

Evacuee Resistances to Relocation

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Letter-

WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY
Washington

June 8, 1943

To Project Directors

This report, on Evacuee Resistances to Relocation, first presented at the May Project Directors' Meeting in Washington, is in the nature of an "estimate of the situation". Constructive measures for overcoming resistances can best be worked out on the basis of a knowledge of just what lies behind the reluctance of people in the centers to relocate. The relocation guidance committees have as their primary function the finding of feasible ways and means of encouraging and making practical the relocation of center residents. The description of basic causes of residents' reluctance to relocation given in this report should assist the members of these committees as well as other members of the project staffs in their work. To this end 150 copies of this report are being sent herewith.

{Signature}
Dillon S. Myer
Director

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Report-

WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY
Community Analysis Report No. 5
June 1943

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

EVACUEE RESISTANCESS TO RELOCATION

Reasons for the Relocation Program

Any discussion of the relocation program should begin with the basic reasons why relocation is a fundamental policy of the War Relocation Authority. As the Director has said on more than one occasion, there are three fundamental reasons for this emphasis on relocation.

1. Most of the aliens and citizens of Japanese ancestry in the United States are going to continue living in this country after the war.
2. The rights of citizenship and the rights of law-abiding aliens are closely associated with what we are fighting for in this war.
3. Assimilation, which includes the development of attitudes of loyalty, cannot develop in an atmosphere of hate, suspicion and fear.

If these assumptions are correct, then relocation is the only constructive program open to the Authority.

Ideal Program

An ideal relocation program would have every one relocated before June 30, 1944, that is, within the next year. To do this would require the relocation of center residents at the rate of about 7500 per month. During April and May of this year, an average of about 2000 people per month have been leaving the centers. A tabulation by projects of the number of indefinite leaves granted during this period is given below.

Reported Number of Persons Leaving Centers on Indefinite Leave During April and May, 1943

	Total Population			
Center	April 1	April	May*	Total
Central Utah	7984	109	168	277
Colorado River	17386	207	380	587
Gila River	13244	153	241	394
Granada	6833	199	178	377
Heart Mountain	10470	179	296	475
Jerome	8399	186	168	354
Manzanar	9497	171	174	345
Minidoka	9138	361	307	668
Rohwer	8379	188	177	365
Tule Lake	14534	157	187	344
Total	105864	1910	2276	4186

* Last date for which form WRA-178 received:

Central Utah	– 5/26
Minidoka	– 5/27
Rohwer	– 5/31 but reports for 5/16 through 5/19 not received
Tule Lake	– 5/28

Statistics supplied by
Relocation Planning Division
June 7, 1943

Recent Leave Procedure

Recent procedures have made departure from centers a relatively simple matter, e.g. grants in aid, and the new rule that project directors may issue leaves. It should be remembered however that the interpretation of cash grants varies between the centers, some leaves officers feeling that it saves the government money to give a small grant even if this results in slowing down relocation and so perpetuating the cost of maintaining evacuees who do not relocate.

Causes of Resistance to Relocation

With leave clearance made easy, the problem arises as to why more people do not leave the centers. The reasons are many and complicated, involving administrative procedures, public attitudes and employment problems. In this paper, attention will be devoted to one aspect of relocation, one which is very important and will probably increase in importance, i.e. the evacuee resistances to relocation.

Put briefly we may trace much of this resistance to relocation to the shock of evacuation and the consequent social and psychic disorganization of Issei and Nisei alike, and to the months of life in the centers as wards of the government in a condition which has halted the assimilation process and stunted initiative.

Feelings of Insecurity

Most of the evacuee reluctance to relocate is due to deep-seated feelings of insecurity in regard to life "outside", together with another set of resistances due to a newly developed social organization within the center.

