed that:

Clearly, art for art's sake is something out of a European dream and does not exist, in most cases, for Black poets...Black art is total being: it cannot be separated from Black life...Thus the people reflect the art and the art is the people. The interaction between the writer and his people, in combination with the interaction between the writer and himself, is essential to the aesthetics of Blackness...⁵

In the same manner, Lee was cynical about blacks who became lost in a trap of white values of society:

i
 met
 a
 part
 time
 re
 vo
 lu
 tion
 ist
 too--
 day (natural hair, african dressed,
 talk always angry, in a hurry & c.)
 ing

⁴Don L. Lee, "Two Poems," Directionscore: Selected and New Poems (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1971), p. 53.

⁵Lee, Dynamite Voices, pp. 23-24.

black
 &
 sleep
 ing
 whi
 te ⁶

There was hatred, rage and satire but touching pride
 in the new black awareness, reflected in his following poem:

- - - - -
 whi-te people can't stand
 the wall,
 killed their eyes, (they cry)
 black beauty hurts them--
 they thought black beauty was a horse--
 stupid muthafuckas, they run from
 the mighty black wall
 - - - - -
 black artists paint,
 dubois/garvey/gwen brooks
 stokley/rap/james brown
 trane/miracles/ray charles
 baldwin/killens/muhammad ali
 alcindor/blackness/revolution
 our heroes, we pick them, for the wall
 the mighty black wall/about our business, blackness
 can you dig?
 - - - - - 7

Due to Pan-Africanism and a new concept of the Third
 World, he naturally turned his eyes toward Africa and the
 Third World. Lee dedicated the following poem for Africa and
 Africans:

⁶Lee, "Contradiction in Essence," Directionscore,
 p. 68.

⁷Lee, "The Wall," Ibid., pp. 66-67.

Africa,

don't let them
steal
your face or
take your circles
and make them squares.

don't let them
steel
your body as to put
100 stories of concrete on you
so that you
arrogantly
scrape
the
sky.⁸

And in his poem "The Third World Bond," Lee hinted his concern for China:

they were
blk/revolutionist.
& they often talked
of the third world
& especially of the power
of
china
- - - - _9

Concerning structure, language and rhythm would be the major characteristics of the sixties. Instead of imitating formal English, Lee used the language of street to write poems for people's sake. Dudley Randall, a poet, critic, and

⁸Lee, "Change is Not Always Progress," Ibid., p. 169.

⁹Lee, "The Third World Bond," Ibid., p. 122.

also editor and publisher of the Broadside Press, explained Lee's poetry as follows:

Don Lee is a poet because of his resourcefulness with language. He writes for the man in the street, and uses the language of the street, and sometimes of the gutter, with wit, inventiveness, and surprise.¹⁰

This following poem is the example of "street language":

No More Marching

didn't i tell you
it would do no good
but you done gone
to school & read
all them book

now you is marchen
& sing
'we shall overcome'
getten hit &
looken dumb/ &
smilen

— — — — — 11

As well as because of their language, some of Lee's poems are hard to appreciate and understand without deep knowledge of black music or black churches, because of their rhythm and sound. Lee admitted the fact that "the major influences on the Black poets were/Black music..., Black

¹⁰Dudley Randall, "Introduction," Ibid., p. 50.

¹¹Lee, Ibid., p. 75.

The "new black literature of the sixties" applied the principles of national liberation in the Black Power Movement. Like the movement itself, it inspired Asian-American youth as well as many blacks.

CHAPTER VI

SANSEI LITERATURE

A: The General Characteristics of Sansei Literature

As the yellow power movement of the late 1960's, having been set into motion by the black power movement, was motivated largely by the problem of self-identity in Asian Americans, so too the dominant theme of the Sansei writing is also the search for a new identity.

Even though Japanese-American Sansei have attained a good educational and economic standing, to the white, they represent a "yellow peril" and are not fully accepted in the white society. By the other minorities such as Blacks and Chicanos, they are looked on with contempt because Japanese Americans have overconformed to the point of accepting white prejudice against other minorities. To the fellow Asians, they are simply "Americans":

Who am i?

