

Use it to get more out of the program!

From a Silk Cocoon

(The Emmy Award-winning documentary)

Viewer's Guide

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About this Guide . . .

This viewer's guide is designed to help individuals and groups most effectively use the *From a Silk Cocoon* program. It includes a synopsis of the story, historical context, as well as provocative questions to consider. It is our hope that this material will enrich your experience and deepen your insights into the lessons of the World War II incarceration experience of the Japanese Americans, and that through this enrichment we will each be strengthened to step forward to protect the civil liberties that belong to all Americans. Please check the *From a Silk Cocoon* Web site for much more information, as well as for a downloadable version of this viewer's guide.



Viewer's Guide

About the Program . . .

The discovery of a small metal box leads to the uncovering of a family story, shrouded in silence for more than 60 years. Woven through their censored letters, diary entries, and haiku poetry, is the story of a young Japanese American couple whose dreams are shattered when, months after their wedding, they find themselves held captive, first in race track horse stables and later, in tarpaper barracks.

Abandoned by America, the country of their birth, Shizuko and Itaru endure four years of life behind barbed wires in American concentration camps during World War II. Itaru, incensed by the indignities of prison camp life, is charged with sedition for speaking out in protest of the government's efforts to separate the "loyal" from the "disloyal" by imposing a Loyalty Questionnaire on all adult prisoners.

In his speech, Itaru demands that Japanese Americans be "treated equal to the free people" before they are required to fight in the war. Those identified as loyal would become eligible for the military draft, while the "disloyals" would be segregated to the Tule Lake Segregation Center in northern California. In answering "no" to the questions regarding his willingness to bear arms against the enemy and disavow loyalty to the Emperor of Japan, Itaru is identified as a trouble-maker, and he, his wife and two small children are segregated to Tule Lake.

Faced with deteriorating conditions regarding food, coal supplies, medical care, and milk for her children, Shizuko falls into despair. Militant pro-Japan groups begin to proliferate in the turmoil-ridden segregation camp and rumors sweep through the barracks. What initially appears to be a crisis-of-loyalty, becomes more clearly, a crisis-of-faith... in their own country.

Historical Context . . .

"Citizens Betrayed" by Barbara Takei and the Tule Lake Committee

The Tule Lake Segregation Center was the crucible for thousands of Japanese Americans incarcerated during World War II, who met America's betrayal of their hopes and dreams with anger, defiance and rejection.

Tule Lake was the largest and most controversial of the ten War Relocation Authority WRA camps used to carry out the government's system of exclusion and detention mandated by Executive Order 9066. The Order was issued February 19, 1942 following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Tule Lake opened May 26, 1942, detaining persons of Japanese descent removed from western Washington, Oregon and Northern California. With a peak population of 18,700, Tule Lake was the largest of the camps - the only one turned into a high-security segregation center, ruled under martial law and occupied by the Army. Due to turmoil and strife, Tule Lake was the last to close, on March 28, 1946.

Tule Lake Becomes a High-Security Segregation Center

Tule Lake became a Segregation Center to detain Japanese-Americans who were deemed potential enemies of America because of their response to an infamous, confusing loyalty questionnaire intended to distinguish loyal American citizens from enemy alien supporters of Japan. Question 27 asked, Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered? Question 28 asked, Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power, or organization?

"No-Nos" gave negative responses to Questions 27 and 28 or refused to answer them. Some answered "No" to protest their incarceration; others were confused about what the questions meant. Refusal to answer or "No" answers were viewed as proof of disloyalty, and resulted in removal to Tule Lake, which became the Segregation Center because it had the highest proportion of persons who answered "No" to 27 and 28. The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) harshly condemned "No-Nos" as troublemakers, believing the situation demanded a strong show of loyalty to America.