The whole evacuation and relocation center experiences has resulted in a drastic social disorganization followed by a gradual reorganization. Those of us not on the receiving end of it tend to forget the profound personal and social disorganization that resulted from evacuation. On short notice, after weeks of acute uncertainty, when the West Coast was filled with fear and hatred of Japan and all Japanese, Issei and Nisei alike were suddenly ordered to be rounded up like prisoners of war and herded into "assembly centers". This order, together with the internment of many Issei community leaders, left the social organization of the people badly broken up. In addition, the Nisei lost at the stroke of a pen the security they thought they had in their citizenship. For the older people, economic security was gone and the gains of years of work cultivating a farm or building up a trade or profession were wiped out. In addition, they had their hopes for their children's future in this country badly shaken.

This evacuation experience has just about knocked out the initiative of the older Issei. They are tired. They were just about to retire when the war broke out and today they want nothing better than to be let alone.

The Nisei, the majority of whom are between 16 and 24 years of age, have also been greatly affected by evacuation, but due to their youth they form better prospects for relocation than their parents. However they feel insecure in many ways and still feel the need of their parents' guidance and advice.

Social Reorganization

Relocation centers began, then, with a badly disorganized lot of people. But human society abhors a vacuum, and in the course of the months since last summer, new social forms have developed and old ones have been recreated.

The family in particular have gained strength as a result of evacuation, in the sense that family members depend upon one another for the lack of other stable groups. Thus the Issei-Nisei cleavage which was growing before evacuation has been in some ways reduced.

After the initial shocks and the early unhappy JACL attempts to run the centers, Issei control has re-emerged. With a Nisei population, young and inexperienced, this was bound to occur. The strike at Poston was, according to the analysts there, a crisis which ended with a reorganization of the society along more stable lines. Local block and neighborhood public opinion is re-emerging to control individual behavior.

There is thus a new social structure replacing the disorganization of last summer which has grown up in the projects. That means a new stability and cohesiveness. The relocation program threatens this new equilibrium and the society is bound to resist this threat to its existence, just as it resisted registration which carried in it the suggestion of relocation and segregation; i.e. the suggestion of a new moving of people and breaking of social ties.

Importance of Issei Influence

All this means, among other things, that the views of the Issei need serious consideration in any War Relocation program whether it be relocation or recreation. By influencing them in favor of a program, the whole center is influenced. That means attention to a relatively small number of older males since the women will follow their lead, but it also means patience and long discussion over extended periods of time. No newspaper announcement or brief statement before a meeting can be considered as informing the center about a new program and its meaning.

The price of neglecting this fundamental social fact is evacuee resistance to administration, bad feelings between evacuees and administration and thus an impeding of the relocation program.

Thus it is the Issei who need to be convinced of the desirability of relocation and their children's future. Through their leadership and their parental relationships they can counsel their children in favor of relocation. This can only be done if they are convinced of the good faith of the War Relocation Authority if they believe that the local project staff is with them, not against them.

Reasons for not Relocating

On the basis of this background, what are some of the specific factors behind reluctance to evacuate?

1. The problem of making up one's mind. For the resident of a relocation center, the decision to relocate is an important one, one which he realizes will affect his whole future. Relocation, like

marriage, is not to be undertaken lightly. It requires much talking over and family consultations. Coming to a final decision is made more difficult by the fact that all recent decisions of a similar nature have been made for him by the government – i.e. the moves to assembly centers and to relocation centers. The basic feeling of insecurity resulting from evacuation also contributes to the difficulty of arriving quickly at a final decision on a matter so important to the future life of the individual concerned.

