

DEMOCRACY BEGINS AT HOME-II

STUDENT RELOCATION

BY ROBERT W. O'BRIEN

A year after the mass evacuation of West Coast Japanese and Japanese American into inland camps, more than a thousand students have been relocated in some 150 colleges throughout the United States to resume their interrupted studies. Student relocation began, in fact, two weeks after Palm Sunday in 1942, when General J. L. DeWitt's orders went into effect prohibiting travel by people of Japanese ancestry within Zone 1 of the Western Defense Command. Six students were granted permission to travel from the restricted area to attend the University of Idaho. This first venture in student relocation proved singularly inauspicious, however. None of the students was allowed to attend classes, and two were placed in protective custody in local jail.

The Idaho Argonaut, college student newspaper, protested the action in an editorial entitled "Six American Citizens":

"Six American citizens were forced to leave their home city of Seattle last week. The reason was purely legitimate. The area had been declared a military zone, and those students were of Japanese ancestry. Last night those same six American citizens were forced to leave their homes of one week in Moscow, but the reason was not military. It was a combination of political haymaking and the threat of violence by a small group of local roughnecks that forced this evacuation. Students on the university campus were not opposed to American-born Japanese students living there. The majority of the people of Moscow were not anti-Nisei, but the small group was loud and active. So six homesick kids, three boys and three girls, became pawns in a political game and live targets for jingoistic patriotism.

"When people begin talking citizenship in terms of race, they are borrowing from the handbook of fascist leaders. When a minority group begins shoving another smaller group of citizens around with no regard to their rights as citizens, they are using the tactics of Nazi stormtroopers.

"Certainly we should keep this shameful action from those University of Idaho students and citizens of Moscow who are fighting now on all world fronts. We think it would hardly comfort those who are risking their lives to preserve and protect this 'land of the free' to learn that its principles are thus defended at home!"

II

To interpret adequately the scope and later success of the student relocation program requires some knowledge about the role of the Nisei in the colleges before evacuation. On December 7, 1941, there were 2,557 American born students of Japanese ancestry registered in 74 colleges and universities in California, Oregon, and Washington.

Although agitation against the Japanese on the Pacific Coast began long before Pearl Harbor, this phenomenon was absent from the educational systems. In the school room Nisei were accepted as Americans and treated as such.

The outstanding adjustment of the Nisei to American academic life has been commented upon by many authorities. Professor Jesse F. Steiner in his provocative book, Behind the Japanese Mask, cites figures to show that children of this immigrant group have nearly three times as many high school valedictorians and honor students as their percentage in the school population would indicate. In one of Seattle's high schools, one-fourth of the twenty class speakers during the past ten years have been Americans of Japanese ancestry, who comprise approximately only one-tenth of the whole student body. In Southern California the Theodore Roosevelt high school has announced that 26 per cent of its Nisei seniors were in the upper ten per cent of their class.

May, 1942, saw the award of the President's medal to the University of California Senior with the highest scholastic standing go to Harvey Itano, who had been evacuated to the Tulare Lake Relocation Center. A week later the Washington State College Scholarship to the honor graduate of Lincoln High School of Tacoma was won by George Kurose of the same center. A study I am now making shows that membership in honorary fraternities is disproportionately higher than that of any other group. This a matter of

great significant, because invitation to honorary societies implies personal as well as academic qualification.

Athletic and extra-curricular activities are perhaps a more valid but less measurable criterion of assimilation than academic achievement. Hundreds of Nisei have participated in football, basketball, track, wrestling, swimming, baseball, boxing, debating, and editing of school newspapers and yearbooks. In the year before evacuation, for example Bob Hosagawa was president of the senior class at Whitman College, while Kazuma "Casey" Hisanaga was captain of Pomona's football team. "Casey," now an officer in the United States Army stationed at Camp McCoy, was the student to whom his classmates dedicated their Senior Ivy Chapel address.

The evacuation crisis brought to the surface the fellowship which Nisei and Caucasian students had for each other. In communities all along the Pacific Coast they have been many examples of this product of democratic, non-segregated education. One of the most interesting occurred at Santa Ana High School, where one of the pole vault stars was a Caucasian, the other a Nisei. The athlete of Japanese ancestry was evacuated the week before the relay carnival. His friend won the medal but forwarded it to the Poston Relocation Center with this note: "You could always jump half inch higher than I, team mate." The other side of the picture is illustrated by Frank Watanabe, brilliant University of Washington tennis player, who gave up a scholarship and a chance to transfer to an eastern university before Japanese were "frozen" on the Coast preliminary to forced evacuation, in order to play in the crucial varsity series and not let his team down.

