The Japanese Journal of American Studies, No. 35 (2024)

Real Voices or Government Mouthpieces? U.S. Propaganda Efforts to Use Japanese Americans in World War II Camps

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This article examines how the United States government during World War II attempted, largely unsuccessfully, to use the voices of incarcerated Japanese Americans in communications such as camp newspapers and short-wave radio broadcasts to influence and control domestic as well as international public opinion. As part of efforts to create the impression that "normal communities" existed behind the barbed wire fences, the War Relocation Authority (WRA) may have had some success using camp newspapers for domestic propaganda, but the agency's editorial "supervision" diminished the newspapers' credibility with detainee readers. The Office of War Information (OWI) in collaboration with the WRA largely failed in its efforts to spread propaganda through camp newspapers and other means within the camps and to persuade detainees to make voice recordings for short-wave radio propaganda against Japan. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, government officials, especially OWI officials, overtly displayed or did not conceal their interests as propagandists, dooming them to fail. Underlying their failure or perhaps the ultimate reason for it was the fact that their propaganda was based on a fundamental contradiction of trying to portray the inherently undemocratic as democratic. As such, officially-controlled communications could not genuinely reflect Japanese Americans' real voices, but served merely as government mouthpieces.

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Propaganda must never be obvious. If obvious, it will prove useless.
—Colonel O.N. Solbert, Chairman, Joint Psychological Warfare Committee, U.S. War Department, *Propaganda in War*[1]

1. Introduction

Propaganda has long been an integral part of modern warfare. Governments at war attempt to influence or control public opinion in their favor, both at home and abroad, by disseminating (and withholding) particular types of information to particular audiences. Sometimes milder forms of wartime propaganda may appear to be "public relations," while other times propaganda is clearly a targeted weapon of psychological warfare against an enemy.

Previous scholarship has extensively documented the United States government's large-scale attempts to employ propaganda in wartime especially since World War I. As one scholar put it, "[t]he total wars of the twentieth century, as well as the sustained ideological struggle called the Cold War, framed and paced … the axial age of propaganda …." Propaganda also played an important role in post-Cold War conflicts such as the "War on Terror" that the U.S. government proclaimed after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.[2]

This article examines how the U.S. government during World War II attempted, largely unsuccessfully, to use the voices of incarcerated Japanese Americans in camp newspapers and radio appearances to influence and control both domestic and international public opinion. As intense animosity toward people of Japanese ancestry erupted after the Pearl Harbor attack on December 7, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt in February 1942 issued Executive Order 9066, which led to the mass uprooting and confinement of more than 120,000 Japanese Americans living on the West Coast. Approximately 70,000 of them were second-generation U.S. citizens known as the "Nisei," while the remaining people were first-generation, non-citizen Japanese Americans known as the "Issei." Regardless of citizenship, both the Nisei and Issei were deemed to be potentially dangerous, and by October 1942 they were forcibly sent to inland camps, euphemistically named "relocation centers," where many were detained for the duration of the war.[3]

Extensive research has documented the mass encampment generally and the Roosevelt Administration's press and public opinion management policies, but previous literature has not explored in detail the federal

government's attempts to use displaced Japanese Americans and their "voices" for psychological warfare.[4]

Although several studies shed light on free speech and press issues in the camps, none has focused on attempts to use Japanese Americans in propaganda as this article does. For example, a series of works by this author and Teruko Kumei analyzed how government officials restricted journalistic activities of detainees and their uses of the Japanese language in camps. Studies such as these provide rich descriptions of what the U.S. government called "supervision" and even "censorship" of detainees' self-expression. "Supervision" included such regulatory measures as government involvement in the selection of detainee staff for camp newspapers, pre- and post-review of newspapers, supplying news and propaganda for the newspapers to publish, and sometimes direct editorial intervention that even officials themselves acknowledged as "censorship." Yet, these studies did not discuss how such control of detainees' self-expression related to the federal government's larger domestic and foreign propaganda efforts.[5]

This article endeavors to begin filling this research gap and by so doing contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the U.S. government's treatment of Japanese Americans as well as its efforts to mold domestic and international public opinion during World War II.

The U.S. government in attempting to use the voices of Japanese Americans for propaganda purposes faced a fundamental contradiction. Through mass incarceration, the government denied Japanese Americans basic civil rights and liberties that lie at the core of a free and democratic society, all the while claiming to be fighting a war to uphold and advance freedom and democracy. How did the government attempt to reconcile this contradiction? In so doing, how did government officials come to view incarcerated Japanese Americans as potential tools for propaganda and public relations? To what degree did officials succeed or fail in their efforts and why?

