

THE DISPLACED JAPANESE-AMERICANS



American Council On Public Affairs

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WHEN the facts about Japanese brutality to the soldier prisoners from Bataan were made known, Americans were more outraged than they had been since December 7, 1941. Instinctively they contrasted that frightfulness with our treatment of Japanese held in this country; and, without being told, Americans knew that prisoners in the U.S. were fed three meals a day and had not been clubbed or kicked or otherwise brutalized. Too few, however, realize what persistent and effective use Japan has been able to make, throughout the entire Far East, of U.S. imprisonment of persons of Japanese descent. This propaganda concerns itself less with *how* the U.S. treats the people imprisoned than *who* was imprisoned. By pointing out, again and again, that the U.S. put behind fences well over 100,000 people of Japanese blood, the majority of them citizens of the U.S., Japan describes to her Far Eastern radio audiences one more instance of American racial discrimination. To convince all Orientals that the war in the Pacific is a crusade against the white man's racial oppression, the enemy shrewdly notes every occurrence in the U.S. that suggests injustice to racial minorities, from the Negroes to the Mexicans and Japanese.

The enemy, of course, deliberately refrains from making distinctions among the various kinds of detention we have worked out for those of Japanese blood in this country. Unfortunately, Americans themselves are almost as confused as the Japanese radio about what has happened to the Japanese minority in this country—one-tenth of 1 per cent of the nation's total population. There are three different types of barbed-wire enclosures for persons of Japanese ancestry. First there are the Department of Justice camps, which hold 3,000 Japanese aliens considered by the F.B.I. potentially dangerous to the U.S. These and these alone are true internment camps.

Second, there are ten other barbed-wire enclosed centers in the U.S., into which, in 1942, the government put 110,000 persons of Japanese descent (out of a total population in con-

tinental U.S. of 127,000). Two-thirds of them were citizens, born in the U.S.; one-third aliens, forbidden by law to be citizens. No charges were brought against them. When the war broke out, all these 110,000 were resident in the Pacific Coast states—the majority in California. They were put behind fences when the Army decided that for “military necessity” all people of Japanese ancestry, citizen or alien, must be removed from the West Coast military zone.

Within the last year the 110,000 people evicted from the West Coast have been subdivided into two separate groups. Those who have professed loyalty to Japan or an unwillingness to defend the U.S. have been placed, with their children, in one of the ten camps called a “segregation center” (the third type of imprisonment). Of the remainder in the nine “loyal camps,” 17,000 have moved to eastern states to take jobs. The rest wait behind the fence, an awkward problem for the U.S. if for no other reason than that the Constitution and the Bill of Rights were severely stretched if not breached when U.S. citizens were put in prison.

Back in December, 1941, there was understandable nervousness over the tight little Japanese communities scattered along the West Coast. The long coast line seemed naked and undefended. There were colonies of Japanese fishermen in the port areas, farmlands operated by Japanese close to war plants, and little Tokyos in the heart of the big coastal cities. There were suspected spies among the Japanese concentrations and there was fear of sabotage. Californians were urged to keep calm and let the authorities take care of the problem. In the first two weeks the Department of Justice scooped up about 1,500 suspects. A few weeks later all enemy aliens and citizens alike were removed from certain strategic areas such as Terminal Island in Los Angeles harbor, and spots near war plants, power stations, and bridges. But Californians did not completely trust the authorities. While the F.B.I. was picking up its suspects, civilian authorities were besieged with telephone calls from citizens reporting suspicious behavior of their Oriental neighbors. Although California's Attorney General Warren (now governor) stated on February 21, 1942, that “we have had no sabotage and no fifth-column activity since the beginning of the war,” hysteria by then had begun to spread all along the coast. Every rumor of Japanese air and

naval operations offshore, and every tale of fifth-column activity in Hawaii, helped to raise to panic proportions California's ancient and deep antagonism toward the Japanese-Americans.

