



The experience for mixed-race people today, such as Dierdre Howard, 1998 San Francisco Cherry Blossom First Princess (above), is vastly different from that of Gunjiro Aoki's children (right, with their parents), whose parents' story is told on p. 8. Photos courtesy of Deirdre Natsuno Howard and Brenda Wong Aoki.

Intermarriages and Hapas: *an Overview*

by George Kitahara Kich, Ph.D., Rebecca Chiyoko King, Ph.D., Larry Hajime Shinagawa, Ph.D. and Shizue

To be biracial and Japanese American means having many different labels from which to choose. For this historical overview, we will use “Hapa”, a term popularized by the Hapa Issues Forum, to mean people who have an Asian/Asian Pacific Islander parent and a parent of any other race. Our focus here is on those with a Japanese or a Japanese American parent.

There is no single Hapa experience. Over the decades, Hapas have had widely different experiences based on individual circumstance and background, as well as the time period and environment into which they were born. The history of people of mixed-race has been deeply influenced by the evolving social and legal contexts for interracial relationships and marriages, along with community attitudes

about culture, tradition and belongingness. Legal barriers against mixed marriages have fallen; however, discrimination, prejudice, community fears and stereotyping still affect interracial marriages and interracial people today. Nonetheless, about half* of all Japanese American marriages since 1970 have been to non-JAs, and the birthrate of interracial and interethnic children with some Japanese ancestry now exceeds that of JA/JA children. The Japanese American community has been gradually welcoming Hapas as a significant and growing part of the Japanese American community.

Historical Context of Intermarriage. To understand people of mixed race, we must begin with the history of interracial relationships and marriages. The social and legal contexts of such unions have paralleled the history of

race-relations in the U.S. Being in a “mixed marriage” or being a “mixed race” person was a vastly different experience 100 years ago than it is today. Anti-miscegenation laws in the United States were in force for over 300 years, leaving the taint of misinformation, prejudice and fears within all communities.

The first anti-miscegenation law, barring marriage between whites and blacks, was passed in Maryland in 1661. By the nineteenth century, such laws had been enacted in most states. In 1880, California passed a law prohibiting the issuing of licenses for marriage between any white person and a “Negro, mulatto, or Mongolian”. (“Mulatto” was a negative word

* Statistical information for this article, based on studies of census and marriage license data, has been provided by Larry Shinagawa, Ph.D., professor of American multicultural studies at Sonoma State University.

“What are you?”

by George Kich, Ph.D.

People of mixed heritage are asked this often, a question that generally annoys us but also has the potential for educating others – especially those from whom we want understanding, acceptance and inclusion.

To be “biracial Japanese American” means having experienced many different labels over our lifetimes. Each has both positive and negative aspects, and none has universal acceptance. We have learned that it is important to recognize each individual’s right to refer to themselves as they choose.

Hapa. Many U.S. mainlanders erroneously believe Hapa to be a Japanese term. In fact, the Japanese word *happa* means “leaf”. The correct term is **Hapa**, a Hawai’ian pidgin word meaning “half” (from the full word “hapa-haole”). This was a negative way to describe mixed-Hawai’ians as being less human. It still stirs controversy, although many have begun to use the term to describe all mixed-race people in Hawai’i. Originally used on the mainland also in the negative sense, the term has been adopted by many mixed-race JAs, who have transformed it to a positive affirmation.

Eurasian specifically denotes an individual with European/Caucasian and Asian heritages.

Amerasian, coined by Pearl S. Buck in the 1960s, refers to all American races mixed with Asians of any ethnicity.

Konketsuji, a Japanese term, translates roughly as “mixed blood child”. Given Japanese emphasis on purity of blood lines, it was always considered derogatory.

Ai no ko is also derogatory. The kanji for *ai* is used in the verb “to fit, or put together.” It is often translated as “child of unlike things put together.” However, *ai no ko* is commonly mistranslated as “love child” (inferring child born out of wedlock, or due to love/lust that was not controlled). It is associated by many with the hostility felt by some Japanese after WWII towards U.S. servicemen, their Japanese partners, and the resultant offspring.

Hafu, the Japanese pronunciation of the English word “half,” is a more recent Japanese term apparently preferred by Japanese-speaking mixed race people.

Double was used in Regge Life’s video documentary *Doubles: Japan and America’s Intercultural Children*. Some mixed-race people prefer the connotation of “double heritage” rather than terms deriving from the word “half”, or less than whole.