2. Fear of breaking up the family. As already indicated, with the initial breaking up of so many social ties, individuals turned to family relationships as something stable. Many individuals are reluctant to relocate for fear of breaking this tie as well. The older parents are reluctant to let their children leave them, especially their daughters. It is against the Japanese tradition of parental duty to let a daughter leave home before the day of her marriage. The results of the Manzanar registration provided dramatic evidence of this family interdependence when it comes to making decisions which might result in family separation. There is an obvious need here for the parents to be better informed on the aims and methods of relocation in order that they may be better qualified to advise their children in discussions concerning relocation.
3. Fear of losing companionship and status. The center, bad as it is in many ways, does give companionship. The evacuee is one of a group of evacuees in the same boat. In the center he is, in a limited sense, one of a majority, whereas on the outside, he is one of a minority. On the outside he will be alone and will lack the companionship of others with the like experience of evacuation behind them. This lack of companionship is especially felt by those who are young and unmarried. Within the center, one also has a status, a position in society as a block manager, a council member, a judo expert, etc. All of this is lost on relocation outside the center. Thus the center provides, in a broad sense, a social security for the individual.
4. Fear of discrimination. Stories of discrimination come back to the centers. Not only are the Nisei fearful of discrimination they may meet, but also their parents are fearful for them remembering what they have been through themselves and realizing that the nation is now at war.

News stories in the press add to this fear of discrimination. In the same category are resolutions in Congress, in State Legislatures, and by organizations such as the American Legion.

5. Financial insecurity. While it is true that some evacuees are wealthy, the majority have suffered severe financial losses as a result of evacuation and are still having their resources depleted so long as they have to maintain any reasonable standard of living on sixteen or nineteen dollars a month. In addition, extreme stories of the rise of prices on the outside and the complications of rationing, cause people to hesitate before deciding to relocate.

This financial worry is a serious matter. The Issei in particular, who managed to overcome financial insecurity over 20 or 30 years, are old and have not the heart to begin over again. Many Nisei are willing to take the financial risk for themselves if they can rest assured that the government will provide security for their parents but they are not sure of this. We have promised to push no one out of the centers but the registration has raised strong doubts about this in many evacuee minds.

6. Uncertainties of resettlement. Then again Nisei who might be willing to relocate and bring their families with them are uncertain about the draft. If Selective Service is reinstated, what would happen to parents, wives and children on the outside? Could they come back to the center? They are not sure and the War Relocation Authority policy has appeared to them to be rather uncertain on this point.

Aliens are uncertain as to their fate after the war. Hence they are reluctant to try to relocate. Why undertake relocation with all its risks if one is going to be moved again in a year or so?

The WRA policy appears to many evacuees to be unpredictable. "Once they said centers for the duration, now they say relocate. Next year they may say come back to the centers again." Recent agitation in Congress and elsewhere against relocation simply increases these fears.

The deep sense of insecurity reflected in items 1 to 6 is a basic force retarding relocation. Many other reasons for not relocating exist as described below, but many of them are simply rationalizations of one aspect or another of this basic personal insecurity.

It will not be overcome by adding new insecurities by creating unemployment in the centers or by large scale segregation moves. In this connection, it is worth quoting from Project Analysis No. 5 (Jerome):

"Cracking down on conditions at the center might cause increase in the number leaving, but it would tend to increase the sullenness and demoralization of many of the evacuees. A gradual change in employment practices probably is desirable, in order to give more incentives to efficient work, but a policy of making center life 'as tough as possible' would have repercussions much more serious than present so-called pampering. 'Get 'em out at any cost' may cost too much in terms of breaking the spirit of a proud, and, on the whole, a still loyal people."

7. Reluctance to settle away from the West Coast. The West Coast represents the known, the rest of the country, the unknown. Rumors about California being reopened have added to the motives for just sitting it out until this happens.

This general objection to relocation is in part rationalization as evidenced by the few Arizona people who have left Poston since the restricted area line was moved back. Furthermore, a fear of strange lands has never been a real hindrance to migration, Japanese or otherwise, if the incentives are strong enough.

8. Organized opposition by pro-Japanese elements. In some centers this may exist. If relocation is a United States Government program, then it is logical for the Japanese government to oppose it. There are reported radio broadcasts to this effect in one or two of the Western centers. These broadcasts, or the rumors of them, are possibly made by certain center residents since the FCC monitorings of Japanese radio broadcasts show no evidence of specific statements about the internal affairs of relocation centers. The statement that the Japanese government

will look after its own may be the work of a small group of actively subversive individuals in one or two of the centers.