Who am i?
i sometimes wonder.
am i japanese?
am i american?

or just both.
 to the white i
 represent the
 yellow peril.
 to the other minorities
 i am looked at with
 contempt as though
 i were white.
 to the fellow asians i am
 american
 who am i? i sometimes
 wonder.
 i am me, a
 human being.¹

(anonymous)

Some Sansei, however, have begun to realize that the easy conclusion of "being just a human being," which is characteristic of the Nisei behavior, doesn't solve any identity crisis at all. Therefore, as a first step to a new identity, instead of asking easy solution, they express honestly the feelings of being Japanese in America:

Who am I? The epitome of the Asian American--
 a Japanese
 a fool,
 insecure and afraid
 Afraid of all that surrounds me, that I try
 to engulf myself with lies.
 Lies, which I justify
 by saying . . .
 I'm happy or
 satisfied or
 that's what everyone else is doing.
 I represent the greatest apathy that exists
 in Amerika today.
 Is my warm house,

¹Gidra, January, 1970, p. 8.

sports car, and
 life style too much
 to give up? . . . What
 are others saying? What will others think?²

Then Miss Eguchi, discovering her true past and accepting it as it was, announces proudly that she is the Sansei, the rebirth of suppressed and forgotten dream:

Reflections

I the silent and mysterious
 The daughter of the sun
 Endowed with the eyes of the cat
 The face of the Moon
 I the industrious and enterprising
 The fisher of sea
 The planter of seed
 I the Yellow Peril
 The stump of an imprisoned race
 From which grew branches
 Entwining, reaching out
 I the Sansei
 The third generation
 The rebirth of a suppressed
 And forgotten dream.³

In spite of their pride of being Japanese Americans, people still keep asking their identity:

Being Asian

I can recall the past and see the ugly sight.
 But I fought away from that fright.
 Now I'm an Asian instead of part Banana,
 Chicano, or Black.

²Victor Shibata, Gidra, March, 1971, p. 7.

³Pamela Eguchi, Yellow Pearl (New York: Basement Workshop, Inc., 1972), p. 21.

I'm proud to be what I am, not what I
 wanted to be.
 I can dig my brothers and sisters and what they
 are striving for.⁴

But their bewilderment continues because;

What Are You?

- - - - -
 Someone asking me
 what are you?
 Now I answer
 I'm an Asian
 and they say
 why do you want to separate yourselves
 Now I say
 I'm Japanese
 don't you know this is the greatest country
 in the world
 - - - - - 5

As a result of their quandary, one of the answers for
 the Sansei identity lies in the Third World;

A Story

- - - - -
 I get tired o being called "Jap" or "Chink" or
 "Gook."
 I get tired of reaching out with my hand
 And getting change slapped on the counter.
 I get tired of being refused a room because
 "We're full."

After a while you so low,
 You get to feel like a piece of shit.

⁴Robert Mayeda, Sojourner II (Berkeley: Agora/Berkeley High School, 1972), p. 60.

⁵Joanne Miyamoto, Asian Women (Berkeley: U. C. Berkeley, 1971), p. 51.

So you laugh and joke constantly
Trying to forget life.

As you grow older problems start.
You just can't seem to fit in.
Who am I and what am I?
Questions constantly bugging you.

Eventually you realize you're being screwed
by everybody working for the Man.
It's at this point the Oriental dies
But it marks the birth of the Amerasian.

Then the answers come to you.
Your identity lies in the Third World.⁶

It seems that the Sansei have not established a new identity of which they can be proud. Therefore, this identity problem will remain as the main theme of the Sansei and succeeding Yonsei (fourth generation) writers.

Since the yellow power movement, as the black power movement, supported revolution against certain traditional values and institutions of America, some of the Sansei writings are very political and revolutionary:

God Bless America

Bless you America for Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon...
and for protecting them through old ages.

- - -

Bless you America for a democratic foot in Vietnam...and
for drafting our young brothers in defense of you.

- - -

Bless you America for moulding our young brothers as
professional killers.

- - -

⁶Larry Osaki, Gidra, March, 1972, p. 7.

Bless you America for your ostensible equality.

Bless you America for sanctioning our right of ethnic
identity...and for separating our history from yours.

Bless you America for dividing us into armed camps.

Bless you America for oppressing our fellow workers...
especially our black brothers and sisters.

