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MYTHS AND FACTS
ABOUT
THE JAPANESE AMERICANS

Answering Common Misconceptions
Regarding Americans of Japanese Ancestry

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT THE JAPANESE AMERICANS

Source information and references for use of WRA staff members

1. Myth: All children born in the United States of Japanese parents are dual citizens, and owe allegiance to Japan.

Fact: Children born in the United States of alien fathers from almost every country in the world, outside of South and Central America, are dual citizens, at least until they become of age. In the great majority of cases, they remain dual citizens for life unless they renounce allegiance to one country or the other. The Japanese law which resulted in dual citizenship for some children born of Japanese parents in the United States before the war was not at all unique and was, in fact, far more liberal than the nationality law of Germany and many other nations.

Dual citizenship arises because countries apply different tests of citizenship. Jus sanguinis holds that a child acquires the citizenship of his father regardless of where he is born; jus soli holds that he acquires the citizenship of the country of his birth. Consequently, every child born in the United States (which holds to the doctrine of jus soli as well as jus sanguinis in a modified form) is a dual citizen if his father is a citizen of a country that adheres to the doctrine of jus sanguinis. Every American-born child of an alien father from any country in Europe is at birth a dual citizen, and in the majority of instances he retains the dual status until he renounces his foreign citizenship. Every American-born child of an alien Chinese father is a dual citizen for life, unless he renounces allegiance to China after his twentieth birthday and has legal capacity under clearance law. (See A Comparative Study of Laws Relating to Nationality at Birth and Loss of Nationality, by Durward V. Sandifer, American Journal of International Law, Vol. 29, p. 248 et seq.; A Collection of Nationality Laws, by Flournoy and Hudson, 1929.)

The nationality laws of Germany and Italy should be of particular interest -- more especially those of Germany. The Nazi leaders have claimed the loyalty of all persons of German descent throughout the world, and have constantly maintained a legal theory upon which such a claim could be based. According to the German law, every child born of a German father, regardless of the country of his birth, is a German citizen; and under a decree of April 19, 1937, every man of German parentage is subject to conscription into the German army, regardless of where he is born or where he is living. Persons who have expatriated, or who have naturalized in a foreign country, are not excepted by the decree.

It was even possible, under the German law effective before 1937 for a person who had acquired American citizenship by naturalization to be a German citizen as well, for the law provided that "citizenship is not lost by one who before acquiring foreign citizenship has acquired on application the written consent of competent authorities in his home state to retain his citizenship." (A Collection of Nationality Laws, by Flournoy and Hudson, p. 310.)

Under the Italian law, every child born in the United States of an Italian father is an Italian citizen, and he retains dual citizenship for life unless he renounces his Italian citizenship after coming of age.

Moreover, even when he renounces his Italian citizenship, he is still subject to a call for service in the Italian army, "except as regards facilities granted by special laws." (A Collection of Nationality Laws, p. 364.)

The magnitude of the population of German and Italian dual citizens in the United States may be judged by referring to the U. S. Census for 1940 which shows that 314,105 German aliens and 690,551 Italian aliens were then living in this country. By contrast, only 47,307 alien Japanese were enumerated in the Census. The number of German and Italian aliens would have been greatly multiplied, of course, if they, like the Japanese, were denied the right to naturalize.

Before 1924, all children born of Japanese aliens in the United States were claimed as citizens of Japan. This law was radically changed, however, by an Imperial Ordinance, effective December 1, 1924, which decreed that no child born of Japanese parents in the United States (and certain other countries) was to be claimed as a citizen of Japan unless the child's father, or legal representative, registered the birth at a Japanese consulate within fourteen days, and unless the intention to retain Japanese citizenship was expressed at the same time. (Former Ambassador Grew in Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Military Affairs, United States Senate, 78th Congress, 1st Session, on S. 444, p. 116.)

A comparison of nationality laws shows that Japan was almost in a class by itself before the war in its policy of relinquishing the citizenship of children born of its nationals in the United States, unless the children were registered to preserve the dual status. This liberalization of the Japanese law resulted largely from the pressure of Japanese Americans who desired to free themselves of any legal obligation to the Imperial Government.

"The Japanese American Associations on the Pacific Coast and in Hawaii memorialized the Japanese government several times in 1919-21 for changes in the law, thus showing a genuine interest in the problem." (The Second-Generation Japanese Problem, by E. K. Strong, p. 141.)

One of these petitions is quoted in full in The Real Japanese Question, by K. K. Kawakami, p. 186-7. In part, it reads as follows:

"We are all men of Japanese parentage, born on the soil of the United States, and who have been educated in the schools of that country. We wish to be considered citizens of the country in which we are now living, and to show that men of Japanese ancestry can be as loyal to the country of their adoption as men of other ancestry residing therein... The question of dual citizenship and the criticisms which have been made against American-born Japanese have caused us to feel that some legislation should be passed by the country of our ancestors that will free us of any obligation to it, and allow those of us, who have located within the United States with the purpose and intention of remaining and interesting ourselves in the affairs of that country, to show that we can be good and loyal citizens of the country of our adoption... We respectfully petition that at the coming session of the Japanese Parliament, a law be enacted, whereby those of Japanese descent can select their own citizenship without restriction of law, and, having once made such decision, can remain citizens of that country without any question of dual allegiance." (The Real Japanese

Question, by K. K. Kawakami, p. 186-7.)

Even after the Ordinance of 1924, became effective, many Japanese Americans were still unsatisfied. They continued to petition for further relaxations in the law. As late as January, 1941, 30,000 Japanese Americans in Hawaii petitioned Secretary of State Cordell Hull to seek a way in which they could more easily expatriate themselves from Japan. This action brought a letter from Lieut. General C. D. Herron, commanding the Hawaiian Department of the U. S. Army, in which he said: "In the willingness of the younger Japanese to sign this petition and in their loyal and eager compliance with the draft, as in the attitude of the older generation in accepting the new (Selective Service) order for their children, there is complete refutation of the suspicions of their loyalty." (Japanese American Review, Jan. 25, 1941, p. 6.)

The Imperial Ordinance of 1924 permitted children born in the United States before 1924 of alien Japanese fathers to renounce their Japanese citizenship, and in the next six years, according to a census taken in 1930, approximately 40 per cent of the Nisei born before 1924 had made formal renunciations. Of the younger children, who were American citizens only unless they had been registered at Japanese consulates, about two-thirds were American citizens only. Of the total Nisei population, 24,263 held American citizenship only, and 22,027 (mainly in the older group) were dual citizens. (The Second Generation Japanese Problem, by Edward K. Strong, p. 142)

This census was taken under the auspices of the Japanese government. It can hardly be supposed, with any reasonable application of reason, that the persons questioned in the census would have falsified their answers to favor the United States. Those who held Japanese citizenship would have admitted it, presumably, without hesitation.

Investigations by the War Relocation Authority indicate that the percentage of Japanese dual citizens has been much reduced since 1930. In the registration conducted at the centers in February, 1943, many of the citizen registrants reported that they had renounced their Japanese citizenship since 1930, and few of the number born since 1924 were reported to have been registered at Japanese consulates.

2. Myth: The religion of the Japanese, no matter where they live, binds them to the Emperor. They all have Shinto shrines in their homes.

Fact: The Japanese in the United States have two major religions: Buddhism and Christianity. Shintoism, among American Japanese, is a minority sect.

Buddhism, which is the predominant religion of the Orient, was introduced into Japan from Korea, about the Sixth Century, A. D. In Japan, it is divided into eight major sects which are, in turn, subdivided into almost innumerable lesser groups, each with slightly different rites and beliefs. There is no evidence that Buddhism, in any of its forms, is in any way connected with Emperor worship.

Shintoism, on the other hand, is the native religion of Japan. There are three major kinds of Shintoism. The most popular kind, which is relatively unorganized, centers around old native beliefs in gods of the household, fields, and wayside. The second kind, which is well organized and divided into sects, often includes a belief in faith healing. The third

kind is State Shintoism, which fosters a belief in the divinity of the Emperor and the purity of the Japanese race. This State Shintoism, a comparatively recent development in Japanese history, is the creed which has given rise to the accusation that all the Japanese are Emperor worshippers.

The wide difference between the older Shinto beliefs (Sectarian Shinto) and State Shintoism is emphasized in G. B. Sansom's authoritative book, entitled Japan - A Short Cultural History, published by the Century Company in 1931. "It is important," Sansom says (p. 53), "to distinguish from the traditional body of popular belief and observance the institutional religion which was fostered by the ruling classes. The former is a simple ritualism based on an animistic creed and tinctured with magic, the latter an organized and elaborate cult closely bound up with the political system."

There are no satisfactory figures on the number of Japanese Buddhists and Shintoists in the United States, owing partly to the fact that the religion of the common people of Japan is often a combination of Buddhism and Sectarian (not State) Shintoism. The common man believes in Buddhism for the sake of his soul, and in the Shinto gods to protect and guide him in his daily affairs.

The charge that all Japanese in the United States, or even that any considerable number of them, have Shinto shrines in their homes is a pure fabrication which has no substance at all except in the minds of the persons who concocted it.

3. Myth: Japanese language schools were maintained in many communities on the West Coast before the war to inculcate American-born Japanese with the national ideals of the Japanese Imperial Government.

Fact: This charge is not supported by the studies conducted by various American educators before the war to determine the purpose and effect of the Japanese-language schools. Dr. E. K. Strong of Stanford University, who supervised the most intensive study ever made of second-generation Japanese Americans, under a \$40,000 grant from the Carnegie Corporation in 1929, arrived at the conclusion that these schools were making a valuable contribution to American community life. The following extracts are from his book, "The Second-Generation Japanese Problem," published by the Stanford University Press in 1934.

