

# Background for the Relocation Program, 6-1880-BU-COS-WP

---

1998.38.92.19

RESTRICTED

## BACKGROUND FOR THE RELOCATION PROGRAM

(Prepared for Information of the Staff of the War Relocation Authority)

Not for Publication

### Japanese Migration to the United States

As every schoolboy knows, Japan was a deliberately insulated island empire—almost completely cut off from the outside world—when Commodore Perry made his first visit there in 1853. In fact, at that time all Japanese subjects were forbidden to leave the empire, except under special permit, on penalty of death. The first Japanese to arrive in this country, therefore, were shipwrecked sailors and occasional stowaways on foreign vessels. As late as 1870 the total Japanese population in the United States was only 55.

Following a Japanese revolution in 1868, however, contacts with the outside world slowly began to develop and the stringent regulations governing emigration were gradually relaxed. The first major movement of Japanese people to a foreign land started in the 1870's when Hawaiian sugar planters, seeking a new source of cheap labor, began importing farm workers on a contract labor basis from Japan into the islands. Throughout the 1880's, as increasing numbers of Japanese farm boys responded to the lure of higher wages than they had ever known, the movement to Hawaii continued at an accelerating pace.

Meanwhile some of the Japanese began to hear of even richer work opportunities that were commencing to develop on the West Coast of the United States. Throughout the 1890's several thousands migrated from Hawaii to the mainland while others came over directly from Japan. Then in 1898 Hawaii was annexed as a territory of the United States, and importation of labor on a contract basis was automatically abolished. Free immigration, however, continued in full swing. In the first decade of the present century more than 50,000 Japanese immigrants arrived on our shores from Japan and another 37,000 came in by way of Hawaii.

The motivation for this movement was twofold. In Japan the grinding poverty of an overpopulated land served as a stimulus to outward movement. On the West Coast of the United States, on the other hand, the rapidly expanding needs for labor in agriculture, lumbering, mining, and railways provided a powerful magnet. As in the case of immigrants from European countries, many Japanese workers were drawn to our shores by the "golden" stories written by the early arrivers. More important, however,

6-1880-BU-COS-WP

were the emigration societies formed by enterprising Japanese for the purpose of exploiting the swiftly developing movement. These companies, advertising for workers in Japan through traveling solicitors and literature, arranged the details of the voyage to American even down to the point of suggesting suitable boarding houses on this side of the water where the immigrants could learn of employment opportunities.

From 1890 to 1908 most of the immigrants were young men who either were unmarried or had left their wives behind in Japan. Taking jobs on farms and in the West Coast cities, they soon displayed a capacity for hard work and a frugality of living that seriously threatened to drive down American standards through sheer competition. As a result, agitation against the admission of Japanese immigrants grew steadily on the Coast throughout this period. Finally, in 1907 and 1908 the United States and Japan negotiated a series of diplomatic exchanges known as the Gentlemen's Agreement which limited future immigration to the non-laboring classes.

From 1908 until passage of the Exclusion Act in 1924 the bulk of the immigrants were women. Some were the wives of men who had come over during the earlier period. But a great many were so-called "picture brides" selected by the single men from photographs and brought over under a matrimonial-bureau type of arrangement through the consular offices. The birth rate among the West Coast Japanese, which had been extremely low prior to 1910, rose sharply during the following decade. In 1920, however, after prolonged agitation in California, the Japanese government cut off the entry of the picture brides, and the birth rate among Japanese in this country has been dropping slowly but steadily ever since. For the past 18 years (i.e. since passage of the Exclusion Act), the only Japanese admitted to the United States have been ministers of religion and a few others coming in under special permit.

Thus, the immigration of Japanese had two characteristics which distinguish it from all other major influxes of foreign nationals into the United States. It was limited in time to a relatively compact period of 35 or 40 years. And it followed a somewhat peculiar pattern with respect to the development of families. These two facts help to explain the unusual age distribution which prevails among the American Japanese population today.