This article addresses these questions by drawing on archival records of several governmental organizations that previous scholars have mostly failed to analyze. Particularly important are the internal papers, such as correspondence, meeting minutes, reports, surveys, memoranda, and policy drafts of the War Relocation Authority (WRA), a civilian agency established in March 1942 to administer camps. This article focuses on the initial stage when the WRA formulated the most basic policies and methods of public persuasion, but it also refers to relevant later phase developments

as well. In addition, this study uses documents from the Office of War Information (OWI), the federal agency responsible for wartime propaganda, camp newspapers and other publications as well as private correspondence, unpublished studies, essays and manuscripts, memoirs, and other first-hand accounts of Japanese Americans and government officials.

This research reveals several important findings. First, the WRA with some confidence used camp newspapers for domestic public relations, and these efforts may have been successful with some of the American public. Second, the WRA failed to establish the newspapers' credibility with detainees because it exercised editorial "supervision." Third, the OWI in collaboration with the WRA largely failed in its efforts to spread propaganda through camp newspapers and other means within the camps and to persuade detainees to make voice recordings for short-wave radio counter-propaganda against Japan.

2. Government Efforts to Present the Camps as Democratized "Normal Communities"

The mass incarceration of Japanese Americans is widely understood today as an inexcusable violation of individual constitutional rights that caused severe harm and disruption to them. As the "redress" movement progressed from the early 1970s to 1980s, political leaders as well as general public came to realize that the policy was a serious mistake that needed rectifying. After a full-scale investigation, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians established by Congress concluded in 1982 that a combination of "race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership" caused the tragedy. The federal government responded with an official apology and enactment of legislation providing among other things compensation of $20,000 to each surviving victim. Thereafter, the federal government's treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II has been widely recognized as a major "dark spot" in U.S. history.[6]

Despite the fundamental deprivation of democratic values and rights of Japanese Americans, government officials at the time asserted their intention to create a "normal community" behind barbed wire and "democratize" the whole mass incarceration policy. The first WRA National Director Milton S. Eisenhower, who served in that position for only 90 days, stressed to President Roosevelt in June 1942: "One of the fundamental objectives of the War Relocation Authority has been to make

life in the relocation center just as close to normal as wartime conditions will permit." An internal WRA memorandum not for publication echoed Eisenhower's words: "At all times, … the ultimate aim of the WRA will be to make life at the relocation centers as close to normal as wartime exigencies will permit."[7]

WRA officials also emphasized their ambition to make camp life as democratic as possible. In July 1942 when the removal of Japanese Americans from their homes to the camps was still in progress, the new WRA National Director Dillon S. Myer, who succeeded Eisenhower the previous month, described his agency's fundamental philosophy: "We are attempting to maintain civilian liberties and obligations to the maximum extent consistent with the exigencies of war …." The next year, Myer contended in a speech that "[r]elocation centers were never intended as concentration camps or prisons" and that those in camps "are entitled to treatment according to American standards of decency." Similarly, WRA Office of Reports Chief John C. Baker spoke of the importance of the public's understanding of the "[d]emocratic principles involved" in running the camps, such as "the way evacuees are fed, housed, supervised, the work they do, the freedom they are permitted, the attitude of the evacuees and the attitude of the administration."[8]

Examples of purportedly democratic institutions that the WRA established in the camps included elected community councils consisting of Japanese American detainees to run and administer many of the camp's operations and internal camp newspapers whose writers and editors were detainees, but subject to WRA "supervision." The WRA also provided detainees generally free access to outside news media, both in English and Japanese. An internal agency study showed that camp detainees could obtain nearly the same, or a somewhat lower, amount of information through print and broadcast media than an average American could. These practices not only served to maintain order and stability within the camps, but the government also understood that the detainees were Americans who after the war ended would leave the camps and reintegrate back into broader society. In 1946, the WRA asserted that its management of the camps had been based on the "recognition of constitutional and human rights of the evacuees who would one day be returning to the West Coast."[9]

But WRA officials were also aware of the contradictory nature of their own statements. As one principal WRA official wrote, one of the early problems of camp administration was "the difficulty of creating a normal community when many external aspects resemble a concentration camp.

The presence of troops, guard towers, restrictions on free movement and the imposition of rules and regulations without consultation are all evidences of the fact that evacuees are not free persons."[10]

Behind such inconsistency lay serious concern about the policy's potentially adverse impact on U.S. nationals in the hands of Japan. Referring to some critics who accused the WRA of "pampering and coddling [the detainees] because we have not allowed the brutality of the Japanese enemy to influence our policies and program," Director Myer claimed that his agency was "working to preserve the principles of justice and equality guaranteed in the Constitution of our country" so as to "avoid conditions and incidents that might encourage the Japanese enemy to inflict more suffering on Americans imprisoned by them."[11]

