

cards 5
ltd - 5
forties 5
or there 5
20 = A
36 = AA

The Evacuation of the Japanese from the West Coast
during World War II - a Social Injustice or a Justifiable Wartime Precaution?

Carmen Whitehead
English I - Mr. Boyce
May 1962

Outline

- I. History of Japanese on West Coast (background)
 - a. Immigration
 - b. Occupations
 - c. Prejudice against immigrants
 - d. Customs and patterns of Japanese
 - e. Education of Nisei
- II. Evacuation
 - a. Immediate reaction to Pearl Harbor
 - b. Events leading up to evacuation
 - c. Evacuation
 - d. Adjustment to relocation centers (conditions in camp)
 - e. Nisei volunteer for Army and for Military Intelligence
 - f. Release from centers and return to homes
- III. After Effects
 - 1. Laws to restore property and money
 - 2. Repeal of discriminatory laws
 - 3. Settlement of Nisei in Midwest and East
 - 4. Conclusion

Twenty years ago, in an action unprecedented in our country, almost 72,000 American citizens and their 40,000 foreign-born parents were confined behind barbed wire in detention camps. They had been found guilty without trial for a crime that had never occurred. This wartime imprisonment of the Nisei¹ and their Issei² parents has since been condemned as one of the most shameful episodes in our nation's history. Bradford Smith in Americans from Japan declares that "No one can survey the evidence today without discovering that it was not even mistaken patriotism that caused the evacuation, but greed masking as patriotism."³ Why were the 112,353 Japanese living on the West Coast considered so potentially dangerous that they were removed to inland points while 97,080 foreign-born Germans and 113,847 foreign-born Italians residing in the same locations had virtually no restrictions imposed upon them?⁴ To find the reasons and causes behind this injustice, we must look back into the history and customs of the Japanese in America.

The Japanese were one of the last and smallest groups to come to the United States. In 1870 there were only fifty-six Japanese here. Their government forbade migration, and it was not until 1884, at the insistent urging of the Americans, then badly in need of laborers, that migration to the West Coast and Hawaii was permitted. By 1890 there were only 2,039 Japanese in America. In 1900, contractors sent agents to Japan searching for laborers, and from then until 1909, about seven thousand came yearly. They were employed chiefly in agriculture, on the railroads, in lumbering and mining, and in salmon canneries.⁵ But the Japanese were not content to be laborers, they wanted to buy their own land and raise their own crops. The farmers and ranchers began to complain that the Japanese would not work for sub-standard wages, preferring instead to work long and hard to grow their own crops.⁶ This tenaciousness further flamed the fires of prejudice which had begun to burn as early as 1887 when there had been less than 1500 Japanese on

¹ Japanese born in the United States.

² Japanese-born aliens living in the United States.

³ Bradford Smith, Americans from Japan, (Philadelphia and New York, J. B. Lippincott Co., 1948) p. 276.

⁴ Ibid., p. 119.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 199-202.

⁶ Albert Q. Maisel, They All Chose America, (New York, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1955) p. 131.

the West Coast. Because they were ineligible for citizenship and therefore, could not vote, they were the ideal scapegoat for politicians. Violent anti-Japanese campaigns broke out; mass meetings were held demanding the end of Japanese immigration. So much pressure was exerted by civic, social, and labor groups that numerous anti-Japanese laws were introduced in the California legislature. In 1908 the Japanese government, in an action known as Gentlemen's Agreement, prohibited all migration of male laborers.⁷ Still this did not seem to be enough to appease the big fruit ranchers who then succeeded in having a law passed in 1913, the Alien Land Bill, which specifically barred Japanese from owning land. ~~Legislature~~ after ~~legislature~~ was passed, five hundred discriminatory measures in all, among them a bill limiting land leases to three years. In 1924 the Exclusion Act barred all Orientals from further immigration.⁸

Besides being industrious and independent, what manner of people were these Japanese so hated and discriminated against? Of all the foreign groups to come to this land, they were the furthest removed from typical American culture-patterns. Their language, customs, their physical looks, and beliefs were entirely exotic. Strict family and social controls kept the group strongly integrated and brought about almost non-existent delinquency rates among the children and adults. Japanese were seldom found on relief roles even during the height of the depression.⁹ They had acquired the greatest percentage of higher education for their children; their credit ratings were the highest; they contributed most liberally to all charities.¹⁰ But prejudice and language barrier had cut off the Issei from the rest of the Americans, and in the cities they lived in their own "Little Tokyos," serviced by their own tradesmen.¹¹ The Nisei, however, had great desire to be Americanized in all things and to be accepted. They began to enter industry and join unions. Those who could became doctors, dentists, lawyers, and studied for all professions, only to find that they

⁷ Smith, op. cit., pp. 207 ff.