The best way to handle meeting someone who is Hapa is to first of all not make a big deal about it. If you are genuinely curious about what terminology they use, do not start out with asking them if they know all of the terms used above. Instead, tell them that you have been trying to understand what terms various people with biracial heritages use as ways of describing themselves. Perhaps you yourself have a son or daughter who is interracially married, and your grandchildren are of mixed racial heritage. This information should be shared first, so that your own personal interest and point of view is shared. Perhaps then the communication can feel more open and engaging for each of you. ■

The information above is drawn from our personal experiences; Hapa Issues Forum dialogues; and articles in the Pacific Citizen 1985 Holiday Issue by J.K. Yamamoto and Christine Hall.

rived from the mixture of a donkey and a horse, producing a mule, which was not itself able to reproduce.) Aimed at the Chinese, the law was supported by the likes of John F. Miller, who said in 1878, “Were the Chinese to amalgamate at all with our people... the result of that amalgamation would be... a mongrel of the most detestable that has ever afflicted the earth.” In 1909, California specifically added the Japanese to the list.

In 1922, the Cable Act decreed that any U.S.-born woman who married a “person ineligible for citizenship” would automatically lose her own U.S. citizenship. The Cable Act was repealed in 1936. However, as recently as 1945, California passed a bill reiterating the ban on marriages between whites and other races. In 1948, the tide began to turn when the California Supreme Court found the State anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional. However, not until 1967 was the last anti-miscegenation law in the U.S. struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court (*Loving vs. Virginia*).

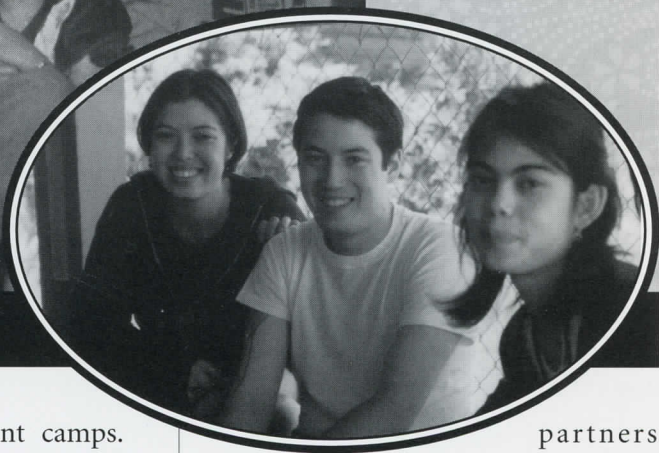
Historic Attitudes Towards Mixed-Race People. Prior to World War II, intermarriages were not common. European American attitudes towards Asians, intermarriage and mixed-race children were often fiercely negative. Moreover, many Issei and Nisei held traditional Japanese social attitudes about racial and cultural purity, filial piety, marriage for duty rather than love, and conformity to social norms. These beliefs encouraged many Nikkei to reject those who choose to marry non-Japanese persons, and to ignore, taunt, or abuse Hapa children.

Many older Hapas experienced tremendous discrimination from the community, as well as from mainstream society. Stories abound of community insensitivity, rudeness or rejection.



Mabel and Ben Omi and their nieces, c. 1950. Courtesy of Michael Omi.

Below: Sai, Shanti and Sathya Seigel at the Tule Lake Pilgrimage, 1996.



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tion, often through subtle but hurtful acts of omission, non-acceptance or lack of inclusion, rather than overt acts.

A Nisei woman in her 70s recently spoke of a mixed-heritage Nisei who had been ostracized by the San Francisco community before WWII. The discrimination continued even in the internment camps. She said, "Here we were in camp [Tule Lake], all in the same boat, and yet people living in the same block wouldn't even talk to her, just because she was half Filipino. Years later she thanked me: 'I'll always remember that you're the only one who was friendly to me. Everyone else was so mean to me, or ignored me completely.'"

After World War II, several factors, such as the eviction of Japanese Americans from the West Coast, led to an increase in out-marriages in the Japanese American community. Executive Order 9066 initiated the removal of Japanese Americans from concentrated settlements on the West Coast. Some moved inland voluntarily. Others moved to the Midwest and the

East from the internment camps. Still others were discouraged from returning to the West Coast by government policies of resettlement and forced assimilation. The resulting dispersal of the JA community led to geographic and social isolation from other JAs.

Although relatively few Nisei in largely white communities married non-Japanese, the majority of their children did. For example, in 1984, 75% of Japanese Americans who married in Chicago married whites. Statistical studies indicate that the rate of interracial marriages is significantly higher in areas with a low concentration of Japanese Americans. However, by the 1970s and 1980s, many Nikkei had returned to the West Coast. Only about 15% of Japanese Americans currently reside outside of the West Coast and Hawai'i.