On the foreign front, officials were particularly concerned about persistent propaganda attacks from Japan, which often condemned Washington's unfair handling of Japanese Americans and even threatened retaliation. For example, a May 1, 1942 Radio Tokyo broadcast that was typical of Japanese propaganda asked: "Is this act worthy of the Washington government which has claimed to be the symbol of democracy? The land of the free turned into a country of vicious prejudice and unbearable discrimination." Director Eisenhower acknowledged that "all of us in WRA are acutely aware of the danger of Axis reprisals and other international complications arising from our activities ...." His successor Myer also stated that "we are dealing with Japanese nationals, in part, and that our treatment of these people might well affect the reciprocal treatment accorded to American soldiers and civilians in the hands of the Japanese."[12]

In order to counter enemy propaganda and demonstrate humane, "normal community" conditions in camps, the WRA undertook image-improvement efforts on three levels: within camps, domestically, and abroad. As early as late March 1942, Director Eisenhower wrote to Archibald MacLeish, Director of the Office of Facts and Figures (OFF), that public relations would be a key to success.

> [Mass encampment] seems to me to have great immediate implications in the war information program of the Federal government. For one thing, the manner in which the evacuation and relocation are handled and interpreted certainly will affect our propaganda efforts abroad. Also, of immediate concern is the manner in which the migration is interpreted to the American people. This bears directly on the success of the relocation program, which by its very nature will be exceedingly

difficult.

Eisenhower added for emphasis: "Obviously this whole program involves a very carefully planned public relations program."[13]

Whenever possible, the WRA attempted to highlight the positive, "democratic" dimensions of camp life. Director Myer, for instance, stated in a July 1943 speech that camp administrators "have faith in the American democratic way of life, with equal rights, privileges, and responsibilities for all, regardless of race, creed, or national origin" and that the WRA "is providing the means for loyal American citizens and law-abiding aliens … to take their place in the national life and enjoy the freedoms which are assured by the Constitution." The Minidoka Project Director in Idaho also declared to a local neighbor organization: "These are trying times for minority groups in the United States, and I feel that it is up to all of us to see that their rights are not destroyed at the same time that we are fighting to uphold the rights of minorities in other parts of the world."[14]

Conversely, officials strove to conceal or downplay the policy's negative aspects. This extended to the vocabulary the WRA used in their communications. In October 1942, Director Myer warned all staff members not to use derogatory words such as "Japs" both in private and public. Avoidance of discriminatory language was necessary because "[t]he words that we use in correspondence, in reports, and in conversation with the evacuees exercise a great deal of influence in determining the attitude of the evacuees and of the American public toward the activities of the War Relocation Authority." In accordance, the chief of the WRA Information Division told the Project Director of the Minidoka camp: "I hope that all of us will find ways of eliminating from the project papers and also from press releases the frequent references to 'Japanese' and 'Caucasians.'" He also advised: "Personally, I do not like the word 'colonists.' I think the term 'residents' is much better or the very simple term 'people.'"[15]

3. Camp Newspapers as a Means to Portray Camp Life as "Normal"

As part of its democratization efforts, the WRA early on decided to permit Japanese Americans to publish their own newspapers. In mid-April 1942 as the camps were being created, the Information Service Division declared: "Maintenance of a free press under such cooperative restrictions as [outside] newspapers may recognize as necessary in wartime for the preservation of our way of life, including the institution of the free press

itself, is a right which shall be equally enjoyed by all evacuees."[16]

Officials assumed that the existence of newspapers would help create a positive public image of the camps. For example, the Project Director of Manzanar, California, explained that "the right to publish their own newspaper" would symbolize "the desire and the intention of the [WRA] to grant evacuees every freedom consistent with military necessity." In fact, all 10 camps eventually had at least one newspaper printed in both English and Japanese (Table 1).[17]

Maintaining the appearance of a "free press" became essential for the WRA to justify its contention that life inside the camps operated like a "normal community" based on democratic values. After making a short observational visit to Manzanar in early May 1942, the WRA Community Service Section chief reported to Director Eisenhower: "A small newspaper was originated and published weekly, and it indicates that life is being carried on except for customary mobility of evacuees pretty much as it would be in a normal community." A 1943 internal policy paper reported that the WRA presented to the public on a regular basis the message that "[i]nside the center evacuees are accorded about the same freedoms they

Table 1. Japanese American Camp Newspapers (excluding Japanese-language sections and miscellaneous publications)