- - - 7

In the following poems, there is rage and hate, but behind
its strong language, punctuated with so-called profanity,
lies the frustration of the Sansei:

PHASES I, II & III

- - - - -

III. Though their mouths remain paralyzed
in hysterical grins
their eyes scream out

"Fuck you!"
"Fuck you, white, for your shit existence!"
"Fuck you, fathers, for not being men!"
"And fuck you, sisters,
for making me compete
for something I'm not!"

Still, their silent mouths only kept the hate
inward.

Fuck me,
each murmurs to himself,

Fuck me.⁸
(anonymous)

⁷Jeanne Iwasaki, Gidra, January, 1970, p. 8.

⁸Gidra, June, 1969, p. 3.

And

Bitter!?

Suck the white cock
 little lemon skinned man.
 Feel the shaft permeate flesh & mind
 and sit
 and think.
 Do it again
 Product of apathy
 Product of fear.
 From a sieve-like mind
 an oral offering. . . .⁹

This kind of language and self-depreciating jokes are new forms of expressions. It is almost impossible to find these forms among Nisei writers, who were afraid of using such language and making jokes about themselves, because quietness, diligence and intelligence were admired aspects of Japanese Americans. In addition, some Sansei poets use Japanese language, as black poets use black language, not only to make poetry "alive" but also to preserve their traditional culture. Miss Ochi writes the following poem from her consideration and pride for her grandfather:

O-jii-San no Shimpai

-- -- -- --
 -- -- -- --

"O-jii-san, no shinpai-anata
 wa sugu genki desu yo"
 was all I could say to comfort him
 but he knew just as I

⁹Marc Kondo, Ibid., p. 3.

Did he want to return to
Japan?
His eyes said no, here
is his home

And with the same spirit that
brought him to Fresno
He left. . .me. . ."JII-CHAN!"¹⁰

Concerning other themes, it should be noted that the Vietnam War, the Korean War, the atomic bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and naturally the relocation camps are also important events often mentioned in order to convey the message that Asians have been subjected to patterns of genocide by white Americans.

These are the general characteristics of Sansei literature. Although, unfortunately these Sansei are all little-known poets and their poems may not be beacons of faith "like the burning bush", since their works represent the Japanese American experience in America, they will be worthy pieces of Sansei writings. Don L. Lee also defines black writing as follows:

Literature produced by Black hands is not necessarily Black writing. What has to be embodied in Black writing, first and foremost, is the consciousness that reflects the true Black experience, the true African-American experience--related in a style indicative of that experience.¹¹

¹⁰Marie Ochi, Gidra, November, 1971, p. 14.

¹¹Lee, Dynamite Voices I, p. 23.

B: Lawson F. Inada's Poetry

As both Issei and Nisei found difficulty in pursuing writing as a career and in publishing their works, most of the Sansei writers also have experienced the same difficulty.

Lawson Fusao Inada is the exception. He is the first American born Japanese-American poet to ever publish a collection of poetry. It is titled Before the War and appeared in 1971.

Mr. Inada was born and spent his childhood in Fresno, California where he associated with blacks, and grew up speaking their language and playing their music. It seems that black musicians, especially jazz artists inspired Inada to write poems:

Special acknowledgment must be made here to those without whose strength and continual inspiration this volume would not have been possible. Among them: Clifford Brown, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Billie Holiday, Milt Jackson, Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, Sonny Stitt, and Lester Young.¹²

Inada writes the following poem as if he is black and shares the sadness and happiness of black people:

The Journey

Miles was waiting on the dock,
his trumpet in a paper bag.

¹²Lawson Fusao Inada, Before the War: Poems as they Happened (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1971), p. 7.

Lady was cold--
 wind lashed the gardenias
 I stole for her hair.

We were shabby, the three of us.

No one was coming so I started to row.

- - - - -
 The city moaned and smoldered.
 Tin cans on the banks like shackles.-

- - - - -
 But Miles took out his horn
 and played
 Lady sang.

A slow traditional blues.

- - - - -
 Our craft so full of music,
 the night so full of stars.

When I awoke we were entering an ocean,
 sun low on water
 warm as a throat,
 gold as a trumpet.

We wept.

Then soared in a spiritual.