Martial Law Declared at Tule Lake

Squalid housing and sanitation, unsafe working conditions, and inadequate food and medical care at the Tule Lake Segregation Center led to increasing dissatisfaction. The Center was soon wracked by work stoppages, labor disputes and demonstrations. On November 1, 1943, a crowd estimated at 5,000 to 10,000 inmates gathered near the administration area to show interest and support for camp leaders meeting with WRA administrators. The mass gathering of Japanese Americans alarmed the Caucasian staff and led to construction of a barbed wire fence to separate the colony from the WRA administrative staff. The Army was poised to take over the camp in case of trouble. On November 4, 1943, disputes over truckloads of food taken from the warehouse to feed off-site Japanese American strike-breakers from Poston and Topaz led to the Army takeover of the camp using machine guns and tanks. Martial law was imposed and was continued until January 15, 1944.

Continued . . .

Motives for Renouncing Complex

Passage of the renunciation law began one of the saddest and least known chapters of Japanese American history. Of the 5,589 Japanese Americans who renounced their U.S. citizenship, 5,461 were detained at Tule Lake, where 70% of all adult American citizens there renounced. At Tule Lake, 73% of families had at least one member who gave up their citizenship. Of that group, 1,327 of them, including young children, were expatriated to Japan. Most renunciants remained in the U.S. stripped of their citizenship, as powerless Native American Aliens.

The stampede to renounce took place in late December 1944, after it was announced detention was ending and the camps would be closing. The prison-like Segregation Center was swept up in panic, anger and confusion. Motives for renouncing varied widely. Many inmates feared they would be forced into hostile American communities with no money, no promise of income and no place to live. Army personnel told them they could remain safe in Tule Lake until the war ended if they renounced their U.S. citizenship.

Second generation Nisei and Kibei, both children and adults, described intense pressure from their non-citizen Issei parents to renounce U.S. citizenship as a strategy to keep the family together in case the Issei were deported to Japan after the war.

Rumors, speculation, and the lack of trusted sources of information gave inmates little basis for making an informed decision about the future. Some believed propaganda heard over contraband short-wave radios; they dismissed news of Allied victories as lies and thought that they needed to renounce U.S. citizenship to prepare for life in a victorious Japan. Some remembered extremists who, like agents provocateurs, incited many others to renounce their U.S. citizenship but did not do so themselves. Teenagers and young adults who were classified by the Army as 4-C, enemy aliens, renounced to avoid being drafted by the country that imprisoned them and their families. For people with no legal forums available to them, renouncing was a way to protest America's shabby treatment of them and their families.

The Tragic Aftermath

When the war ended, the tragedy of the renunciants became apparent when the Justice Department prepared for mass deportation of the thousands who renounced. The renunciants had little understanding of what they gave up, or that they would become enemy aliens who could be legally expelled. Nearly all of the renunciants eventually sought restoration of their citizenship, including those who expatriated to Japan.

Most regained their citizenship primarily due to the heroic but little-known efforts of Wayne Mortimer Collins, a civil rights attorney who convinced the federal courts that the renunciants' citizenship should be restored because the renunciations took place under extreme duress and amidst impossibly difficult circumstances. Collins wound up fighting the Department of Justice over 20 years to help former renunciants reclaim their citizenship. Congress and President Nixon repealed the renunciation law in 1971.

Although absolved by the government, Japanese Americans who answered the loyalty questionnaire "No" and those who renounced their U.S. citizenship were stigmatized and ostracized for their choices. The renunciants, along with draft resisters, were condemned at the 1946 National JACL convention, which led to decades of them being marginalized for wartime choices. Consequently, they speak little about their life in the Segregation Center, a topic filled with powerful feelings of stigma and shame.

Sources:

(Please visit the From a Silk Cocoon Web site, under "History," for list of sources.)