Newspaper Title and Period of Publication
Gila News-Courier (Gila River Relocation Center, Arizona): 9/12/1942 – 9/5/1945
Granada Pioneer (Granada Relocation Center, Colorado): 10/28/1942 – 9/15/1945
Heart Mountain Sentinel (Heart Mountain Relocation Center, Wyoming): 10/24/1942 – 7/28/1945
Communiqué (Jerome Relocation Center, Arkansas): 10/23/1942 – 2/26/1943 (Renamed the *Denson Tribune* in March 1943)
Denson Tribune (Jerome Relocation Center, Arkansas): 3/2/1943 – 6/6/1944
Manzanar Free Press (Manzanar Relocation Center, California): 4/11/1942 – 10/19/1945
Minidoka Irrigator (Minidoka Relocation Center, Idaho): 9/10/1942 – 7/28/1945
Newell Star (Tule Lake Segregation Center, California): 3/9/1944 – 3/1/1946
Poston Chronicle (Colorado River [Poston] Relocation Center, Arizona): 12/22/1942 – 10/23/1945 (only the first issue appeared as *Poston Daily Chronicle)*
Rohwer Outpost (Rohwer Relocation Center, Arkansas): 10/24/1942 – 7/21/1945
Topaz Times (Central Utah Relocation Center, Utah): 9/17/1942 – 8/31/1945
Tulean Dispatch (Tule Lake Relocation Center, California): 6/15/1942 – 10/30/1943 (a new camp newspaper *Newell Star* started in March 1944 when Tule Lake became a segregation camp.)

would have outside. They speak in English or Japanese, operate their own newspapers, and worship as they choose."[18]

By the end of May 1942, the WRA had begun to formulate an official policy regarding publication of camp newspapers. Newspapers had already appeared in some of the camps, and on May 29, 1942, the WRA issued a "Tentative Policy Statement" that set forth basic principles for their publication.

A foundational principle of the policy was that the agency would not exercise rigid institutional "censorship" of the newspapers because camp living conditions were supposed to be as "normal" as possible. The statement's foreword explained that "the WRA aims to provide in each project a setting in which normal activities of life can go on as nearly as possible like those of an ordinary American community. … Project regulations will be imposed only where necessary, and center residents will be given every possible freedom in the conduct of their daily lives." It then declared: "There will be no censorship by WRA of any written or published materials going into or out of projects, or circulating within the projects." Consistent with this principle, the Granada administration in Colorado proclaimed in a pamphlet intended for outside consumption that the camp "functions on the theory that Freedom of Speech, like Freedom of Religion, must be preached, practiced, and protected from within, and never abused. … THE PIONEER [the Granada camp newspaper] is an ultra-democratic institution and its work is very much the thing of 'today.'"[19]

In light of public relations, the WRA defended its principle against rigid censorship in an effort to ensure that the camp press did not appear to be a government "mouthpiece." When the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) recommended that the WRA impose harsher restrictions on newspapers, meetings, and assemblies, Director Myer straightforwardly rejected such idea, saying "[a]lthough the project paper is essential as a conveyance for administrative information, there is a real danger in controlling its activities so closely that it comes to be regarded as an administration mouthpiece." The WRA's 1946 final report made the same point, maintaining that "the fullest possible freedom of expression [was] guaranteed to the evacuees …. All centers … had community newspapers published both English and Japanese." It also claimed that the newspapers were "produced by evacuee staffs with a minimum of supervision and no actual exercise of censorship."[20]

The claimed absence of censorship enabled WRA officials to publicize both inside and outside the camps that the newspapers were outlets

for detainees' "real voices." For example, the Reports Officer at Heart Mountain, Wyoming, stated that the camp newspaper *Heart Mountain Sentinel* served "most importantly as a voice for the community, particularly during the hectic, early days of the center, when community thought and action were dulled by confusion and frustration." Similarly, when the administration of Colorado River (Poston), Arizona, decided to transform the official information sheet the *Press Bulletin* into the *Poston Chronicle*, the *Press Bulletin* editorialized: "This issue is a big step towards turning the Press Bulletin into a newspaper of the people …." When the *Poston Chronicle* finally made its debut as a camp paper on December 22, 1942, the Reports Officer praised the development, noting that "[t]he Press Bulletin … was mainly an administrative mouthpiece and the need for some news medium for the evacuees was keenly felt by them."[21]

In fact, Japanese Americans themselves wrote and edited newspaper articles in most cases. At some places, the camp authority primarily published official information sheets such as the Poston *Press Bulletin* as mentioned above. But administrators soon realized that they could achieve their objectives far better by letting the Japanese do it by themselves.[22]

As the WRA came to understand that newspapers could be used as evidence of camp democratization, the agency circulated them not only inside, but outside the camps. In October 1943, the Reports Officer at Heart Mountain wrote: "We are anxious to not only give full coverage of center activities but we must also use The Sentinel for outside public relations." About a month later, the national headquarters issued "Manual Release No.38," which encouraged wider dissemination of newspapers to prominent outside individuals, organizations, and mass media as a "desirable" means of publicity. The WRA Reports Division's "Semi-Annual Report" in 1944 summarized: "By distributing them to local newspapers and radio stations, most Project Reports officers utilized center newspapers as an additional public relations device."[23]