Because most of the immigrants married relatively late in life, there is a pronounced gap in ages between the first and second generations. And, since practically all the aliens came to this country as adults more than 18 years ago, they naturally tend to have an uncommonly high average age. The average age of the Issei is close to 60 years. The group with which WRA is concerned, then, consists mainly of older people plus young adults or children with a relative scarcity of individuals in the supposedly most productive years of middle life. This fact, obviously, must be considered in practically all plans made for community life at the relocation centers.

#### Economic and Social Aspects of American Japanese Life

Prior to evacuation, there were roughly 112,000 people of Japanese ancestry living in the evacuated area—California, the western half of Oregon and Washington, and the southern half of Arizona. Approximately two-thirds of them are American citizens. While the remainder are aliens, it should be remembered that nearly all of them have been in this country for 18 years or more and that, unlike most

European immigrants, they have been prevented by the laws of the United States from becoming naturalized citizens. Since the average age of the second generation is only about 22, aliens probably constitute a slight majority of the adult American Japanese population. Nearly 25 per cent of the total group is under 15 years of age.

In the years since the early Japanese immigrants arrived on the West Coast, the alien group as a whole has probably climbed several rungs up the economic ladder. By dint of hard work and frugal living, many of the first-generation Japanese have risen from the ranks of common labor to highly responsible positions as farm managers and supervisors, or as owners of shops, businesses, restaurants, and similar establishments. Although very few of the alien Japanese have risen to positions of real wealth, there are many who could be classed as moderately well-to-do, and practically none who have not effected some improvement in economic status since their first arrival.

Meanwhile a whole new generation has grown up in American surroundings and under the influence of American education. This second-generation group—far more American than Japanese in speech, dress, manner, and attitude—is just beginning to exercise a really important influence on the American-Japanese community. Its members are, on the whole, well educated, ambitious, and intelligent. Although some have followed their fathers in a career of farming, the majority have tended to gravitate toward the larger West Coast cities and toward business or professional careers. By and large, these American-born Japanese are a more distinctly urban group than their elders and more accustomed to American standards of living.

The evacuees, in short, are a highly heterogeneous body of people. They include in their number doctors, lawyers, and businessmen as well as farmers, fisherman, and truck drivers—learned doctors of philosophy as well as muscular young men without special skills. Despite this occupational versatility, however, only a very few of the American Japanese on the West Coast have been able to carve out lives or careers for themselves among the American community at large. Due to a variety of economic and social discriminations dating back to the period before 1924, they have tended to congregate in compact communities and to have relatively little social or economic intercourse with their Caucasian neighbors.

#### Why the Evacuation was Necessary

The full story behind the West Coast evacuation has never been adequately told and probably will not be until many years after the return of peace. It is a complex story with many chapters that must remain hazy in times of total war. Certain basic facts, however, are widely known and should be understood.

In the first place, there were a number of hard, practical considerations of a strictly military nature. The United States was—and, of course, still is—engaged in a total war against a powerful, ruthless, and highly resourceful foe. The Pacific Coast, teeming with vital industries and lying closer to Japan than any other part of the country, was obviously a potential arena of combat in that war. Although the majority of American Japanese on the Coast were recognized by competent authorities as loyal, their behavior in the event of a bombing raid or an invasion attempt by Japanese forces was unpredictable. Under such circumstances, would all American Japanese cooperate loyally in the defense? Or would some of them

respond to years of Caucasian discrimination suffered in this country and aid the attacking forces? It was conceivable at least that even some of those who had always considered themselves pro-American might react unfavorably when faced with such a powerful and unprecedented test of loyalty. And in time of desperate struggle for national survival, the risk was too great to run.