There is also a fear on the part of some of the individuals of adverse public opinions in their blocks if they relocate. This is similar to the public opinion controls that were in evidence at registration. On the whole, such adverse opinion is chiefly to the effect that one is foolish to relocate after all that has happened to the Japanese in this country since the war began. Better to sit it out and await the peace.

9. Citizenship worries. There are some socially conscious individuals concerned with the problems of citizenship status. Is it more likely to be protected by relocating and dispersing or by remaining as a group in the center? It might be pointed out in this connection that relocation and assimilation are much more likely to assure citizenship status than isolation from American life in a center where life is abnormal and which is the object of constant criticism.
10. Jobs Offered. There is a current attitude that the only jobs available are domestic and unskilled labor. The formerly independent entrepreneur or farmer does not care to apply for such work.
11. Ignorance and rumors. Many of the evacuee fears are increased by ignorance and rumor. Too often, under the present organization, evacuees are ignorant of WRA policy and intention. They have no voice in that policy so it seems to them arbitrary and unpredictable.

This situation brings out the need for greater coordination of WRA activities and better communication. There is also a need for better and more frequent face-to-face contact between evacuee representatives of various social groups and the responsible members of the project and Washington staff.

Rumor play its role in giving strength to many of the fears listed above. Some characteristic rumors are:

- a. The only reason the government wants us to leave is to save money.
 - b. A number of Japanese-Americans were killed in Utah in reprisal for the execution of the Doolittle fliers.
 - c. Wages and working conditions seldom turn out to be as good as represented.
 - d. Housing is impossible to find and evacuees are often evicted from rooms or apartments.
 - e. The people of this center are going to be moved soon.
12. Effects of registration. The shock and after-effects of registration are still with us and have created serious rifts between evacuees and staff at some projects. The shadow of segregation has also hung over the centers since the beginning. The Nisei fear leaving parents behind in the centers with an increasing bad name after all the "good" people leave.

To summarize, there are two chief conditions within the centers hindering relocation so far as the evacuees are concerned:

1. A deep feeling of insecurity exists in the average evacuee as a result of evacuation. He is afraid of discrimination; he is afraid of the high cost of living; he is afraid for his wife and children.

2. A new social organization is growing up giving position and status to the individual. The evacuee as a member of this group is reluctant to leave it.

Taken together, these considerations make many evacuees, especially the Issei, reluctant to leave the centers. As to the Nisei who are more likely to leave, it will be necessary to overcome their feelings of insecurity and loss of status.

Note on Administrative Attitudes

The relocation centers are made up of interdependent and inter-acting social units. One cannot isolate the attitudes and activities of the evacuees from those of the appointed personnel since they are interacting forces and the attitudes of the project personnel have their effects on those of the residents.

As is well known, the evacuees are very sensitive to prejudice. They have been sensitized to it over the years and especially since evacuation. Attitudes of superiority and prejudice¹ on the part of staff members where these exist may hinder, for instance, any real or open meeting of the minds between project administration and evacuee leadership, especially Issei leadership. This, of course, interferes with the need to get WRA policies across to evacuee leaders in such a way that they can see their value and support them (or point out their faults and change them).

Fears of discrimination to be met with on the outside are only intensified when antagonistic attitudes are met with in WRA project personnel, whether in the foreman, the teachers, or the project director. It is remarkable how a man's reputation for prejudice can spread even beyond his own project. Such a reputation does not create respect for that man. Attitudes of social prejudice breed an atmosphere of hate, suspicion and fear, an atmosphere not conducive to creating respect for American democracy. They are attitudes which, if prevalent or existent in high places on the project, lead to resistances to administration either active or passive; they inevitably interfere with any constructive program of relocation.

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¹ A brief discussion of race and culture may be found in Community Analysis Report No. 1, entitled Dealing with Japanese-Americans.