Individual camp newspaper distribution numbered in the several hundreds or even more. As early as July 1942, the Reports Officer at Manzanar wrote that "the Manzanar Free Press [the camp newspaper] has a circulation of 2,500 copies in camp. I feel it safe to estimate at least 500 copies of the paper are mailed out …." He also commented that "the newspapers of the various centers are one of our best mediums of public relations with the press and should be officially mailed to the various editors." The Reports Office at Granada reported in April 1943 that the *Granada Pioneer* had a total circulation of 3,000 and about 400

complimentary copies were mailed to outside subscribers. At almost the same time, the *Heart Mountain Sentinel* had 213 cash-paid subscribers and was distributing 972 free copies to various outside audiences nationwide.[24]

On special occasions such as Christmas, New Year, and other holidays or anniversaries, those numbers soared. When the *Minidoka Irrigator* published its second anniversary edition in September 1944, the Project Director ordered printing of an extra 2,000 copies. Similarly, the 1943 New Year's edition of the *Heart Mountain Sentinel*, whose regular circulation numbered about 6,000, had a circulation of approximately 7,200 copies.[25]

Officials felt confident that outside distribution of camp newspapers was having a positive impact. As early as September 1942, the WRA officially set up a policy to pay the cost of postage for outside circulation because "it is desirable from the point of view of public relations." Referring to its influence, the Granada Project Director reminded the *Pioneer* staff that "the newspaper is a medium by which we will be judged by the people who are on the outside; we should maintain a standard of excellence and keep our paper clean." Another Granada official asserted that "we must sell ourselves to the public and that we should be a machinery by which to further the interests of the entire group." The Heart Mountain administration took pride in some local Wyoming newspapers frequently reprinting the *Heart Mountain Sentinel*'s editorials and articles, stating those outside papers were "amazed in the first place that people of Japanese ancestry could publish an English-language newspaper and secondly, that the 'concentration camp' could and did express itself fearlessly in its editorial columns …."[26]

Some newspaper staffers were even permitted to venture beyond the barbed wire fences themselves to support the WRA's public relations. The Granada authority appointed a Nisei editor of the *Granada Pioneer* as the "Publication Director," whose major responsibilities included going outside to present a positive social image of the camp. The editor received the following instruction: "In many cases, the director of the camp paper will be called to represent the center in goodwill meeting and meetings in which the will of the residents must be heard at special sessions. … His presence at the meetings is to give camp representation …. He must refute [outside] newspaper articles contrary to the truth." Likewise, Nisei editor Bill Hosokawa of the *Heart Mountain Sentinel* regularly contributed columns to news media in the vicinity. In a letter recommending him to the publisher of the *Des Moines Register and Tribune*, Director Myer praised Hosokawa, noting that his "editorials frequently are quoted in other relocation center

papers, and have been picked up by outside newspapers as well."[27]

WRA officials at one time considered using camp newspapers as propaganda against Japan. In June 1942, the Chief of the Office of Reports wrote to the Office of War Information (OWI), the federal agency charged with disseminating information about the war to domestic and international media:

> The papers thus far issued tell in effect that these people of Japanese ancestry are really Americans, that they are loyal to the United States, that they think, talk, act, and live as other Americans do, that they are accepting the restrictions which must be imposed upon them in good spirit and with understanding of the reasons for restrictions.

The chief proposed that "this kind of material might provide some ammunition for short wave broadcasts [toward Japan]." Attached to this letter were sample copies of the *Manzanar Free Press*.[28]

The OWI responded positively. The following month, a propaganda officer in charge of East Asia requested the WRA to send the OWI's San Francisco branch all back issues of the *Free Press*. He wrote: "There is undoubtedly a great deal of material for short-wave use which we can glean from these Nisei peoples …."[29]

4. Editorial "Supervision" of Camp Newspapers and Their Lack of Credibility within the Camps

Despite the WRA's repeated claim that it did not exercise censorship, the agency considered it imperative to keep the content of camp newspapers in line with its own policies. A 1942 confidential memorandum written by the Division of Reports chief stated: "Any statement that may be misinterpreted to indicate that the evacuees are receiving harsh treatment, that they are subject to unnecessarily stern restrictions, or forced to live under unfavorable conditions should also be strictly censored …." Regarding the *Tulean Dispatch*'s editorial policy, the Reports Officer at Tule Lake, California, declared: "The WRA is responsible for what is printed in the paper. You see, there's mailing list for this paper. We must realize that outsiders read it, and therefore we have to be pretty careful about what we print in it."[30]