Then, too, there were a number of factors that might be classed under the heading of “public morale.” In the weeks immediately following Pearl Harbor there was a marked heightening of popular feeling against the American Japanese all up and down the Pacific Coast. Rumors of sabotage by resident Japanese at Honolulu on the morning of December 7—latter proved wholly false—were spread and exaggerated. The time-worn and fallacious credo that “all Japanese are sly and treacherous” was fortified and strengthened in the minds of many by the very nature of the Pearl Harbor attack. The presence of Chinese and Filipinos in large number near the Pacific Coast added to the general confusion and the fear of violence between racial and national groups.

By the latter part of February, it had become abundantly clear that the American Japanese people—quite apart from their individual intentions—were complicating the problems of western defense in numberless way simply by living in vital areas. As long as they continued to reside in these areas, the military authorities could never be wholly free to concentrate on the primary job of defending our western frontier. Mass removal of the American Japanese admittedly a drastic step, but it was deemed the only effective way to clear up a situation that was becoming more critical and chaotic with every passing week of the war.

These are some of the outstanding reasons that made evacuation a military necessity.

#### Mechanics of the Evacuation

The legal foundations for the evacuation were laid down on February 19 in President Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066 which authorized the Secretary of War or any designated military commander to prescribe military areas and to exclude from such areas any or all persons whose presence was deemed contrary to national security. Acting under authority of this Order, Lieut. Gen. J. L. DeWitt, commanding general of the Western Defense Command, on March 2 issued a proclamation defining certain military areas in California, Oregon, Washington, and Arizona, from which all persons of Japanese ancestry eventually would be excluded.

With the issuance of that proclamation, the machinery of evacuation was swiftly set in motion. On March 14 the Wartime Civil Control Administration was set up by the Western Defense Command to handle the details of actual movement. Four days later, the War Relocation Authority was established by Executive Order 9102 to carry out the long-range job of resettling or reestablishing the evacuated people. And by March 25, the first contingent of evacuees—1,000 volunteers from the Los Angeles area—was on its way to the Manzanar Reception Center established by the Army in the Owens Valley section of eastern California.

Meanwhile the Western Defense Command had been urging all people of Japanese ancestry to move out voluntarily and resettle on their own initiative. In response to this plea, approximately 8,000 moved out

during February and March—some to the eastern portions of the coastal states and others to the intermountain region in Utah, Colorado, and neighboring states. The reaction was quick and unmistakable. The inland communities, ill prepared to receive large numbers of evacuees on such short notice, were soon protesting vigorously against the influx and threatening forcible action against the evacuees. By March 27 the situation had become so acute, particularly in the intermountain states, that the Western Defense Command decided to halt all further voluntary evacuation. Two days later, all people of Japanese descent in the western half of the three coastal states and the southern half of Arizona were “frozen” in their homes and made subject to curfew regulations. Since that time, the evacuation has been carried forward under a series of exclusion orders issued by the Army in accordance with an orderly and systematic plan.

In essence, the plan of evacuation was simple. Once an exclusion order was issued covering a specific area, the heads of all affected families were ordered to report at a control station established by the Wartime Civil Control Administration. At this station, a “team” of employees from Federal agencies cooperating with WCCA on the evacuation informed the evacuees regarding their removal and helped them with the manifold personal problems that inevitably resulted. Representatives of the Federal Reserve Bank provided aid and guidance in connection with the sale or leasing of business establishments and other urban properties. The Farm Security Administration lent a hand on the disposal of agricultural holdings and the negotiation of lease arrangements. The Federal Security Agency furnished needy evacuees with public assistance and general welfare services. The Public Health Service handled routine physical check-ups and inoculations. Military personnel supervised the whole process, registered the evacuees, and prepared them for actual movement.

In spite of the valuable assistance provided by these agencies, many of the evacuees suffered serious losses in disposing of their properties. In the haste and confusion of evacuation, such losses were doubtless inevitable. But the fact remains that the economic status of many American Japanese is now far lower than it was before evacuation.

