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THE JAPANESE FAMILY IN AMERICA

By THE BUREAU OF SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH
COLORADO RIVER WAR RELOCATION CENTER

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IN THE present article we have endeavored to condense a complicated subject into a few pages. As a result we have made many omissions and have not pointed out many significant interrelationships. Almost every sentence is open to qualification. Furthermore, all pertinent data are not available on the subjects we discuss, and not all that are available can be published at this time. Within these limitations, we have attempted to present what seem to us the best-established facts and most salient points bearing on the status of the Japanese family in America.

Unique Position of the Japanese

Although none of the people in the United States have been untouched by the events since Pearl Harbor, the Japanese *as a civilian group* have been the most drastically affected. The change in their geographical distribution between December 1941 and October 1942 indicates the extent of their dislocation. At the time of Pearl Harbor, about 112,000 Japanese, or 88.5 per cent of the total Japanese population in the United States, lived in the Pacific coastal region.[2] A year later, with the exception of a few hospitalized cases, they had disappeared from that area. A small number were interned for anti-American activities, but the vast majority, against whom there were no charges, had been moved through wholesale evacuation by the Government into ten relocation centers administered by a civil agency, the War Relocation Authority, and guarded by the Army. These centers are in inland areas of California, and in Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and Arkansas. By June 1943, after spending some months in the centers, about 10,000 were resettling in the Middle Western states, hoping to become reabsorbed into the life of the Nation.

On the surface, this statement of geographical change may not imply dislocation more drastic than that affecting individual families of war workers and soldiers. They too have moved great distances to settle under unfamiliar and unfavorable conditions and have faced readjustment to life in strange communities. The overcrowded barracks of the evacuated Japanese, the common mess halls and community washrooms, created problems not too dissimilar to those found in overpopulated areas around big defense plants.

However, other factors entered the picture in the case of the Japanese and made their problem unique. Their movement was a forced evacuation on the grounds that they were dangerous to the Nation and that it was unsafe to leave any of them on the Pacific coast because some might aid the enemy through sabotage or espionage. It was also said that they were moved for their own protection, for fear of popular demonstrations of antipathy.

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[1] The Sociological Research project of the Colorado River War Relocation Center is directed at improving administration by the use of applied psychology and social anthropology. It is sponsored jointly by the U. S. Navy, the U. S. Indian Service, and the War Relocation Authority. The personnel is as follows: Lt. Alexander H. Leighton, (MC) USNR—Coordinator, E. H. Spicer, Ph.D., Elizabeth Colson, M.A., Tom Sasaki, A.B., Chica Sugino, A.B., Hisako Fujii, Misao Furuta, Iwao Ishino, Mary Kinoshita, June Kushino, Yoshiharu Matsumoto, Florence Mohri, Akiko Nishimoto, Jyuichi Sato, James Sera, Gene Sogioka, George Yamaguchi, Toshio Yatsushiro, and Kazue Uyeno.

[2] 77th Cong., 2d sess., House Report No. 2124, 91–92, 1942.

The Japanese, approximately two-thirds of whom are citizens of the United States by birth, interpreted this as a wholesale rejection by other Americans. The rejection was the more bitter because it singled them out from all other groups and placed American *citizens* of Japanese ancestry in a position inferior to and more suspect than German and Italian *enemy aliens* who were treated on an individual basis. They could understand the evacuation of the alien Japanese as a wartime measure, but the indiscriminate inclusion of American citizens and the mass nature of the evacuation left them suspicious of the motives prompting the measure. They were quick to equate this with earlier attacks against them as a racial group, and regarded it as a political and economic move which pressure groups had foisted upon the rest of the Nation. When their citizenship was placed in a special category, they felt that the way was opened for further discrimination against them, that might go to they knew not what limits.

Added to this was the fact that although the Federal Government had set up agencies to protect their property, forced sales and other events incidental to evacuation wiped out much of the economic security they had succeeded in obtaining after years of pioneering. Many were left without means for making a new start in another area, and the older people felt that they were too far along in years to begin at the bottom again.

Thus, by the time the evacuees arrived in the relocation centers, they were filled with insecurity and pessimism regarding their future. This was increased by new attacks against them in the press, which demanded that legislative action be taken to deprive those born in the United States of their citizenship and to confiscate Japanese-owned properties such as farm equipment.

The special adjustment problem of the Japanese, then, is due to the fact that their relocation was a forced one which they interpreted as discrimination and rejection and which left them more uncertain of the future and therefore more insecure than other groups. This is to be contrasted with the war worker or the soldier, who is rewarded for his discomforts and sacrifices by a feeling of fuller participation and acceptance in the national life and an increase in prestige, if not in income.