Myriad WRA communications demonstrate that the agency was keenly aware of the importance of controlled newspapers for public relations. In November 1942, for example, the Project Director at Gila, Arizona, warned

all division chiefs to be more watchful when they released information for newspaper publication: "Policy matters of W.R.A. should not be discussed by anyone unless they are positive that the information they are giving to the community does comply with W.R.A. regulations -- I request that everyone adhere strictly to this memorandum." The Minidoka Reports Officer reminded a pictorial section editor of the *Minidoka Irrigator* that "I am extremely concerned about the public relations aspects of your pictorial page …. [I]t is my responsibility to see that the Japanese-Americans are presented in the most favorable light possible …." In 1943, a Japanese American editorial staff member of the *Granada Pioneer* reported that a WRA official declared at a staff meeting that "[t]hrough the newspaper we must show the outside people how Americanized we actually are; how our activities are carried on; and how our center is progressing in general."[31]

In order to maintain camp newspapers' value as a public relations tool, the administration exercised "supervision," or editorial control less strict than "censorship." WRA Director Myer admitted such practice in his July 7, 1943 appearance before the House Special Committee on Un-American Activities: "[W]e have been very cautious and very careful as to what we allow to be published in the press within the centers" and therefore "supervision" was necessary "so that it would not be published without having a chance to check it."[32]

The WRA's "supervision," however, tended to result in the newspapers being filled mostly with factual news, administrative announcements, and other banal, non-political, non-controversial pieces. In July 1942, a major Information Division official directed: "What information we do issue … should be strictly confined to what has happened …. All opinions, forecasts, and information that may in any way arouse emotional reactions or questions concerning the wisdom of our policies should be carefully avoided." In 1944, the Minidoka Project Director warned newspaper staffers that "the Irrigator had a considerable exchange list, and in their own interest, and from a public relations point of view, they should very carefully consider public reaction to a controversy …. [underline in original]" Shortly thereafter, the Minidoka Reports Officer quoted earlier also warned the same pictorial editor to "make certain of your ground before publishing any pictures or text not in accord with good public relations …. [S]hould the pictures and text not measure up to these standards, I shall be compelled to have the Irrigator issues containing them stopped at the gate. [underline in original]"[33]

The camp authority's influence and control diminished the credibility

of the newspapers. Detainee readers came to see these publications which the WRA publicly represented as open and free, and thus proof of "normal community" life in the camps more as government mouthpieces. An elderly Issei at Minidoka voiced distrust, complaining that "[the *Minidoka Irrigator*] is not our paper. It is under the thumb of the Administration and reflects only the policies and opinions of the W.R.A." Even the WRA Community Analysis Section admitted in its final report that "[e]vacuees in general trust their own sources of information about the outside more than WRA material, which they often think of as 'propaganda.'"[34]

5. Failed Propaganda Efforts of the OWI and WRA

Further evidence of the federal government's lack of credibility in the eyes of incarcerated Japanese Americans can be found in the WRA's collaboration with the Office of War Information (OWI). The WRA worked closely with various federal information agencies such as the Office of Facts and Figures (OFF) and the Coordinator of Information (COI) to try to take further advantage of the public relations and propaganda value of the camp newspapers. The OWI was particularly active in seeking collaboration with the WRA. Founded in June 1942, this federal agency under the direction of former CBS news reporter Elmer Davis coordinated a wide range of both domestic and international wartime propaganda campaigns. The OWI viewed conditions in the WRA camps as one of the major battlefields in psychological warfare between the U.S. and Japan.

By early August 1942, the two agencies decided to strengthen their mutual cooperation and ratified an official policy agreement called "An Interpretation of Relations Between War Relocation Authority and the Office of War Information." The agreement defined their partnership in detail, specifically in terms of press and public relations. One provision read: "Press releases relating to WRA activities and policies will be prepared by the WRA, and will be cleared by and issued by the OWI News Bureau. … Publications prepared by WRA intended for distribution to the public or to evacuees, will be cleared with OWI for consistency with government information policy."[35]

As part of this arrangement, the OWI supplied the WRA with propaganda materials in both English and Japanese that it wanted used in camp newspapers or otherwise. For example, the WRA Washington headquarters in early August instructed all camp directors to urge newspaper staffers to use the publicity the OWI created to mark the first anniversary of the

Atlantic Charter (a joint American and British declaration of their goals in World War II and vision for a post-war world), stating that both agencies "shall be very much interested in seeing [accounts] made of this material in editorials."[36]

But such collaboration did not always succeed. During the summer and autumn of 1942, for example, the WRA studied the effectiveness of two OWI publications. One OWI booklet compared resources and potential military strengths of the U.S. and Japan. The other was a Japanese translation of "A Letter to the Japanese People," which was written by an OWI official and published in the January 1942 issue of the *Readers Digest* (the author Bradford Smith was then at the Office of the Coordinator of Information). The WRA Information Division Chief directed report officers at several camps to get a sense of the potential reception the two publications might receive by "show[ing] copies of the attached circulars to a few Nisei at the relocation center who can read Japanese and in whose opinion you have confidence."[37]