Among JAs who returned to the West Coast, some felt great pressure to assimilate with the mainstream, downplay associations with the Japanese community and culture, and increase their identification as "American". One consequence was in choosing marriage

partners without regard to race.

Japanese-born wives of U.S. servicemen Approximately 150,000 Japanese wives of U.S. servicemen have immigrated to the U.S. since 1945. The majority married whites and ethnic minorities, (perhaps 5% wed Japanese Americans). By conservative estimate, these unions have produced over 300,000 Hapa children.

The term "war bride" is not accurate for the majority of Japanese military wives, because the bulk of these marriages took place *after* both the U.S. military Occupation of Japan and the Korean War. Prior to 1957, stringent government and military policy discouraged fraternization with the local populace. Permission for marriage and U.S. entry were difficult to obtain, requiring background checks and, sometimes, bribes. In some cases, the result was long periods of separation, broken relationships resulting inphans ("Amerasians") or difficult migration experiences.

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Intermarriages and Hapas (cont'd from p. 6)

The number of marriages peaked from 1956-64, after regulations were relaxed. By 1965, intermarriages began to decline as the US had begun reducing troop levels in Japan. Figures continued to drop in the early 1970s as Japan's rising economy reduced the economic disparity between U.S. military personnel and the Japanese.

Because U.S. military officers were under more pressure to observe non-fraternization regulations, the vast majority of military marriages were with enlisted men. Frequently the wives were middle-class, and better-educated than their husbands, who tended to be Scots-Irish, Jewish, or ethnic minorities, and to come from rural or working class families. In terms of class and education, the wives had higher perceived status than their husbands. Perhaps because of this, and the fact they tended to socialize primarily with other Japanese military wives, these mothers often had tremendous influence on the cultural values of their children, some of whom experienced themselves as more Japanese than "American".

Economic and social opportunities and changing social mores. The late 1940s through 1960s saw steady gains in civil rights for minorities. In addition to the overturning of anti-miscegenation laws, race-restrictive housing covenants were ruled unconstitutional, and opportunities steadily increased in education and employment. Increased socio-economic success, status and education resulted in more contact with European Americans and other races.

The civil rights movement also increased multicultural consciousness and cross-racial political and community involvement. In the decades following the 1950s, gender and sex-role scripts loosened throughout American

society. Cultural expectations about relationships, mates, marriages and parenting became more fluid.

These postwar circumstances led not only to increased intermarriages, but also changes in the entire Nikkei culture, with identity, historical preservation, interethnic relationship and community issues that we are still trying to fully assess.

As the churches, social clubs, and neighborhoods that once defined community have become less sustainable than in the past, an individual's sense of community identity has become more and more a matter of individual choice and selection. Previously, Japanese Americans had had two choices: the organic JA community or Anglo-assimilation. However, in the past 20 years, with the globalization of the economy and shifting migration and immigration patterns, as well as the rise of civil rights and integration, two additional identity choices have arisen: multi-racial and Pan-Asian.

That Japanese Americans are taking advantage of these choices can be seen by the following demographic trends. Although U.S. census data indicate that the percentage of JAs nationwide who marry non-Japanese has remained roughly 50% since 1970, a striking shift has occurred: Japanese/white marriages declined from 45% of all marriages in 1970 to 25% in 1990. At the same time, marriages to other Asians has risen from 2-3% to 21-22.5% of all marriages, so almost as many marriages now take place between JAs and other Asians as between JAs and whites. (Contrary to popular belief, among U.S.-born JAs, men out-marry almost as often as women.)

A similar trend is occurring among Hapas. Prior to the early 1990s, Hapas had only one choice – Anglo-assimilation – 99% married whites. However,

with increasing acceptance within the Japanese American community, the rise of multi-cultural and Pan-Asian identities, and more sense of space for the individual to choose the identity that fits best, the marriage rate of Hapas to whites has dropped to 75%. 25% are now marrying Asians or Latinos.

Current Japanese American Attitudes. Intermarriage has been a major, and controversial, topic of discussion within the Japanese American community over the years. The *Pacific Citizen* has consistently afforded a forum for some of this discussion (particularly the Holiday Issue, December 20-27, 1985). As more and more marriages across culture and race occurred, unresolved questions, opinions and prejudices surfaced.