For decades the Hearst press had campaigned against the Yellow Peril within the state (1 per cent of the population) as well as the Yellow Peril across the seas that would one day make war. When that war prophecy came true, the newspapers' campaign of hate and fear broke all bounds. And, when Hearst called for the removal of all people of Japanese ancestry, he had as allies many pressure groups who had for years resented the presence of Japanese in this country.

The American Legion, since its founding in 1919, has never once failed to pass an annual resolution against the Japanese-Americans. The Associated Farmers in California had competitive reasons for wanting to get rid of the Japanese-Americans who grew vegetables at low cost on \$70 million worth of California land. California's land laws could not prevent the citizen-son of the Japanese alien from buying or renting the land. In the cities, as the little Tokyos grew, a sizable commercial business came into Japanese-American hands—vegetable commission houses, retail and wholesale enterprises of all kinds. It did not require a war to make the farmers, the Legion, the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West, and the politicians resent and hate the Japanese-Americans. The records of legislation and press for many years indicate that the antagonism was there and growing. War turned the antagonism into fear, and made possible what California had clearly wanted for decades—to get rid of its minority.

By early February both the Hearst press and the pressure groups were loudly demanding the eviction of all people of Japanese blood—to protect the state from the enemy, and to protect the minority from violence at the hands of Filipinos and other neighbors. A few cases of violence had, indeed, occurred, and spy talk ran up and down the coast. On February 13, a group of Pacific Coast Congressmen urged President Roosevelt to permit an evacuation; a week later the President gave that authority to the Army. On February 23, a Japanese submarine shelled the coast near Santa Barbara. Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt, on March 2, issued the order that all persons of Japanese descent, aliens and citizens, old and

young, women and children, be removed from most of California, western Oregon and Washington, and southern Arizona. The greatest forced migration in U.S. history resulted.

MIGRATION EASTWARD

At first the movement inland of the 110,000 people living within the prohibited zone was to be voluntary. The Japanese-Americans were merely told to get out. Within three weeks 8,000 people had packed up, hastily closed out their business affairs, sold their possessions or left them with neighbors, and set forth obediently toward the east. But Arizona remembered all too well how California had turned back the Okies in the past, and many Japanese-Americans were intercepted at this border. Kansas patrolmen stopped them. Nevada and Wyoming protested that they did not want to receive people found too dangerous for California. About 4,000 got as far as Colorado and Utah. It became apparent that the random migration of so many unwanted people could result only in spreading chaos. By March 29 voluntary evacuation was forbidden, and the Army made its own plans to control the movement.

The *évacués* reported to local control stations where they registered and were given a number and instructions on what they could take (hand luggage only) and when they should proceed to the first camps, called assembly centers. Although they were offered government help in straightening out their property problems, many thousands, in their haste and confusion, and in their understandable distrust of government, quickly did what they could for themselves. They sold, leased, stored, or lent their homes, lands, personal belongings, tractors, and cars. Their financial losses are incalculable.

The Army, in twenty-eight days, rigged up primitive barracks in fifteen assembly centers to provide temporary quarters for 110,000. Each *évacué* made his own mattress of straw, took his place in the crowded barracks, and tried to adjust to his new life. By August 10 everyone of Japanese descent (except those confined to insane asylums and other safe institutions) was behind a fence, in "protective custody." They were held here (still within the forbidden military zone) until a newly created civilian agency, the War Relocation Authority, could establish other refuges farther inland. WRA's job was to

hold the people until they could be resettled in orderly fashion.

WRA appealed to the governors of ten nearby western states. With one exception, Colorado's Governor Carr, they protested that they did not want the Japanese-Americans to settle in their domain, nor did they want any relocation center erected within their borders unless it was well guarded by the Army. Finally nine remote inland sites were found, all of them on federally owned land. (One assembly center in eastern California became a relocation camp.) Most of them were located, for lack of better acreage, on desolate but irrigable desert tracts. More tar-papered barracks were thrown up, more wire fences built, and once more the people moved. By November, 1942, all the *évacués* had packed up their miserably few possessions, had been herded onto trains, and deposited behind WRA's soldier-guarded fences, in crowded barracks villages of between 7,000 and 18,000 people.