Never have I been so happy.¹³

No wonder one critic said in review of Before the War that "Inada owes very little to his Japanese/Japanese-American past. He sounds more like LeRoi Jones. He is enamoured, even obsessed, by jazz, and his poetry really swings, nothing of oriental 'grace' or 'poise' about it--just lots of hard-in

¹³Ibid., pp. 120-121.

impact and power."¹⁴

Certainly, he writes poems for Malcolm X and for jazz artists, but when this critic said, "Inada owes very little to his Japanese/Japanese-American past," he was wrong. Inada's works primarily come from his life experience in the concentration camps:

From Our Album

III. Desert Songs

1. ALL THAT WE GATHERED

Because there was little else to do,
they led us to the artillery range
for shells, all that we gathered,
and let us dig among dunes
for slugs, when they were through.¹⁵

And when he and his family were released from the concentration camp:

IV. Song of Chicago

When the threat lessened,
when we became tame,
my father and friends
took a train to Chicago.

for factory work
for packaging bolts.
One grew a mustache
And called himself Carlos.

¹⁴No writer of the review mentioned, Choice 8.1014, Oct. 1971 100w, in Book Review Digest 1971 (New York: the H. W. Wilson Company, 1972), p. 675.

¹⁵Inada, Before the War, p. 17.

And they all made a home
 with those of their own -
 rats, bedbugs, blacks.¹⁶

He owes much to his Japanese-American past. He is influenced by the black artists and black people, but his voice is very much his own, a Japanese-American, Sansei voice, afraid of nothing. He is also very aware of his identity and knows what he is:

Japs

are great imitators
 they stole
 the Greeks'
 skewers,
 used them
 on themselves.
 Their sutras
 are Face
 and Hide.
 They hate
 everyone else
 on the sly.
 They play
 Dr. Charley's
 games - bowling,
 raking,
 growing, forks
 on lapels.
 Their tongues
 are yellow
 with "r's"
 with "l's."
 They hate
 themselves

¹⁶Ibid., p. 20.

on the sly. I
used to be
Japanese.¹⁷

Reading Inada's poetry, we realize that in tones and contents Inada's writing is completely different from the Nisei's success story. It also should be noted here that we can see some progress. There is no quaint and exotic curio image of Japanese Americans in Inada's writing, yet a mainstream American publisher published the book, as well as an anthology of Asian-American writing Aiiiiieee!

Generally speaking, the young Sansei writers, including Inada, speak honestly, without fear of white society, searching for their new identity and attempting to build a more responsive and responsible society.

¹⁷Lawson F. Inada, "Japs," Asian-American Authors eds. Kai-yu Hsu and Helen Palubinskas (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), p. 112.

CONCLUSION

The history of black people is different from that of Japanese Americans, and so the black power movement differs from the yellow power movement. However, as the yellow power movement was set in motion by the black power movement, there is not much difference in ideology.

Perhaps the single decisive difference is the cause of the two movements. Devised by people completely segregated and oppressed economically, socially and politically and denied psychologically and culturally, the emergence of the black power movement was rather an inevitable phenomenon.

On the other hand, Asians, especially Japanese and Chinese Americans, were already secure economically and socially around 1960, and so the main motivation of the yellow power movement was the problem of Sansei self-identity. In short, the emergence of "yellow power" was not so critically needed as the emergence of "black power."

The other difference was the potential strength of the power. Blacks, as a single large ethnic group, have potential political leverage to improve their economic and social

conditions. On the contrary, Asians not only are small in number, but also have difficulty uniting as one yellow group, because the group is composed of peoples from several different national origins, each with its own different culture, history and problems in the United States.

Nevertheless, with the Third World concept, yellows tried to identify with their black brothers.

Revolution point-zero: 1967 (or whenever).
 Hey, who's that groovy guy
 who-sits-in-the-corner-near-the-clock-
 of-West-Wing-Powell-Sunday-nights--
 (I could sure dig on his ass). . .

Revolution 1: 1968 (or whenever).
 The coop's full of laughter--Asian laughter.
 How come it stops,
 when I come in with my white boyfriend?