⁸ Maisel, op. cit., pp. 127 ff.

⁹ R. A. Schermherhorn, These Our People, (Boston, D. C. Heath and Company., 1949) pp 201 ff.

¹⁰ James Edmiston, Home Again, (New York, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1955), p. 226.

¹¹ Smith, op. cit., p. 240.

were unable to find work in their fields because of discrimination and instead became houseboys, gardeners, or servants; others were forced to go to Japan to practice their trades.¹² The older generation, meanwhile, had set up Japanese-language schools to preserve their customs and to better communicate with their children. The Nisei went to these schools after their regular school day in an American school, but as the children became more and more Americanized, in spite of their parents, the enrollment dropped and the schools gradually became less successful.¹³ Many Issei were sending their sons to Japan to be educated. By 1940 over 8,000 of them had been schooled three years or more in Japan. They found upon their return that now they did not even fit in their own society. These were the troublesome ones later in evacuation camps.¹⁵

This, then, was the picture in 1941, when suddenly the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. At first the West Coast remained quite calm, and the people showed less prejudice toward the Japanese than at any other time as if to reassure the Nisei that they were not considered the enemy.¹⁶ Thirteen hundred alien and American-born Japanese known to the F.B.I. to be espionage agents were quickly and quietly rounded up.¹⁷ However, sentiment against the West Coast Japanese rose steadily. On February 11, 1941, the Attorney General and the Secretary of War issued a joint statement that there had been no sabotage of any kind in Hawaii or on the West Coast.¹⁸ In spite of this reassurance, pressure to evacuate the Japanese began to mount on all sides. The F.B.I. found itself working feverishly to disprove false rumors and reports: Machine guns had been found in the Japanese-language schools; bombs were hidden in Buddhist temples; flaming arrows were seen pointing to military installations.¹⁹ Hysteria mounted. The

¹² Ibid., p. 241.

¹³ Schmerhorn, *op.cit.*, p. 214.

¹⁴ Monica Sone, *Nisei Daughter*, (Boston, Little, Brown, & Co., 1953), p. 128.

¹⁵ Smith, *op.cit.*, p. 240.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 261.

¹⁷ Alan Hynd, *Betrayal from the East*, (New York, Robert M. McBride & Co., 1943), p. 270.

¹⁸ Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

¹⁹ Edmiston, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

funds and bank accounts of the Japanese had already been frozen; now their fishermen were forbidden to put to sea; business and professional licenses were revoked; insurance companies cancelled their policies.²⁰ The California State Civil Service dismissed all Nisei without cause. They were refused enlistment in spite of the fact that there were 5,000 in the army at the outbreak of war. In some army camps, Nisei soldiers were disarmed; others were jailed. The Japanese community was getting desperate; their money was running out.²¹

Finally, almost as a relief, the climax came. On March 12, 1942, General John L. DeWitt, Western Defense Commander, announced the forced evacuation of all Japanese from the West Coast. The Wartime Civil Control Administration and the War Relocation Authority were formed to handle the evacuation. The Japanese were given scant weeks' notice to settle their affairs; consequently, everyone took advantage of them, cheating them out of land, property, and possessions. All that they had accumulated in a lifetime disappeared. On March 24 the first relocation center opened at Winslow, Washington, and from then until August 11, more than 109,000 evacuees were processed in 112 such centers, from where they were transported to the camps. Everyone went. The only ones left behind were the T.B. patients in hospitals and the mad in insane asylums. Of those evacuated less than eleven thousand were male aliens between twenty and forty-five, most of them over forty.²² With no real preparation for this vast undertaking, conditions were desperate at the ten relocation centers located in Arkansas, the Mountain States, and the desert areas of California.²³ The living quarters for each family consisted of one large room in barrack-like buildings and afforded little or no privacy, no plumbing, and no heating.²⁴ Although most of the Nisei were determined to prove their loyalty and patriotism by cooperating fully, many grew bitter with America and yet were unable to morally ally themselves with Japan. The Issei fell back to their faith in Japan and in all things Japanese.²⁵

²⁰ Smith, op. cit., pp. 261 ff.

²¹ Edmiston, op. cit., pp. 53 f.

²² Smith, op. cit., pp. 265-280 passim.

²³ Maisel, op. cit., p. 136.

²⁴ Sone, op. cit., p. 173.

²⁵ Smith, op. cit., p. 303.

20

Riots, strikes, and revolts were organized by subversives in the camp who agitated the Nisei.²⁶ Things were going from bad to worse.

