

## "Jap Crow" Experiment

By John Larison

Enough time has rolled by since we evacuated the Japanese from the West Coast and relocated them in the interior to enable us to appraise the undertaking and perhaps to project a better way out of one of the strangest dilemmas in our history. The majority of the evacuated are American citizens, and now that we have regained our poise after the shock of Pearl Harbor we ought to be able to work out some wise and just means of reintegrating them into the American community.

It is no secret that ten months' experience with the relocation centers has not been a happy one either for the administrators or for the citizens and aliens taken into "protective custody." It can be said at the outset that the enterprise as a whole has been humanely administered by the men of good-will, though it has never been the Sunday School picnic or the Boy Scout jamboree that some of our more imaginative reporters have tried to make it out.

The evacuees are distributed among ten centers in California, Arizona, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, and Arkansas. They live in standard army barracks built of lumber covered with tarpaper. Originally it was intended to allot one room about twenty feet square to each family, but owing to shortages in building materials this space allotment could not be followed, and good many families had to double up, sometimes with strangers, at best with friends. These living quarters obviously permit little in the way of home life, since they lack both privacy and cooking facilities. Dining-halls, toilet and bath houses, and laundries are communal, one of each to a block. Meals are fair, with some provision of Japanese dishes for the older people. The food cost forty cents a person a day, and food is rationed as in the other communities.

The centers have few facilities for recreation. Therecreation halls, of which there is one each block, have in many cases had to be preempted for temporary schools and other purposes. Moving pictures are few and far between. Mostly the people have had to make their own amusements, and have leaned heavily on baseball, theatricals, and gardening and landscaping. Books, newspapers, and magazines are scarce and in great demand. As an offset to the meager recreational facilities, the authorities plan to operate the schools eleven months a year, on the theory that the devil find work for idle hands to do. The elementary and high schools are making every endeavor to meet the standards of the states in which they are situated, although there is a shortage of Caucasian teachers, and inexperienced evacuees have had to be hastily trained to meet the need. It is significant of the strong trend toward Americanization that the parents urge the employment of Caucasian teachers.

The government does not provide education beyond high school, although there are large numbers of college students whose work has been interrupted by relocation, as well as recent high-school graduates ready to enter college. With the cooperation of a number of Western universities, the War Relocation Authority has been able to provide some facilities for adult education but nothing adequate for the need. Through the admirable work of the National Student Relocation Committee, a private agency, several hundred evacuees have been released to attend college outside the evacuated areas.

The economic condition of the evacuees is very bad. The original intent of the WRA was to develop agriculture and to some extent industries on a scale sufficient not only to make the centers self-supporting but to create a surplus for the war effort. Three things have caused this program to fall short of accomplishing its purpose. One is the surprisingly large outside demand for Japanese-American labor that developed during the 1942 harvest season. About ten thousand workers left the centers, after official investigation and permission, largely for beet and cotton picking. This demand will undoubtedly increase in the coming season.

A second obstacle to industrial and agricultural development in the centers has been the wage scale. In addition to furnishing board, lodging, and hospitalization or other medical care to all evacuees, the government has set up a system of cash wages for all workers for whom jobs could be found in the centers. These

wages amount to \$12, \$16, and \$19 a month, depending on the nature of the work, whether unskilled, skilled, or professional. Almost half the inhabitants are thus employed--many in essential services such as clerical work, transportation, warehousing, and mess-hall operation, others in agriculture and industry. Even if the cash wages we add the cost of food and quarters, it is clear that the most of them the resultant wage scale is very meager and far out of line with what is being paid elsewhere in this country. Resident aliens of course would expect to receive the customary perquisites of interned enemy aliens, and, figured on this basis, the allowances would be considered generous. With our American citizens of Japanese ancestry, however, the case is different. They regard the wage scale as unfairly discriminatory and do not work with any enthusiasm. Nevertheless, they have collectively done a surprisingly amount of work in agriculture, in running the essential public services, in organizing community stores, and in operating certain industries such as camouflage net factories--in which, however, a more attractive wages scale had to be established after a preliminary failure to attract workers at the standard relocation-center rates. During the calendar year 1942, with most of the centers getting into production only by midsummer, about \$800,000 worth of vegetables and other crops were produced. In 1943 crop production will run to almost \$,000,000, and by midsummer of 1944 the value of livestock and livestock products will amount to another \$2,000,000.

Thirdly, the evacuees have been too much bossed and managed by unnecessary large administrative staffs. Among the evacuees are highly skilled farmers, artisans, engineers, technicians, scientists, doctors, business men, mechanics, foremen, nurses, and artists. As a group they are unusually well educated, have a tradition of good workmanship, and are in general competent to organize and manage their own affairs. If they had been given free rein, they could have done a far better job than they have been able to do in bureaucratic leading-strings and with a superfluity of Caucasian bosses. Even in their own civic affairs they have been restricted, the community councils being only advisory and hampered moreover by the arbitrary ruling that no Issei--first-generation, elderly people--could hold public office in a center, with the result that the civic responsibilities have fallen largely on the shoulders of the Nisei--second generation--most of whom are so young that a community council meeting is almost like a meeting in Boys' Town.

The unexpectedly large demand for evacuee workers outside the centers has led to an important shift in the basic policy of the WRA, which is now to encourage and assist as many of the evacuees as possible to obtain outside employment, and to keep the centers unattractive enough to persuade most of them to leave instead of to stay. If this plan could be handled wisely, skillfully, and gradually, with emphasis on those best fitted to work outside, it might be one step toward a final solution.

Thus far, this report might convey the impression that aside from some material inconveniences and low wage scales, relocation has been pretty satisfactory. But it cannot be too strongly emphasized that the evil of relocation is its psychic and emotional effect; much damage has already been done and will be permanent unless great skill and insight go into the future handling of this minority problem. It must be remembered that about 70 per cent of the evacuees are American citizens by birth. Moreover, with a few exceptions they are eagerly, indeed pathetically, American in speech, manners, and ambitions. So Americanized are they, in fact, that a very troublesome aspect of administration in the centers is the deep schism between the young generation and the old.

These young citizens are for the most part courteous, industrious, earnest, and intelligent. They strike an unbiased observer as unusually good human material. Moreover, they approach their own minority problem in a spirit of humility, candor, and cooperation. Yet they are deeply troubled by the paradox of their detention despite their citizenship in a country whose constitution is conspicuously devoted to safeguards of liberty and equality. Like all young people, they lean heavily on the security, continuity, and predictability of a meaningful environment. Yet these