Glossary

Concentration Camp – a guarded compound for the confinement of political prisoners, minorities, etc.
Enemy Alien - an alien residing in a country at war with the country of which he/she is a citizen.
Expatriates - U.S. citizens who choose to take up residence outside their country of birth.
Kibei - Second generation Japanese Americans partially educated in Japan.
Native American Alien - Americans without citizenship.
Renunciants - American citizens who gave up their citizenship, includes Nisei and Kibei.
Renunciation Law - July, 1944 congressional amendment to the Nationality Act of 1940 making it possible for U.S. nationals to renounce their citizenship during wartime while still residing within the country.
Repatriates - first-generation immigrant Issei who were legally ineligible for U.S. citizenship, who returned, or repatriated to Japan.
Segregation - separation of those deemed "loyal" or "disloyal" based on loyalty question #28.
WRA – War Relocation Authority – The civilian agency charged with implementing Executive Order 9066.

Using the Guide . . .

History has shown that the question of "loyalty" was not an issue for the Japanese American community, but an issue foisted upon them by the United States government and military officials to justify unjust treatment and to validate the necessity to suspend basic constitutional rights. Protest and dissidence were denounced as "disloyalty" by the government as well as by other Japanese American internees who feared that such actions would cause them more harm. During research for this documentary, many of the renunciants, now in their 80's, were reluctant to be interviewed or to be publicly identified, having carried a life-long stigma of being viewed as "disloyal." *From A Silk Cocoon* honors those renunciants who exercised their democratic right to protest.

This Viewer's Guide has been designed to broaden the viewer's knowledge about the history of Japanese Americans and their WW II incarceration, and to deepen understanding of the potential dangers of repeating history's injustice and race prejudice in time of war. It is our hope that questions, dialogue and self-reflection will guide this process.

Invite Others to a Group Viewing . . .

From a Silk Cocoon exposes a little known and very controversial aspect of the internment experience. Prior to the 1986 Civil Liberties Act, which included a presidential apology and a \$20,000 symbolic redress for those who were interned, there was primarily a singular "face" to the internment story. It represented the unswerving loyalty of those who served in the armed forces and made incalculable sacrifices to prove their loyalty. The Civil Liberties Act served to publicly acknowledge the fact that incarceration was unjustified and that in fact, there was no "military necessity" for imprisoning 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry; and in doing so, has lifted the veil for many other internment stories to be told.

We encourage you to invite family, friends, colleagues, or classmates to participate in a frank and open discussion about this little known aspect of U.S. history and all of its ramifications for living in today's post 9/11 America.

We Suggest the Following:

- Listen very carefully, avoiding judgment and encouraging discussion.
- Listen to your own emotional and intellectual response to what you're hearing and try to express it.

Ask and Discuss:

- What parts of the program affected you the most and why?
- What kind of feelings did you experience as you watched the program?
- What did you learn that you didn't know?

Consider:

- What lessons from the Japanese American experience can be applied to today's post 9/11 climate?
- What do you believe made it possible for this large-scale incarceration to occur? Could it happen again, perhaps to a different group of people?
- How do we balance the need for national security with the risk of an enemy attack?
- What do you think the Muslim and Arab American communities are experiencing today?

Decide:

- What you can do to help educate others about the danger of categorizing the enemy by race or nationality, rather than by their actions.
- How you can use this documentary to teach social justice and peacemaking as an alternative to war.
- To stand up for others whose human rights are being challenged, whether by a racial joke or an institutional policy.
- To cherish your freedom by voting, contributing your time and resources to supporting individuals and groups working toward the protection of civil liberties.

To Learn More . . .

There are many other Web sites, listservs, e-mail newsletters, and user groups on the Internet devoted to the internment experience. Please visit the *From a Silk Cocoon* Web site (www.fromasilkcocoon.com) for a more complete list of resources.

Feedback!

Tell us what you thought about the program, and its impact on you, your group, or your family. Write us at *From a Silk Cocoon*, e-mail: kimina@fromasilkcocoon.com or Dr. Satsuki Ina, 2716 X St., Sacramento CA 95818.

Purchase a DVD!

DVDs may be purchased for educational, grassroots, and home use from the Center for Asian American Media (formerly NAATA), at (415) 863-0814, by e-mail at distribution@asianamericanmedia.org, and on their Web site at www.asianamericanmedia.org.

Suggested Reading

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