Almost all responses were negative, however. The Reports Officer at Tule Lake replied: "The two booklets … were unfavorably or indifferently received. … The general comment was, 'So What?' The editors of the 'Tulean Dispatch' felt it was a waste of time to distribute further booklets since no specific reactions could be obtained." One WRA analyst stated that the "OWI handouts [are] bad because too much propaganda. What is wanted is a straight news summary and analysis." Sometime later, the same Tule Lake Reports Officer noted: "A consensus of their opinion is that the booklet would tend to stir up more discussion and this distribution is therefore not recommended at this time."[38]

Unflattering comments came from other camps, too. Saburo Kido, the National President of the pro-WRA Nisei organization Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), at Poston, Colorado, stated that "OWI releases to date have been too obviously propaganda. More subtle propaganda in the form of news slanted for this purpose would be valuable if such releases could be prepared by veteran newspapermen and distributed by the OWI for center publication." As virtually the only officially recognized organization of Japanese Americans, the JACL served as the WRA's close partner and advisor throughout the war.[39]

Consequently, the WRA had to give up this particular joint propaganda project with the OWI. The Office of Reports concluded: "While the services met with a certain amount of approbation on the part of the reports officers and project newspaper staffs, there were many criticisms and apparently a

general feeling that the material was not effective in furthering a program of Americanization among evacuees. So it has been decided to discontinue the services, at least for the time being."[40]

On another occasion, the OWI considered using detainees to test the effectiveness of propaganda messages aimed for the Japanese in Japan and its territories. In October 1942, the OWI compiled a Japanese-language leaflet in the form of booklet to be dropped overseas and requested the WRA to collect opinions from those who could read Japanese.

Once again, responses were overwhelmingly negative. The Reports Officer at Minidoka reported that "[o]nly one, a translator, was enthusiastic about the booklet's possibilities as effective reading matter" and added that all the other responses were unfavorable because "the booklet was too blunt to be effective propaganda." Many readers particularly disliked the way the publication criticized the nation of their ancestry, Japan. The same Reports Officer quoted one translator as explaining that "many of the Issei left Japan when they were young men, and remember their homeland in cultural and family terms, rather than political. Therefore, when an outsider makes accusation as in this booklet, the reaction of many Issei is apt to be one of resentment and of antagonism."[41]

Since reactions from other camps were similar, the WRA had to inform the OWI that it would not be desirable anymore to continue the testing of the propaganda material. The Chief of the Office of Reports summed up that the WRA "receive[d] about the same reaction as other pamphlets in the Japanese language prepared for propaganda purposes. Accordingly, we shall make no effort to give a distribution in the Relocation Centers."[42]

6. Detainees' Refusal to Participate in OWI Short-Wave Radio Propaganda Broadcasts

The OWI in collaboration with the WRA also attempted, here again unsuccessfully, to use the voices of incarcerated Japanese Americans in short-wave radio counter-propaganda against Japan. The OWI wanted to refute Tokyo's repeated charge that Washington was harassing the displaced people of Japanese descent in retaliation against the Axis' treatment of captured American soldiers. In a seven-page proposal to the WRA dated July 23, 1942, the OWI quoted one typical Radio Tokyo broadcast as claiming that "United States authorities without fully investigating loyalty of the Japanese residents have forced them into mass evacuation." The proposal maintained that "[t]he only way we can discredit Japanese

leadership with respect to evacuated Japanese is to present the actual voice and statements of the evacuee themselves."[43]

The OWI proposed to highlight several particular messages in such short-wave broadcasts, all of which were in full accord with the WRA's goal of presenting that camps were "normal communities" and that the U.S. was fighting the war to uphold democracy. Among them were:

> Pride that they are Americans; …
>
> Pride in their accomplishment in the building of their new homes [in camps] where they are being paid for their work, where they enjoy their families, where they are happy and where they are prosperous;
>
> Condemnation of the spirit of militarism which has been explosively expressed by the minority of Japanese who are now in control of Japan;
>
> Regret that the Japanese in Japan are suffering from the hardships of the war which they obviously did not want and which was forced upon them; …
>
> Sincere belief in the principles of American democracy ….[44]

The two agencies agreed that OWI officials would first make a preliminary trip to the camps to solicit cooperation from detainee representatives. If these negotiations proved successful, the OWI would then prepare radio scripts in English, get approval from the WRA and preferably from the Army as well, translate the scripts into Japanese, and finally make recordings at the camps.[45]

In late August, an OWI team visited Tule Lake to begin the process. The OWI team started with an unofficial conference with select detainees who were both Issei and Nisei and thought to be influential among camp residents. The OWI officials entered the meeting generally optimistic, anticipating that the majority of attendees would be willing, or at least not strongly unwilling, to talk about their camp experiences for the audience in Japan.[46]

However, the team immediately discovered the opposite. Many were uncooperative or even hostile. One of them, Issei Christian minister Daisuke Kitagawa, was intensely opposed to all aspects of the proposal. Kitagawa wrote in his 1967 memoir:

> Looking back, anyone can see how ridiculous that proposal was. In the first place, it presumed that we were also prisoners of war, something which the U.S. Government repeatedly denied. The official argument to justify the mass evacuation of people of Japanese descent was the theory of protective custody. To turn around now and use us as if we were prisoners of war would be a gross contradiction.