To provide temporary gathering places for the evacuees for the evacuees inside the Military Area, the Wartime Civil Control Administration swiftly established a chain of 15 assembly centers stretching from Puyallup, Washington, to the small town of Mayer in central Arizona. The other 13 centers were located at North Portland in Oregon and at Fresno, Marysville, Merced, Pinedale, Pemona, Sacramento, San Bruno, Salinas, Arcadia, Stockton, Turlock, and Tulare in California. Manzanar in the Owens Valley section of California, originally established by the Wartime Civil Control Administration as a “reception” center, was transferred on June 1 to the War Relocation Authority and has since been operated as a relocation center.

Most of the assembly centers were set up at race tracks (like the Santa Anita establishment of Arcadia) or at fairgrounds (like the one at Stockton) where facilities such as water and electric power were readily available. Evacuee capacity of the centers ranged from Mayer with only 250, to Santa Anita with a potential capacity of almost 20,000. Although the great majority of evacuees were housed in assembly centers for a period of several weeks following their evacuation, several thousand (particularly from the eastern half of California) were transferred directly from their homes to relocation centers.

By August 7 all people of Japanese descent formerly residing in any part of California, in the western half of Oregon and Washington, and in the southern half of Arizona, had been removed from their homes and were living either in assembly centers or in relocation communities.

### The Relocation Program

Basically, the War Relocation Authority has three major function with respect to the evacuees of Japanese ancestry: (1) To provide them with an equitable substitute for the lives and homes given up; (2) to reestablish them as a productive segment of the American population; and (3) to facilitate their re-assimilation into the normal currents of American life.

The first phase of the job is carried out principally at the relocation centers. Obviously, in the wilderness-type surroundings where most relocation centers are located and against the background of material shortages and wartime priorities, completely normal communities will not be possible. Like all Americans—but to a far greater extent than most—the evacuees inevitably will have to give up many of the comforts and conveniences which they enjoyed in time of peace. At all times, however, the ultimate aim of the WRA will be to make life at the relocation centers as close to normal as wartime exigencies will permit. In every way, the evacuees should be made to feel that it is their community and that its ultimate success or failure depends largely on their efforts. Fullest possible latitude should be accorded to the residents in the conduct of their community affairs. Cooperation, and not paternalism, should be the guiding principle of all relationships between WRA staff members and the relocated people.

Effective employment of the evacuees is one of the most urgent problems facing the War Relocation Authority. The 110,000 people making up the evacuee population constitute a sizable reservoir of manpower and skills which the Nation can ill afford to leave idle in time of total war. Mass unemployment would be demoralizing to the evacuees and costly to the taxpayers of the Nation. Every effort should be made, therefore, to get all evacuees who are willing and able to work assigned on suitable jobs at the earliest possible date.

Of the three major functions of WRA, the third is perhaps the most important. The so-called “Japanese problem” in this country stems largely from the fact that our Japanese population has always been concentrated to a great extent along the Pacific Coast. Looking ahead to the post-war period, it seems clear that a return to these conditions will be neither wholly feasible nor satisfactory. If the American Japanese people are ever to assume their rightful place in our national life, free of discriminations and animosities, an effort must be made during the war to prevent the formation of “Little Tokyos” in the future. Under the leave regulations which became effective October 1, 1942, it is the policy of the War Relocation Authority to re-establish as many of the evacuees as possible in private life outside the relocation centers. Because of the widespread public apprehension toward all people of Japanese ancestry, individual relocation of the evacuees will obviously have to proceed slowly and without fanfare of publicity for many months to come. Wholesale discharge of the evacuees at this time would lead almost inevitably to the very type of situation that brought about curtailment of voluntary evacuation back in March. Within the limits of national security and administrative expediency, however, the Authority will work throughout the wartime period toward a gradual depopulation of the relocation

centers and a dispersal of these evacuees about whom there is no question of loyalty. In the last analysis, the relocation centers should be regarded not as places of detention or confinement, but as way-stations on the road to individual relocation and re-assimilation into American life.