They felt bitterness and anger over their loss of land and home and money and freedom. They knew that German and Italian aliens—and indeed, Japanese aliens in other parts of the U.S.—had been interned only when the F.B.I. had reason to suspect them. Second-generation citizens of German and Italian origin were not evacuated from California; nor were the second-generation citizens of Japanese descent elsewhere in the U.S. put behind fences.

Although the *évacués*' resentment at regimentation within WRA's little Tokyos is deep, it is seldom expressed violently. Considering the emotional strains, the uprooting, and the crowding, no one can deny that the record of restraint has been remarkable. Only twice have the soldiers been asked to come within a WRA fence to restore order.

CODDLING, AT 31 CENTS A DAY

But WRA and its director, Dillon Myer, have been under almost continual attack by congressional committees in Washington, and by a whole long list of badgering groups and individuals on the West Coast. The Dies Committee goes after WRA* and the Japanese minority at frequent intervals. Even

**Herman P. Eberharter, a member of the Dies Committee, has said of its September, 1943, findings, "... the report ... is prejudiced, and most of its statements are not proven." The committee wound up by suggesting three policies, all of which the WRA had already adopted.*

Hedda Hopper, the movie gossip, prattles innuendoes. Not wishing to "imply anything," she noted last December that "we've had more than our share of explosions, train wrecks, fires, and serious accidents" since WRA has released so many of the *évacués*. Actually, not one of the 17,000 has been convicted of anti-American activity.

WRA has usually been criticized for the wrong reasons. It has been accused of turning loose, for resettlement, "dangerous Japs." The implication usually is that no Japanese-American should be released, although from the very beginning WRA's prescribed purpose was to help the *évacués* to find some place to live outside the prohibited zone. Again and again, the pressure groups and California Congressmen have urged that WRA's ten centers be turned over to the Army. (In February the President, instead, dropped WRA intact, with its Director Dillon Myer, into the Department of Interior.) Most frequently Mr. Myer has been charged with pampering the Japanese-Americans. Almost every day the Hearst papers fling the word "coddling," with the clear implication that all persons of Japanese descent, citizen or no, women and infants, should be treated strictly as prisoners of war, which of course they are not.

No one who has visited a relocation center and seen the living space, eaten the food, or merely kept his eyes open could honestly apply the word "coddling" to WRA's administration of the camps. The people are jammed together in frame barracks. A family of six or seven is customarily allotted an "apartment" measuring about twenty by twenty-five feet. It is a bare room, without partitions. The only privacy possible is achieved by hanging flimsy cotton curtains between the crowded beds.

Furniture is improvised from bits of scrap lumber: a box for a table, three short ends of board made into a backless chair. The family's clothing and few personal possessions are somehow stuffed neatly away—on shelves if scrap lumber, a priceless commodity in all camps, is available. Otherwise, they are stuffed away under the beds. The quarters are usually neat. There are no cooking facilities and no running water in the barracks, unless the *évacué* has brought his own electric plate or had a friend "on the outside" send one in. As in Army camps, each block of twelve or fourteen barracks

(250 to 300 people) has its central mess hall, laundry building, public latrines, and showers.

With faithful regularity, irresponsible yarns are circulated that the *évacués* are getting more and better food than other Americans. Actually, the food cost per day is held below 45 cents per person. For 15 cents a meal the food is possibly adequate, but close to the edge of decent nutrition. In most camps, located far from dairy districts, milk is provided only for small children, nursing and expectant mothers, and special dietary cases. There are two meatless days a week and a heavy emphasis on starches. Nearly a third of the food requirements are grown on the irrigated fields of the camp itself. This reduces the actual cash outlay for food to 31 cents per person.