With the announcement by General DeWitt that mass evacuation of all Japanese and their American-born children was imminent, student relocation committees were formed on all the major campuses on the Pacific Coast. College administrators and personnel officials, following the leadership of President Robert G. Sproul of California and Lee Paul Siegel of Washington, wrote their colleagues in the non-restricted zones on behalf of Nisei students. Registrars and deans in many instances gave up vacation time to assist in evaluation of students for relocation. With two exceptions, every one of the seventy colleges with Nisei on their rolls furnished transcripts without fees. The colleges on the Pacific Coast were united in their efforts to provide democratic rights for their students.

From hundreds of teachers came letters like this, each about a different student: I cannot speak about others, but this student I know, and he must be allowed to go on with his college work. He has outstanding possibilities and he is completely dedicated to American traditions."

Vigorous effort on the part of their colleagues to find jobs for the some thirty Nisei on college faculties added much to the morale not only of the displaced faculty but of the entire Japanese American group. One younger Nisei teacher wrote: "I am deeply grateful to the University for having given me the opportunity to follow out my ambition to teach. As you may or may not know, I was a member of what is usually termed the underprivileged class, economically, not racially, during most of my youth and early manhood. This country is the only one in which an individual of my background could have been permitted to become a university professor. My own experience has made me realize more than most Americans that the principles of Americanism are actually converted into action.

"Regarding the problem of Americanism, I think my wife and I can safely say that we cherish our Americanism more than most Americans do. First, our stay in Japan, where most of the personal liberties as we know them are denied, made us realize even more the importance of the democratic way of life. In the second place, the conduct of the American people as a whole during the last six months, since the attack on Pearl Harbor, has enabled us to experience in a form denied to most Americans the true tolerance that is at the base of our American way of life. True, there have been many instances of intolerance in regard to the Japanese people in this country, but, at the same time, the same time, the attitude of the American public has been tremendously fair. Because acts of kindness and tolerance have been unsuspectacular, they naturally have not been given the publicity that the acts of violence and intolerance have been given.

"Ten years ago, when I was a college student, I would not have believed it had anyone told me that at one time I would be expressing sentiments like those above. You

will recall that the early 1930s were characterized by a tremendous amount of cynicism among American college students in regard to the question of patriotism. However, as I have indicated, our experiences both in Japan and in this country have instilled in us a love of the United States which really springs up from the heart. We are accepting evacuation because we consider it part our duties as Americans to cooperate fully with the government in this time of great crisis. My only hope is that I shall soon be permitted to contribute my services to the government in the work for which I am best qualified. These are not times when we can indulge in the luxury of worry as far as our personal futures are concerned."

### III

Three conferences marked the beginning of the Student Relocation Council. The first held in mid-March, 1942, at the University of California YMCA set up a clearing-house under the direction of Joseph Conard to co-ordinate the efforts of the camps relocation committees. Six weeks later the Pacific Coast delegates to the Conference of Foreign Student Advisers at Cleveland presented the problem of the Nisei to their eastern, southern, and mid-western colleagues. The result of these preliminary efforts was the self-evacuation of some 216 students to 29 different institutions. The majority were placed before voluntary evacuation was halted, although some, like the six students who started for Idaho, were given travel permits after March 29.

The third and most important conference was held in Chicago May 29, when Clarence Pickett of the American Friends' Service Committee, at the request of John J. McCloy, Assistant Secretary of War, called together educators, representatives of organizations dealing with student placement, and officials from the interested government agencies to form the National Japanese American Students Relocation Council. Local committees from the Pacific Coast together with the Japanese American Citizens League placed their facilities at the disposal of the new organization. Milton S. Eisenhower, then Director of the War Relocation Authority, designated the NJASRC as the official agency for the resettlement of college and high school students. The Council was divided into two sections: the Philadelphia office was to find college openings and raise scholarship money; the western offices in Berkeley, Los Angeles, Portland, and Seattle were to assemble information about the students.

During the month of June an elaborate questionnaire was prepared and administered to 2,166 students in the assembly and relocation centers—those Nisei high school graduates and college students who wished to continue their education and believed there was some chance they might be allowed to do so. In the following nine months an additional 800 have signed up for educational relocation. Representatives of the Council visited each of the camps to explain the program in detail and interviewed the candidates.

By July, the first questionnaires together with letters of reference and high school and college transcripts were ready for analysis by counselors and college personnel officials. Due consideration was given to question of professional goal, special interests or talents, evidence of social adjustment to both Caucasians and Japanese, degree of maturity, and the sense of social responsibility and American life in general. When a student received a high rating from an analyst, he was matched with a college opening and tentatively accepted, pending the investigation of his loyalty by a designated government agency.

