

TEACHER'S GUIDE
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MISSION US: "Prisoner in My Homeland"

Excerpt from "A Nisei Who Said No"

The following excerpts are from interviews with a Nisei in camp who answered "no" to Question 28 on the "Statement of United States Citizen of Japanese Ancestry" questionnaire. Question 28 asked incarcerated if they would swear allegiance to the United States and disavow allegiance to the Emperor of Japan. The first section is part of an exchange between the Manzanar Hearing Board and the Nisei who responded "no." The second section is a longer statement later collected from the incarcerated.

Hearing Board Member: Don't you want to tell us? Perhaps there is something that we can do. If you say "No" you are giving away your citizenship. Is that what you want to do? Feel free to talk. We're not here to argue with you but we want to help you.

Nisei: What I was thinking. I thought that since there is a war on between Japan and America, since the people of this country have to be geared up to fight against Japan, they are taught to hate us. So they don't accept us. First I wanted to help this country, but they evacuated us instead of giving us a chance. Then I wanted to be neutral, but now that you force a decision, I have to say this. We have a Japanese face. Even if I try to be American I won't be entirely accepted...

Nisei: If I would say "Yes", I'd be expected to say that I'd given up my life for this country. I don't think I could say that because this country has not treated me as a citizen. I could go three-quarters of the way but not all the way after what has happened.

HBM: Would you be willing to be drafted?

Nisei: No I wouldn't do that.

Later I contacted this young man and asked him for a fuller statement of his views. The following is what he told me:

...I don't know Japan. I'm not interested in Japan. That's another thing that worries me. I don't know what will become of me and people like me if we have to go to Japan...[My father] doesn't tell me what to do but I know what he wants me to do about this answer. I can sense it from the way he talks.

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In order to go out prepared and willing to die, expecting to die, you have to believe in what you are fighting for. If I am going to end the family line, if my father is going to lose his only son, it should be for some cause we respect. I believe in democracy as I was taught it in school. I would have been willing to go out forever before evacuation. It's [not] that I'm a coward or afraid to die. My father would have been willing to see me go out at one time. But my father can't feel the same after this evacuation and I can't either . . .

I'm sick right now. Right now while I've been talking to you I've had a cramp in the pit of my stomach.

I appreciate this talk with you. But my mind is made up. I know my father is planning to return to Japan. I know he expects me to say "No" so there will be no possibility that the family will be separated. There isn't much I can do for my father [anymore]; I can't work for him the way I used to. But I can at least quiet his mind on this.

Source: War Relocation Authority, *Community Analysis Notes: From a Nisei who said "no."*, January 15, 1944. Densho Digital Repository, <https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-csujad-2-84/>.