For many years, people who were of mixed race were seen as a loss to community. Some people went so far as to state that intermarriage was worse than internment as an assault on the JA community. The assumption in this type of reasoning is that Hapas are automatically not JA culturally, and that Hapas will of necessity be excluded from the JA community. However, interviews of Hapas conducted by the University of Hawai'i indicate that Hapas, in comparison with people with two JA parents, report a stronger sense of identification with both mainstream values and Japanese American ones.

Hapas, Interracial Families and Japanese American Community Identity: Inclusion and Exclusion. It is difficult for many Hapas to overcome the long history of rejection by individual families and by the community. Broken connections and communications in extended families and within the community remain part of the human and emotional struggle for some Japanese Americans. However,



Left: A light moment for the candidates for 1998 San Francisco Cherry Blossom Queen. Hapas like Dierdre Howard (far right) are eligible under S.F.'s 50% rule. Courtesy of Deirdre Natsumi Howard.

many families have found new ways of re-connecting after intermarriages, discovering that change is difficult but not impossible. We have heard many stories about how grandchildren have been one way that extended families have remembered their roles in passing on traditions, and begun processes of reconnecting.

But these experiences and stereotypes are changing as Hapas and their families become a larger and more accepted and active part of the JA community. Steve Shigematsu-Murphy, a psychologist and researcher now living and teaching in Japan, once wrote (*Pacific Citizen*, 1985): "Can interracial be included in the definition of Japanese American?... Let's hope that someday, a Bill Smith, with brown hair and green eyes, who has been called 'Jap' and blamed for Pearl Harbor and who cares deeply about his Japanese heritage, can say with ease and prideful assurance, 'I am Japanese American.'"

Since 1980, an increasing number of interethnic marriages to other Asians have occurred. Incorporating other Asian ethnicities within Japanese American families and the JA community has its challenges and potential for stirring up old conflicts and rivalries. However, as the stigma against interracial and interethnic marriages and people has begun to lessen, it appears that the Japanese American sense of itself, either as individuals or as a community, is being gradually replaced by

more-inclusive models of identity and identity formation. That the JA community can embrace a more multiracial and multicultural perspective of itself can mean that it could never "die out," as critics of intermarriage have warned. However, a consciousness about the dangers of assimilation (within areas as complex as class, white culture, the global marketing of brand-names, etc.) requires all cultural groups to remain inclusive, yet continually measuring, cherishing and passing on traditions, ceremonies, languages and histories.

Community organizations and events (community centers, churches, national organizations, basketball leagues, Cherry Blossom queen events, JACL, etc.) have taken into consideration the inclusion of both Hapas and their families as participants and as members of the community, initially with some trepidation, fear and rigidity. The previously hotly-contested rules about parentage in JA basketball leagues and in the selection of Cherry Blossom queens have provoked much upset and have symbolized the stance of various JA communities on inclusion or exclusion of Hapas. These ancestry rules are still in effect in most Nikkei communities. They are literally the lines within the community which are drawn in a very public way to determine who is and who is not JA "enough" to participate in these community organizations. Basketball re-

cently is largely accepting of anyone with any "drop" of JA ancestry as JA. Pageants are still using the 50% rule in San Francisco and Los Angeles, but in Hawai'i you must be 100%. Some organizations (the Center for Japanese American Studies, now defunct, for one) have always included Hapas, consistently researching Japanese American community attitudes and behaviors and opening up difficult topics for self-understanding.

The Hapa Issues Forum [see p. 12] was originally formed to unify and represent more of a collective mixed JA identity, with the goal of participating in traditional JA community organizations and helping them address the issues of Hapas. This organization has been successful in increasing Hapa participation in organizations within the Japanese American community.

The Future as a Community That Includes Hapas and Their Families. A panel discussion at a Center for Japanese American Studies conference in 1985 raised the question "What is Japanese American? Can interracial be included in that definition?" Since that time, there has been major change in accepting Hapas and their families, seeing them more as resources and as a bridge to the future of a strong JA community. A changing cultural climate has also allowed expanded definitions of who each of us are, so that "Japanese American" can include a more multicultural sense of racial/ethnic identity and group membership. For instance, we are more able to accept that we can belong to more than one identity group and that, as JAs, we

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Intermarriages and Hapas (cont'd from p. 15)

recognize and are growing to accept a wider diversity among us that includes Shin-Issei (postwar immigrants), wives of U.S. servicemen, Kibei and Hapas.

Conclusion. Mixed-race people and interracial families need to be recognized, welcomed and supported as vital assets to the whole community. Interracial couples consistently deal with one or the other being an “insider”, while the other feels like an “outsider” within their separate ethnic and racial communities. If the insiders are sensitive to and welcome the outsider, chances increase that the insider’s customs, traditions and values will be incorporated into the couple’s lives and passed on to their children.