To help ease this tension in the camps and to provide an outlet for the patriotism of the Nisei, on January 12, 1943, Secretary of War Stimson announced that volunteers would be accepted for an all-Nisei combat team. Thus, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was formed and fought courageously in the European theater of war to become the most decorated unit in the entire military history of the United States.²⁷ At this same time, Japanese with knowledge of their language were being accepted for training at the Military Intelligence School by Issei and Nisei instructors. Over four thousand of them took part in every campaign in the Pacific and were credited with shortening the war by two years.²⁸

And now, in 1943, scarcely a year after the evacuation, the War Relocation Authority was opening channels through which the Nisei could return to the main stream of life. It granted permanent leave to anyone cleared by the F.B.I. who had proof of a job and a place to live outside of the vital areas. Students were released if they had been accepted into colleges and universities.²⁹ A year later, the army announced in January of 1944 that Nisei were again eligible for induction. As more Nisei left for war, their parents began to show pride in their being in the service and spoke about their exploits proudly. The Issei again had a stake in America.³⁰

Finally, in late 1944, the Supreme Court ruled that it was unconstitutional to hold these Japanese and to bar them from any state in the union.³¹ At the end of that year the Western Defense Command announced the reopening of the West Coast to the Japanese and the closing of all relocation centers within a year.³² Slowly the Japanese started back - the Nisei feeling that they were more Japanese than American.³³ In the big cities the Japanese found little hostility, but it was different in the urban areas. Their houses were burned in the night, NO JAP

²⁶ Edmiston, op.cit., p.. 108..

²⁷ Maisel, op. cit., p.138.

²⁸ Smith, op. cit., pp. 324 ff.

²⁹ Sone, op. cit., p. 216.

³⁰ Smith, op. cit., pp. 316 ff.

³¹ Edmiston, op. cit., p. 148.

³² Smith, op. cit., p. 313.

³³ Edmiston, op. cit., p. 173.

signs turned up everywhere, and Nisei veterans were even insulted and refused service.³⁴ Some of the returnees found conditions as bad as they had feared. Many tenants had abused their property; others refused to return it to them. As news of these conditions reached the camps, many Japanese just lingered there until they felt it was safe to come home; consequently, it was not until May 15, 1946, that the War Relocation Authority closed its last field office.³⁵ Then came the long and arduous task of reclaiming what was rightfully theirs. After much legal groundwork, a Claims Law was passed for reimbursement of property to the deported Japanese, those aliens and Nisei who had sworn allegiance to Japan. This law was followed by Public Law 886 which provided for payment of claims for losses sustained due the evacuation.³³⁶ One by one the five hundred state and local laws directed against the Orientals were gradually repealed. Finally, in 1952 the Immigration and Nationality Act once more opened immigration quotas to the Japanese and at the same time permitted the Issei to become citizens.³⁷ The war had opened doors for them that prejudice had slammed in their faces.

But why had it taken a war to awaken the conscience of a nation? Certainly, recognition of the valuable contributions the Japanese had to make to our country would have eventually come about; the war only hastened its coming. Today, the Nisei are better understood, more widely and favorably received. Fifty-two thousand of them have settled in the Midwestern and Eastern parts of the United States, never to return to the Pacific shores that treated them so shamefully. There, they were given the welcome that we never extended to them. They were allowed to live where they pleased and work at the skills for which they were trained.³⁸ Wherever they have settled, they have contributed to the advancement and prosperity of the community, and now, here on the West Coast, we, too, have awakened to the richness and beauty of their culture and their heritage. At long last, the American-Japanese is a full-fledged, first-class citizen.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 189.

³⁵ Smith, op. cit., p. 352.

³⁶ Edmiston, op. cit., pp. 291-297 *passim*.

³⁷ Maisel, op. cit., p. 145.

³⁸ Smith, op. cit., p. 344.

Bibliography

Edmiston, James, Home Again, New York, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1955.

Hynd, Alan, Betrayal from the East, New York, Robert M. McBride & Co., 1943.

Maisel, Albert Q., They All Chose America, New York, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1955.

Schermerhorn, R. A., These Our People, Boston, D. C. Heath & Co., 1949.

Smith, Bradford, Americans from Japan, Philadelphia and New York, J. B. Lippincott Co., 1948.

Sone, Monica, Nisei Daughter, Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1953.

325.73
Ma

325.1
H. 325.1

95
25

325.73
Sch

325.252

Sm

325.252

son

FROM CARMEN WHITHEAD

338 CLYBURN AVE

BURBANK CA 91505

TOMAS HATANO

64 MANLEY CT.

SACRAMENTO, CA

95820

PARCEL POST • CONTENTS: MERCHANDISE • RETURN REQUESTED