Practically everyone who wants a job can work, and most of the able bodied do. They plant and till the camp's vegetable acreage, prepare the food in the mess halls, do stenographic work for the Caucasian staff, work in the cooperative store.* In some centers they make furniture for the administration building or cotton mattresses to take the place of the hard straw pallets. Some are barbers and cobblers for the community, doctors in the hospital, scrubwomen in the latrines, garbage collectors. The maximum wage (a doctor, for instance) is \$19 a month; the minimum, \$12; the average, \$16. In addition, those who work get a clothing allowance for themselves and their dependents—at the most, \$3.75 a month for an adult in the northernmost center.

Individual enterprise is forbidden. To set up one's own dress-making service within the community, or to sell shell jewelry or anything else to the outside is prohibited. In order to keep the center wage uniform, all economic activities must be conducted through the community cooperative, which pays its barbers and other workers the standard stipend. With their small monthly wage, and by dipping into their prewar savings, most *évacués* buy extras to eat, but they can get only nonrationed food, since they possess no ration books. They send to the mail-order houses for some of their clothes, buy

**WRA has a lexicon of its own: Caucasian is the term for appointed administrative personnel, to distinguish them from the "évacués," sometimes called "colonists"; beyond the gate is "the outside."*

shoes, yard goods, and clothing at the cooperative store. Their children go to school in the barracks village, and when they are sick, to the center hospital.

Thus the pampering and thus the humiliation. A doctor distinguished in his profession, who lived with grace and charm in a decently comfortable home before the war, is today huddled in a small room with all his family. He practices his profession for \$19 a month at the center hospital, serving under a Caucasian of lesser accomplishments, hired for considerably more money. A man who spent twenty years building up his own florist business or commission house, or who operated a large vegetable farm in one of California's valleys, is merely "stoop labor" on the center's acreage.

The record of Japanese-Americans during the depression indicated that they did not take to public relief. They were too proud. They stuck together, helped each other, and almost never appeared on WPA or home-relief lists. To virtually all of them it is now galling to be distrusted wards of the nation, their meager lodging and food a scanty handout, the payment for their labor somewhat the same.

"POLITICS"

They have always been an isolated, discarded, and therefore ingrown people. Today this is more true than ever. The barracks village as a rule is literally isolated. At Manzanar, California, for example, the center is but a tiny square in a vast and lonely desert valley, between two great mountain ranges. Spiritually the people are just as isolated as that. Thrown together in a compact racial island of their own frustrated people, they grow in upon themselves and each other; they become almost completely detached from American life, the war, the world. Their small children speak more Japanese than they would if they competed daily with other American school children. The teen-age boys and girls are ostentatiously American in clothes, slang, and behavior. It is as if they were trying too hard to convince themselves that they *are* Americans. They know that they must and will go out the gate soon.

The adults think about themselves, and about the past they left. With time and distance, California's farm valleys, towns, and cities become more golden-hued than ever to the *évacués*.

They brood vaguely and fearfully on the future; the war, sometimes, seems like a vague abstraction, the cause of their troubles. And they think about rumors—which they often trust more than they do printed, official announcements. It may be a rumor that the Army will take over. Or that the *évacués* in this center will all be transported to another. This is the most nightmarish rumor of all to people who have moved so much in the past two years.

They think, too, about the endless details of their camp life. Each group of 250 or so *évacués* has a block manager who gets \$16 a month for listening to their complaints and, if possible, straightening out innumerable daily problems. The food in the mess hall is badly prepared; there is no toilet paper in the ladies' latrine; the neighbors play the radio too late and too loud; the roof of No. 29 barracks has a small leak.

Finally, there are gossip and politics. The Japanese-Americans back in California went their way without much participation in politics as most American citizens know it. In the barracks village of WRA there is little real self-government. Most of the centers have a Council made up of block representatives or managers. But there is only a slight area within which such a congress can make community decisions. Usually at the meeting of the Council the members do little more than listen to new rules, new plans of WRA, handed down from Washington or the local director. The block representatives are expected to pass on this information to all the people.