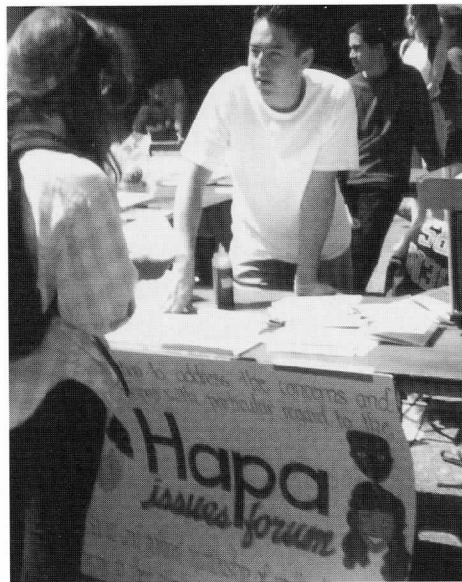
What Hapa children need most growing up is an actively communicated sense of recognition, acceptance and support about the fact that they do have two or more separate and valuable heritages. Family and community communication about the realities of being interracial are essential to positive identity development. The JA community is not shrinking if we widen the definition, from a monoracial version of Kibei/Issei/Nisei/Sansei/Yonsei, to a more inclusive multiracial acceptance of the generations and of a Nikkei community, that includes all Shin-Issei, Hapas and their parents and families. Purity of blood in any ethnic group has never been a reliable measure of commitment or involvement. If Japanese American culture, traditions and the valuing of its history are to survive, they will be passed on by all the members of the varied Japanese American community. ■

George Kitahara Kich, Ph.D., was until recently a professor of psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies. He is a trial consultant for National Jury Project-West in Oakland.

Rebecca Chiyoko King, Ph.D., is assistant professor of sociology at the University of San Francisco.

Larry Hajime Shinagawa, Ph.D., who is a professor of American multicultural studies at Sonoma State University, is working on a book whose working title is Asian American Intermarriage and the Social Construction of Love. It is based on studies of census and marriage license data and on interviews of over 100 people. It will be published by Beacon Press in the fall of 1999.

Shizue Seigel is Managing Editor of Nikkei Heritage and the mother of three Hapa young adults.



Members of the Hapa Issues Forum have been active of developing public awareness of issues concerning biracial or bi-cultural people. Photo courtesy of Jeff Yoshimi.

Hapa Issues Forum (cont'd from p. 12)

differently depending on where you are, that’s ok too.

HIF has evolved considerably since its inception in 1992. We broadened our focus to actively promote a pan-Asian membership, developed web-site and an international email discussion list, began a Southern California chapter, and instituted an Advisory Board. In 1997, HIF formed a coalition with the JAACL, NAACP, and the Association for Multi-Ethnic Americans (AMEA) – an umbrella group for the mixed-race organizations in America – to successfully advocate for a “check all that apply” format on the race question in the 2000 Census. This allows multiracial people to identify

honestly and accurately for the first time in American history.

Current projects include a Hapa research archive, a parenting resource guide, an updated and more interactive web-site, more local chapters, and further work within non-Japanese Asian-Pacific Islander communities.

In the past six years, HIF has cleared a space for Hapas to express themselves and voice their perspectives on their own terms. Narrow minded discussions such as the one that took place in that infamous Japanese American history class are increasingly a thing of the past. Moreover, a national and international community of Hapas has formed. People often come to their first HIF meeting or the their first HIF conference, and say “Wow, I’ve never seen so many people who look like me.” Even on the internet there is a feeling of common purpose and comfortable space in the midst of intense dialogue about our different perspectives.

HIF continues to evolve through the present day. We are always looking for new perspectives on Hapa identity and experience, so if you haven’t done so yet, get involved! To do so, contact us in one of the following ways:

National Chapter, Berkeley Chapter
#401 ASUC
Bancroft Way/Telegraph Ave.
Berkeley, CA 94620
510-466-5859

Southern California Chapter
231 E. Third St, Suite G-104
Los Angeles, CA 90013
213-694-0286

WEB: <http://www.wenet.net/~hapa/>
LISTSERVE: owner-hapa-list@listlink.berkeley.edu ■

Jeff Yoshimi is a board member of HIF and a co-founder of the Southern California chapter. He writes a column for the newsletter called “E-grub,” and is also a Ph.D candidate in philosophy at UC Irvine.

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