MINORITY GROUPS IN THE UNITED STATES

Though the evacuation itself was a result of the war with Japan, the factors making it possible were already present and were only brought to focus by Pearl Harbor and the events since then. They ultimately spring from the status of minority groups in the United States.

It is a basic postulate of social science that no inherent differences in biological stocks of the human species exist that make it impossible for individuals of one stock to assimilate the culture practiced by another. An individual is born with a capacity to react in a great variety of ways, and assumes the behavioral patterns of those surrounding him because he is rewarded for conforming to their standards. Alternative ways of behavior are repressed by punishment or because they are not rewarding to the individual.

By and large, the United States, with its pride in the "melting pot," has accepted this postulate for those resembling in physical appearance the majority white group. The result has been the development of comparatively few barriers to full participation in American life and therefore thorough exposure to American culture. Such is the force of the impact of this culture through schools and other influences in the environment outside the home that even a determined effort on the part of foreign parents to hold their children to their own standard has little effect. Within a generation or two, children of white immigrants become thoroughly assimilated into American culture.

In some cases, however, Americans have helped to prevent the full assimilation of a group by walling it off in society and claiming that racial heredity is more important than the factor of culture. By discrimination and enforced segregation, they have denied such groups full participation in American culture, have strengthened the position of the immigrant or native Indian parents in their natural and often unconscious attempts to pass on their culture to their children, and have created definite barriers to assimilation. Economic and prestige rewards are minimized, and contacts with the majority group, which are the means whereby the new culture can be acquired, become punishing for the members of the minority. They tend to withdraw from such contacts back into association with members of their own group, where they do not meet with rebuff. When this has resulted in a slower rate of assimilation, the original attackers are inclined to believe this is proof of their assertion that the group is unassimilable, and by this, justify further discrimination.

In effect, children of European immigrants are told, "Only behave as we do and you will be rewarded with complete acceptance and full opportunity to gain every economic and prestige advantage that we ourselves have." Children of other immigrant groups are made to feel, "Since you do not resemble us physically, there will always be barriers against you no matter how closely you resemble us in other ways, and these barriers will increase as you grow up." This was in large measure the experience of the Japanese in the United States.

BACKGROUND OF JAPANESE IN CALIFORNIA

The majority of the Japanese, arriving about the turn of the century, settled in California, where they fell heir to pre-existing anti-Oriental prejudice because the state had just passed through a period of strong feeling against the Chinese. The Japanese were accused of lowering the "American standard of living" and of unfair competition with white laborers, but the chief argument used against them was that they were "unassimilable" because of "race." On this basis, extremists like McClatchy fought to keep California a "white man's country," and demanded that the Japanese be restricted from privileges enjoyed by other immigrants and that future immigration be prohibited. In 1920 he argued:

> There are three main reasons why it is useless to attempt the making of good American citizens of Japanese material, save, of course, in exceptional individual instances. The Japanese cannot, may not and will not provide desirable material for our citizenship. First, the Japanese cannot assimilate and make good citizens, because their racial characteristics, heredity, and religion prevent; second, the Japanese may not assimilate and make good citizens because their Government, claiming all Japanese, no matter where born, as its citizens, does not permit; third, the Japanese will not assimilate and make good citizens.[8]

The result of this and similar influences was the successful exclusion of further Japanese immigration in 1924, denial to Japanese of the privilege of naturalization, passage of state laws forbidding Japanese aliens to own land in the state and forbidding intermarriage between Japanese and Caucasians, and legislated but never generally enforced bills to segregate Japanese children (citizens for the most part) in the public schools of the state. There were also well-recognized social, occupational, and economic barriers which operated to restrict the Japanese in their relations with the white group and which led them to associate to a large extent with other Japanese.

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[8] House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, pt. 1, p. 240.

In spite of these obstacles, the second generation made tremendous strides in Americanization. In the schools where there was comparatively little prejudice, they were outstanding students and often leaders in extracurricular activities. Many became Christians, and to compete with the Christian churches, the Buddhist groups took on such features of Western culture as Young Buddhist Associations, Buddhist Sunday schools, and regular services.

A notable characteristic of the social relations of the Japanese in California was that many had special friends among the white people who would often stand up for them as individuals and protect them. It was largely from such white friends—who were in a sense patrons—that the Japanese children acquired their goals and ideals in American life, as well as manners and language. Their Americanization was also due to the fact that they did not feel the prejudice against them too strongly during their formative years. It was only as adults that they realized the full force of the economic, occupational, and social barriers. For this reason, their frustration was all the greater when they found themselves cut off from the things for which their education and social conditioning had fitted them and to which their emotions and expectations were attuned.