Originally WRA ruled that citizens alone could hold office in the centers, but this proved to be unwise. Two-thirds of the *évacués* are citizens, but most of these American-born Nisei are from eighteen to twenty-eight years of age—too young to take on such responsible jobs as the block manager's. Besides, among the Japanese-Americans born here are hundreds of Kibei—young men who were sent to Japan for part of their education. Not all—but a large percentage of them—are pro-Japan, particularly those who gained the latter part of their education in Japan. Disliked by the Nisei majority, outnumbered and maladjusted, the Kibei often have become a nuisance, creating little areas of disaffection in the center.

Thus it turned out that the Issei—the aliens, parents of the Nisei and Kibei—could best provide the authority, stability,

and seasoned wisdom needed in a block manager. They possessed a tradition of family and community leadership, and had commanded respect in the past. Above all they usually have an earnest desire to make the block of 250 or more people in which they live function in an orderly and quiet fashion. They are aliens primarily because U.S. law forbade them to become citizens. Many of them have a real loyalty to the U.S., not because the U.S. has invited their loyalty but because they look to their children's American future for their own security.

Politics in the centers has nothing to do with office or votes or *apparent* power. But it *is* power—the power of demagoguery, of spreading the infection of bitterness, exaggerating an instance or affront into an issue that may even get to the point of a small strike against WRA. The leaders have not invariably been pro-Japan. Some, both aliens and citizens, who had been good Americans became indignant at their loss of freedom and their right to participate in the life of the nation.

It may be that the administration was not willing to permit a big funeral for a man accidentally killed when a work truck overturned; it may be that three or four of the Caucasian staff displayed signs of race discrimination; it may be a rumor more plausible than fact. The “politicians” take any one of these, or a series, and worry it into a big camp issue. How great an issue it becomes depends most of all on the degree of confidence the center as a whole has in its director and the coolness and fairness with which he customarily handles his people. Too often the administration is out of touch with the main issues and grievances within the camp. WRA suffers, like every other agency, from the manpower shortage. Competent center directors and minor personnel are scarce. Often enough the director finds his Caucasian staff more of a problem than the *évacués*.

The two so-called “riots,” which brought the Army over the fence, arose from the accumulation of small grievances, whipped up to a crisis by groups struggling for power and eager to put the administration on the spot. There was, in each instance, a strike. Actually a strike in a relocation center is self-defeating since almost all labor in the community works to provide goods and services for the *évacués* themselves; no

more than a handful work in the staff mess and office building. Only when violence occurred, and the director thought he needed help in maintaining order, was the Army invited in.

But trouble rarely reaches either the strike stage or violence. The people in the Pacific Coast's little Tokyos rarely appeared on police blotters in the past, and now the crime record of WRA centers compares favorably with that of any small cities of their size, or, indeed, with any Army camp. Most of the policing is done by the *évacués* themselves, appointed to the "internal security" staff of each center.

Policing should be simpler than ever from now on. The ideological air has been cleared; the pro-Japan people have been moved out. The process of sifting the communities, separating the loyal and the disloyal, is virtually complete. The "disloyal" have been sent to a segregation center in northeastern California, leaving the other nine centers populated only by the loyal.

REGISTRATION AND SEGREGATION

To all the *évacués* the two words, registration and segregation, are almost as charged with emotion as that disturbing term, evacuation. Quite simply the two nouns mean that a questionnaire was submitted to all adults in the centers to determine their loyalty or disloyalty. On the basis of this, plus F.B.I. records and in some instances special hearings, WRA granted or denied the *évacués* "leave clearance," the right to go East and find a job. The same information was used as a basis for segregating the "disloyal" in a separate center. About 18,000 (the "disloyal" and all their dependents) will sit out the war at Tule Lake, within a high, manproof, barbed-wire enclosure, unless Japan shows more enthusiasm than she has to date for their repatriation. (These 18,000 must not be confused with the few thousand interned by the Department of Justice.)

But separating the loyal and the disloyal is not so simple a job as it might seem. Loyalty is difficult to measure accurately on any scales, and the sifting of the *évacués* was clumsily handled. The process began in February, 1943, when the Army decided to recruit a combat unit of Japanese-Americans. A registration form was printed containing twenty-eight questions to determine loyalty and willingness to fight. It was to