Kitagawa further explained how the proposal had in fact backfired on the OWI and WRA at Tule Lake: "The total effect of that proposal upon the Tule Lake community was, however, extremely unfortunate, and the incident was one of the chain of events that solidified Japanese evacuee opinion against the government."[47]

Despite the negative feedback from the initial conference, the OWI made a formal request to the self-governing Community Council of Tule Lake detainees anyway. Ultimately, it too turned out to be in vain. In contrast to the participants in the first meeting, the Council members were all young Nisei and seemed to have a relatively favorable reaction to the proposal, initially endorsing it. But after long heated discussions with Issei leaders, the Council twice rejected the OWI's request. The older Japanese-speaking detainees who were the ones expected to actually appear in radio programs remained deeply suspicious. The Tule Lake administration's internal report reveals: "An underlying reason for the poor reception given by the Tule Lake people to the O.W.I. representatives was a distrust of the agency because of its propaganda function, and the belief that propagandists could not be trusted to preserve the truth."[48]

Nor did the detainees agree with the OWI's claim that Japanese Americans in fact felt secure as Americans and were proud of their own situation. On this issue, many Nisei agreed with the Issei. The aforementioned Tule Lake administration's report read: "[T]he bulk of Nisei sentiment, and certainly that of the Issei, was directly contrary to [the OWI]. The evacuees felt no assurance that they were Americans, considering the evacuation. [They also] doubted the sincerity of American democracy, … felt no pride about building homes in the relocation center, and certainly did not consider their circumstances a happy and prosperous one."[49]

Despite its failure at Tule Lake, the OWI made another identical request in 1943, but the result was no different. In March, an OWI Information Officer asked the WRA to recruit individuals who had sufficient Japanese language skills and appropriate background for foreign radio propaganda.

The OWI officer wrote: "The procedure which OWI wants followed in such cases is to write a script in both English and Japanese, submit these scripts to the Overseas Division of OWI at New York for approval, and then make a recording at one of the local radio stations of the script as finally approved." However, the WRA after consulting with detainee leaders again declined the request. "We have discussed this matter with several of the evacuee leaders, including block managers, teachers, etc. None of these wish to participate in such a broadcast, and they were in agreement that it would be very difficult to find other qualified evacuees who would be willing to do so."[50]

7. Conclusion

Propaganda is a type of communication with definite purposes. Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell define it as "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist."[51]

As the epigraph at the beginning of this article cautions, however, propaganda that is "obvious" is "useless." For propaganda in most contexts to be persuasive, it must be indirect and subtle as if the sender has no intention at all to influence someone else's thoughts.

This paper has demonstrated that U.S. government propaganda pertaining to the wartime Japanese American camps tended to overlook this basic rule of thumb. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, government officials, especially those of the OWI, overtly displayed or did not conceal their interests as propagandists, dooming them to fail. The WRA with some confidence used camp newspapers for outside public relations, but its editorial "supervision" resulted in lack of trust among Japanese American readers. Underlying the government officials' failure or perhaps the ultimate reason for it was the fact that their propaganda was based on a fundamental contradiction of trying to portray the inherently undemocratic as democratic, whether through newspapers, booklets, or efforts to get detainees to offer their voices for short-wave radio broadcasts to Japan. Regardless of the degree to which "normal community" life existed in the camps, neither the WRA nor OWI could escape the truth that no Japanese Americans chose on their own to be behind the barbed wire fences. As such, camp newspapers, short-wave radio broadcasts, or any other officially controlled communications could not genuinely reflect Japanese Americans' real voices, but served merely as government mouthpieces.

Note

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[3] One of the most comprehensive and thorough studies of Japanese Americans mass encampment is the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC), *Personal Justice Denied: Report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians* (Washington, D.C.: The Government Printing Office, 1982). For other major previous studies, see, for example, Morton Grodzins, *Americans Betrayed: Politics and the Japanese Evacuation* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1949); Jacobus tenBroek, Edward Norton Barnhart, and Floyd W. Matson, *Prejudice, War and the Constitution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1954); Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps, USA: Japanese Americans and World War II* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971); Peter Irons, *Justice at War: The Story of the Japanese-American Internment Cases* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Greg Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy: Japanese Confinement in North America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

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