This oversimplified sketch of the background of the California Japanese gives some clues as to why it was possible for them to become the subject of evacuation when other groups of enemy aliens and their children were not. In spite of the existence of the German-American Bunds and evidence that attempts were being made to indoctrinate the young of this group with Nazi ideology, the Germans and their children were treated on an individual basis. This is not to imply that those who knew the Japanese were unable to distinguish the thoroughly loyal, but only that an insufficient number did know them, and no group was mustered that could successfully refute the charge that it was impossible to tell.

AFTER THE WAR BEGAN

During the weeks that immediately followed the raid on Pearl Harbor, things went reasonably well for the Japanese in America. The newspapers called for moderation, ministers preached against anti-Japanese actions, and the Fair Practice Committee of Northern California which had been organized to combat race prejudice reported that on the whole the situation was fairly healthy.[4]

In January 1942, however, the situation changed and there appeared a growing desire to have all Japanese removed from the coast. This seemed correlated with the repeated successes of the enemy in the Pacific. Wild rumors of espionage and sabotage in Hawaii and on the mainland spread far and rapidly. Statements from reliable sources later showed that these rumors were unfounded, but by that time the damage they had brought to the Japanese in America was already accomplished.

In this situation the Japanese family and community life became subject to forces of disintegration. Great numbers of the alien heads of families were picked up for questioning and detained, and most of those who were left were afraid they would be taken at any time. The number of men who were subsequently released suggests that most were harmless. Nevertheless, their temporary incarceration prevented their being on hand to guide their families through the uncertain times before and during evacuation. Boys and women were left to run farms in critical stages of the crops, and there was considerable loss due to inexperience and insufficient help. Jobholders were dropped from their positions, and a particularly severe blow was the discharge of Japanese-American employees from state and municipal civil service. Such services had always been considered secure from racial prejudice.

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[4] 77th Cong., 2d sess., House Report No. 2124, 149–51, 1942.

The American citizens of Japanese ancestry feared for their alien parents and at the same time were placed under a great strain by the burden of responsibility that fell on their shoulders. This was the more difficult to bear because the majority of the second generation are still in their twenties, relatively inexperienced, and they were uncertain what to do in the crisis. Soon disagreements and strife split their society and their families. Some of the younger generation blamed the older generation for their failure to become Americanized. The older people blamed the younger ones for not having utilized the opportunities their parents had given them to obtain a more secure place in American society. Young men attempted to volunteer but were refused at that time, and soon many of the thousands already in the Army were being let out with honorable discharges. Some groups made overt demonstrations of their loyalty by going out of their way to co-operate with the Government, and they were accused by others of promoting evacuation instead of working to prevent it. Some were frankly pro-Japan. Mutual suspicion became a destructive force and there were widespread rumors that every community had Japanese informers who turned in lists of innocent names in order to make money and ingratiate themselves with the authorities.

Every day the future became more uncertain and more threatening, with contradictory reports and notices appearing in the papers. It seemed impossible to make any plans to secure crops or business. Even evacuation could not be counted on until it was almost at hand. Restrictions appeared and increased. Farmers were uncertain whether or not to spend their resources planting new crops, fearing that if they were not there to harvest, they would lose everything they had. Curfew orders hampered produce deliveries to market. College students began to drop out in order to be with their families through the storms of uncertainty.

EVACUATION

Finally, on February 19, 1942, the coming of evacuation was officially announced, although its extent became apparent only by degrees. The people stored their goods, leased their land, and tried to find friends who would take over their growing crops. They felt that they lost heavily at this time through unscrupulous persons who took advantage of their position, their bewilderment, and their lack of leadership. All attempts to discover where they would be sent, what the accommodations would be like, what they should bring with them, and what the medical facilities would be, met with a wide variety of answers, many of them diametrically opposed. The certainty of evacuation increased rather than diminished other uncertainties. Just as the white population on the coast had been a prey to the wildest rumors concerning the Japanese, so they too were victimized by equally wild rumors which seemed to "explain" the hardships they were enduring and made their difficulties appear far more horrible and threatening than they really were.

Within the relocation centers, influences of disorganization have continued to operate on the family in spite of the return of many fathers. Lack of privacy, communal mess halls, and crowded quarters altered home life profoundly. Parents felt they were losing authority over their children since they had little to offer them, and attempts at discipline became neighborhood events. They believed the children were growing wild and picking up all kinds of bad behavior through having to live in close proximity to all kinds of people. Juvenile gangs who obeyed nobody but themselves appeared.

Problems such as whether or not alien parents should seek repatriation to Japan, or whether or not a son should join the American Army (when volunteering again became open), cut some families asunder much as the Civil War split relationships. With the opening up of opportunities for jobs in the East and the Middle West, thousands of young persons have struck out to seek their fortunes and become as rapidly as possible again members of the American Nation. Others hesitate. What will become of their aging parents? What will happen to them and their families if they do go out? