

"The complaint that the Japanese 'skin' the land and ruin the orchards is frequently heard. Most of the Japanese are tenants, and tenant farming is likely to have such results. No case can be made against the Japanese as against other tenants, however. On the contrary, while one finds rather numerous instances in which the landowners have been dissatisfied with the Japanese tenants they have had, the general opinion is that the Japanese are good farmers and give rather more than less interest than is usual among tenants to the care and conservation of the properties leased by them. At Sacramento... the president of one large fruit-shipping firm and the treasurer of another said that the Japanese were among the most careful and painstaking orchardists. At Fresno, a prominent American told me that he would rather lease his vineyards to Japanese than to farmers of his own race because they took better care of them. The charge that the Japanese ruin the farms is a charge, which, like many others, one hears less of the closer he gets to the place where the damage is presumed to have taken place. On the whole the Japanese are regarded as good farmers and good tenants." (p. 148.)

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20. Myth: Japanese farmers evacuated from the West Coast have stubbornly refused to release trucks and farm machinery for the use of other farmers who desperately needed such equipment.

Fact: Very little of the farm equipment owned by the Japanese Americans was left idle when they were evacuated. By far the greater part of it was either sold or leased to the tenants who took over the operation of the farms after the owners departed. On May 8, 1942, the Farm Security Administration, which had charge of the disposal of evacuee-owned farm property, reported that satisfactory disposals had been made of the machinery on all but thirteen farms in Exclusion Area No. 1. It was the policy of the FSA to hold the machinery on the land to the extent that it was needed to keep the land in operation.

Typical of the grossly exaggerated stories that have been spread on the West Coast is one reported to the WRA by an implement dealer in Sacramento, who stated that more than 200 farm tractors, owned by Japanese Americans, were standing idle in storage in the Sacramento Valley area, and that he, himself, knew of approximately 50 idle tractors in the city of Sacramento. A representative of the WRA immediately called upon the dealer, and asked him where the tractors were stored and who was custodian of them. As a result the dealer admitted that he knew of only four tractors; the rest of his report had been based on hearsay.

On another occasion, Senator Sheridan Downey sent to the WRA office a copy of a telegram from the Salinas, California, Chamber of Commerce, which stated that some 500 articles of farm equipment, owned by evacuees, was stored in that vicinity. The telegram declared that the use of the equipment was essential if the farmers of that community were to meet their food production goals.

Again, a WRA representative went immediately to the source of the report and sought the assistance of the Chamber of Commerce in checking the accuracy of the information. Implement dealers and many others who were presumed to have knowledge of the equipment were interviewed. This survey

revealed one tractor, two listers, a ten-foot ring roller, and a land chisel which were in storage -- a total of five (not 500) pieces of farm equipment. The Salinas Chamber of Commerce corrected the erroneous information given to Senator Downey, in a second telegram to him, which received only a fraction of the publicity given to the first.

The report was published in West Coast newspapers that some 33,000 Japanese-owned automobiles were in storage and, consequently, that more than 100,000 tires were kept away from persons needing them. An inspection of the records in the motor vehicle departments in Washington, Oregon, California, and Arizona revealed that only 32,977 motor vehicles were registered to Japanese owners before the evacuation; 18,522 of them had been sold to non-Japanese owners; 3,379 were registered to owners whose names were not included in the evacuation lists (probably voluntary evacuees who took the cars with them); 879 were owned by Japanese outside of the exclusion areas; and 174 were owned by evacuees released from relocation centers. Therefore, only 8,923 (not 33,000) vehicles were recorded as owned by people living in the relocation centers. Of this number, many had been left with dealers to be sold, or returned to dealers by purchasers who owned only a small equity in them; others had been sold and the sales had not been recorded.

These incidents reveal the mythical character of the evidence used as a basis for charges that the evacuees stubbornly refused to sell great quantities of idle equipment. It should also be noted that any reluctance on the part of the evacuees to part with such property would have had considerable justification. Many of them expected to return to their West Coast homes, and when they returned they wanted machinery to cultivate their land, and trucks and cars to be used in their work.

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21. Myth: The evacuees in the relocation centers have been pampered and coddled, while Americans imprisoned by Japan have received inhuman treatment.

Fact: This charge, which provided the basis for an especially vicious campaign against the WRA in the early part of 1943, was carefully investigated by Governor Maw of Utah. His comment, after a personal tour of the Central Utah Relocation Center, was reported in the Salt Lake City Tribune, of January 16, 1945, as follows:

"These Japanese are pioneering a project... They're not living the life of Riley and they're not being pampered. It's not luxury when six persons of a family live in a single room. I found that these thousands are not getting more than their share of coffee, sugar, meat, or any other commodity. The ration regulations are rigidly adhered to by the project director's staff."

Every statement made to support the charge that the evacuees have been pampered has been proved to be untrue. In April, 1943, the War Relocation Authority issued a memorandum refuting a series of accusations published by the Denver Post which was spearheading the attack. Typical of the accusations was a statement that WRA had stored at Heart Mountain "enough food to supply the 10,300 Japs there for three years, seven months and two weeks."

An actual inventory at the center, made two days after the Post statement was published on April 24, revealed that the food supply was sufficient to last only sixty days, which was the minimum period for safety.

On July 17, 1943, the War Department and the War Relocation Authority issued a joint statement through the Director of War Mobilization which read, in part, as follows: "A portion of the food (used in the relocation centers) is produced by the evacuees themselves on government-owned or government-leased land within the project area; some perishable commodities are purchased locally; and practically all other food is brought through the Quartermaster Depots of the Army. All rationing restrictions applicable to the civilian population are strictly followed and two meatless days are observed each week... Beef served at the centers is third grade and no fancy meats of any kind are furnished. The cost of feeding at the centers over the past several months has ranged from 34 to 42 cents per person per day."

The following description of a relocation center was written by a well-known author who investigated the pampering charges in the summer of 1943:

"You may think you have gotten into an Army camp by mistake, for the barracks were built according to Regular Army design and construction. True, they were built hastily of green lumber which split apart. The floor boards are not close together...The land is silt, so when the dust storms come, the dust seeps through the crevices into the barracks...

"The barracks are in blocks. The buildings have been divided into 'apartments', and about 260 men, women, and children live in an average block. The 'apartments' are rooms twenty by twenty-five feet in size, and families of from two to five or more occupy each of them. In each block there are two latrines, one for the men, one for the women; one laundry room, one ironing room. In each block there is a mess hall -- for food is supplied by the government through the Army Quartermaster Corps and eating is communal...

"It is not quite so grim as it was in the beginning. The evacuees, young and old, hearty and frail, had come from the moderate West Coast climate to this desert when the temperature was 120 degrees. The government had offered them their rooms, cots, straw with which to make mattresses, and Army blankets. They had no furniture. They needed soap, brooms, pails, everything. Most of them had to make furniture out of scraps of lumber left when the barracks were finished. After a while those who had furniture at home got some of it moved here. Some got plywood from a mail-order house and partitioned their apartments. In some blocks the men secured air conditioners for the mess halls. The inevitable Japanese gardens began to bloom in window boxes and around the blocks and between them. Most of the comfort you see has been created by the Japanese themselves; it is not donated by the government.... At best, this is not the lavish luxury in which many of us have heard that the War Relocation Authority has pillowed the Japanese...

"There is a swimming pool which is merely a wide place in the ditch. From the uproar..., I had expected a marble pool with umbrella-shaded tables beside it and liveried waiters serving champagne. But it's only

a ditch and there is no alcoholic beverages of any sort... Indeed, there isn't even any soft drink or candy to be had, as a rule...And recreation is whatever the people made for themselves..." (The Truth About Jap Camps, by Maxine Davis, Liberty Magazine, Aug. 7, 1943.)

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