"Many non-English-speaking people who have come to America have established private schools where their children may learn the parents' native language and some of the history, traditions, and customs of their native land. The Japanese have been no exception to this practice." (p. 201.)

"Some knowledge of Japanese appears desirable for all the second generation...Such facility is needed in order to insure proper morale within the family and the Japanese group. It is this relationship which is seemingly so largely responsible for the low rate of juvenile delinquency," (p. 205. NOTE: The Japanese Americans had the lowest juvenile delinquency rate of any racial or nationality group on the West Coast before the war. Ibid, p. 175 et seq.)

"The work of the Japanese-language schools should be continued."
(p. 205)

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Quotations from other authors:

"...These schools are not intended to perpetuate the...moral concepts of Japan. They are supplementary schools, and at worst there is much less in them to be adversely criticized than in the parochial schools attended by so many children of South and East European immigrants."

(The Japanese Problem in the United States, by Prof. H. A. Millis, pp. 265-66.)

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"The strongest objection which has been raised in this country towards the language schools of the Japanese has been that they foster anti-American ideas. This accusation is without basis." Sociology and Social Research, Jan.-Feb., 1933, p. 259.)

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"Similar schools have been conducted by the Chinese; and also by the Germans and many other nationalities in the form of parochial schools. The Japanese schools are merely supplementary to the public schools and not a substitute for them as are the parochial schools." (Orientals in American Life, by Albert W. Palmer, 1934, p. 51.)

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A better proof of the falsity of the charge is the fact that the Army and Navy have recruited hundreds of graduates of the Japanese-language schools to act as interpreters and teachers of the language. The relocation centers have been combed for them, and the supply has never equalled the demand.

Many of the recruits are now serving in the Pacific Theatre of war, and wherever they have been assigned, they have established an outstanding record of loyalty and devotion to duty.

4. Myth: It was a common practise among families of Japanese origin to send their children to school in Japan, where they were trained for espionage and sabotage.

Fact: Prof. E. K. Strong of Stanford University, who supervised the most thoroughgoing scientific study ever made of the Japanese Americans before the war, wrote in 1934.

"The United States-born have received their education primarily in this country....The fact that only 13 per cent of the second generation have received part or all of their schooling in Japan, coupled with the fact that this preference for Japanese culture is gradually dying out, tends to disprove the contention that 'large numbers of Japanese children....return [from Japan] at a later date loyal and ideal Japanese citizens'." (The Second-Generation Japanese Problem, p. 188).

A WRA study of all American-born citizens of Japanese descent, who were evacuated to relocation centers, showed that 72.7 per cent of them had never been to Japan. Another 14.4 per cent, though they had visited

the Orient, had received no schooling there. Only 12.2 per cent had attended school in Japan for three years, or more. (Note agreement with Prof. Strongs' percentage.)

These figures clearly show that the practice of sending children to Japan for schooling had almost ceased before the outbreak of the war.

Of the total number of relocation center residents who had studied in Japan for three years or more, 26.8 per cent were 40 years of age, or older. Their Japanese schooling had been received before the military clique gained power by assassinating and otherwise overpowering the liberal leaders who prevailed in the Japanese government prior to 1930

The study further reveals that many young men returned to America to avoid service in the Japanese army, and that many are now serving with the Army of the United States in all theaters from Burma and the Philippines to Italy and the Western Front.

To support the charge that American-born Japanese have aided the enemy, the rumor has been circulated that Japanese airmen, forced down in Hawaii during the attack on Pearl Harbor, were found wearing Hawaiian high school rings and carrying Honolulu street car tokens. This rumor was checked by Robert J. Casey, of the Chicago Daily News, who arrived in Honolulu one week after the attack. He interviewed the Navy surgeon in charge of all enemy wounded, who had examined some eight corpses taken from the plane wreckage. According to Casey's report, the surgeon said, "I've heard that story. But I never saw any rings. I never saw any street car tokens. None of the pilots had much of anything in his pockets. None wore any jewelry. Only one had a watch."

5. Myth: The Japanese in California deliberately concentrated in strategic areas to be near important military installations.

Fact: The vast majority of the Japanese who lived near important military installations when the war began, had been settled in the same localities long before they became military sites.

"...The main geographic pattern of Japanese population was fixed many years ago with reference to economic, social and soil conditions. Limited occupational outlets and social pressures encouraged their concentration near their initial points of entry on the Pacific Coast. That these points may now be near certain strategic military and industrial areas is no proof of a diabolical purpose on the part of Japanese Americans." (U. S. Supreme Court Justice Murphy, in Korematsu vs. the United States, p. 19.)

They concentrated around the peripheries of large cities to be near markets for their truck crops, along main highways where they could operate vegetable stands, and in the vicinity of vegetable-packing plants. (See Prejudice, by Carey McWilliams, p. 84.)

The statement has often been made to support the charge that they settled purposefully in strategic areas, that approximately 72 per cent of the California Japanese lived in seven counties: Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Francisco, Alameda, Fresno, San Joaquin, and Santa Clara. Those who have used the statement have usually failed, however, to add that more