Meanwhile the Philadelphia office increased the number of educational institutions accepting Nisei from the 29 available in May, 1942, to some 459 a year later. Each of college has either registered one or more students or has indicated a willingness to do so. In addition, each has been cleared by the War and Navy Departments as suitable for accepting evacuees from the War Relocation Centers. Scholarship aid in the form of remission of fees, work opportunities, and financial grants from colleges, individuals, church boards, and the World Student Service Fund have reached a total of approximately \$200,000.

Fourteen denominational groups, representing the major religious faith in this country, have joined with the Friends, the Carnegie Fund, and the Columbia Foundation in underwriting the budget of the NJASRC. In February, 1943, the western offices were merged with the Philadelphia office under Carlisle V. Hibbard, who succeeded Robert W. O'Brien and Robbins Barstow as national director.

The able leadership of President John W. Nason of Swarthmore College, the national

chairman of the Council, has assured consistency in a staff which was, in part, on loan from educational institutions.

So much for the structure of student relocation. Its problems are flesh-and-blood problems of young people who have come through a period of fear and bewilderment bred in segregated camps behind barbed wire away from the main streams of American life.

Evacuation has inevitably produced feelings of bitterness and frustration which have not not been easily allayed. Nevertheless, the fears which characterized the early period are gradually being replaced by new hope. The WRA's comprehensive resettlement program has meant that thousands of residents within the camps are being considered for jobs on the "outside", the Army has recruited Nisei soldiers for combat as well as linguistic service; and the one thousand Nisei now in colleges have found they are pretty much accepted as part of the American scene.

The first fears of the evacuees were matched by the fears of uninformed citizens on the outside. Evacuation, which had been asked of American citizens of Japanese ancestry as a mark of their loyalty, was corrupted in the minds of many other Americans to be a sign of disloyalty. It is not surprising that in the early days of student relocation there were some tensions and a few incidents. One was the famous "battle of Parkville," in which a group of Platte County, Missouri, citizens tried to ban seven West Coast students of Japanese ancestry who had enrolled in Park College. The fight was carried to the board of trustees of the college, which decided after two and a half hour session to "let the Nisei stay in school because their loyalty is unquestioned." The students themselves welcomed the evacuees, and all six of the undergraduate social clubs "rushed" them.

In another midwestern locality a group of vigilantes threatened to lynch two recently relocated students. While the director was working out the proper strategy to prevent the affair, the potential lynchees visited the vigilantes to protest that they didn't want to be lynched as they were "citizens and anxious to join the Army when the ban on Nisei had been removed." So convincing was their appeal that the head of the super-patriots offered to beat up anyone molesting the evacuees!

Community acceptance, which at one time was a stumbling block for the relocation program because municipal officials hated to commit themselves before elections, became increasingly easy as students made good records in other communities. Individuals who were hesitant about their new classmates were won over by the fact that they were typically American-interested in activities and well-versed in college tradition and folk customs. The students of Oberlin College in March, 1943, elected Kenji Okuda, late of the University of Washington via the Granada Relocation Center in Colorado, as president of the student council, the highest office in the student body.

#### IV

The future of the student relocation program depends upon a number of factors.

Scholarship aid, or the lack of it, is the most pressing problem facing the Council today. The thousand relocated students are those who had sufficient funds to pay their own way or were the students who have been helped by the \$200,000 raised in tuition grants, jobs, and scholarships. Another two thousand evacuees, at least three-fourths of whom are first-rate scholars, are unable to continue their education for lack of funds. There is little chance to "save" for it on a wage-scale in the centers of \$12, \$16, and \$19 a month. As outside employment opportunities and scholarships materialize, the program can be speeded up.

The decision of the War Department to recruit Nisei for a special combat team has resulted in over a thousand youths' enlisting from the relocation centers, though many, like their Caucasian compatriots, have preferred to wait for the call of their draft boards. Among those enlisting are many potential students, as well as some who have been relocated. But there is still a reservoir of excellent students who for one reason or another will make their contribution outside the armed forces.

Our ability to recognize the significance of our Nisei to our whole war effort is the most important factor in the picture. It is imperative that we keep faith with the Japanese Americans and our common heritage of American justice and democracy. The kind of treatment which we give Orientals in the United States is being watched by our allies

in China, India, Africa, and South America as well as by thirteen million citizens of color within our country. The course we follow with the evacuees will be taken as an index as to the real meaning of our war and peace aims. To an unusual degree the loyal American citizen of Japanese ancestry is in a position to make a disproportionately high contribution to winning the war and shortening its length. He must interpret us and our essential, if imperfect, democracy to a parent generation which has sometimes felt unjust barriers of race. He must find his place among Caucasian students, workers, and soldiers who do not always understand him because of his heritage. He must use his unique position to help win both the war and peace which should be lasting. It is America's duty to provide opportunity for her citizens of Japanese ancestry; it is their responsibility to accept that opportunity as functioning Americans who happened to be of Japanese descent.

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