Revolution 2: 1969 (or whenever).
 "Hey sister. . .I want to turn you on to Revolution.
 Let me rap with you awhile."
 The sister looked at me
 then shifted her gaze back
 to her loving peace freak (or whatever).
 Her eyes told me to go to Hell.
 (-I did!)

Revolution 3: 1970 (or whenever)
 Another year, another face. . .
 "Hey, don't I know you?
 Well, if I don't it really doesn't matter"
 We'll be recognizing each other just the same
 the familiar Asian eyes, say yes,
 and my smile creeps up from my stomach.
 "Right on brother. . .right on!"¹

¹Mary Uyematsu, (no title) Gidra, January, 1971,
 p. 14.

As this example also demonstrates, it is a certain fact that the theme and tone of the Sansei writing changed, after the black and yellow power movements, from that of the Nisei's success story formula.

One of the characteristics of the movements is pride in one's own cultural heritage. The Sansei writers are well aware of this characteristic, saying that although "the concept of yellow power owes its origin to the black power movement, the significance of yellow power is not within the black revolution for yellow power speaks for Asian Americans not blacks."² Yet, it is difficult to assess accurately the extent of influence of the new black writing on the Sansei writing. Black writing is peculiarly black, and yellow writing peculiarly yellow. At least, however, the criterion of "honesty" in black writing of the 1960's had a great impact on the Japanese-American writers:

The Asian-American writers here are elegant or repulsive, angry and bitter, militantly anti-white or not, not out of any sense of perversity or revenge but of honesty.³

Compare the editor of The Black Aesthetic, Addison Gayle, Jr., as he introduces new black artists as follows:

²Gidra, October, 1969, p. 10.

³Lawson F. Inada, et al., ed. Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers (New York: Anchor Press, 1975), p. xix.

Speaking honestly is a fundamental principle of today's black artist. He has given up the futile practice of speaking to whites, and has begun to speak to his brothers.⁴

As Mr. Gayle pointed out here, the black artist has begun to write only to black people. The Sansei, too, direct their work to Japanese Americans and at the same time to their other yellow brothers.

Black artists, however, have published many works in the new style, while Sansei have not. There are two decisive factors that account for the difference in amount of publication. One is population. As blacks have a large population in the United States, the black writer has a solid and large community to address himself to. That is to say, there is always a theoretical black market for black publishing if it can solve the relevant economic problems. On the other hand, Japanese Americans, constituting a very small population, have no such substantial community for the Sansei writer to address. Therefore if he wants to publish his work as an artist, he always has to depend on white publishers, and he has to compromise and dissemble.

This problem marks a certain similarity between the

⁴Addison Gayle, Jr., ed. The Black Aesthetic (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1972), p. xxi.

nature of Nisei writing and that of black writing during the period from 1865 to 1910. The autobiographical success story was the dominant theme of Nisei writing after World War II. Black writing after the Civil War was also dominated by success stories, such as Booker T. Washington's Up From Slavery, and by romantic escapism which used stereotyped Blacks and stereotyped dialect. As Richard Long explains, "The white public's degrading image of black people, superimposed on America's Victorian mediocrity, hovered over the imaginative literature. So dark was its shadow that the writer had few choices if he wanted to publish his work."⁵ Black writers had to produce what white readers wanted. The Nisei writers faced an identical constraint.

Population and publication, then, cause one of the most remarkable differences between black power writing and yellow power writing. The other important factor is cultural history. Because blacks have been permanently isolated culturally from the American mainstream, they could and did create and maintain their distinct cultural heritage. Therefore, with the rise of black power, whites began to accept and appreciate black culture as a part of the greater American culture. On

⁵Richard A. Long and Eugenia W. Collier, eds. Afro-American Writing I (New York: New York University Press, 1972), p. 114.

the contrary, Japanese Americans in their successful attempt to be well accepted by whites, have abandoned their cultural heritage, such as the Japanese language. When they awoke to the realization that they could not be fully accepted, and could not become white culturally, they almost seemed to conclude that they had nothing to be proud of. Perhaps due to this dilemma, a new search for self-identity of Sansei writers has begun.

Today, black artists are creating their literature, much of it specifically designed for and addressed to black people. Perhaps Sansei writers of the last decade have made a firm beginning in designing and addressing Japanese American literature primarily to Japanese Americans.

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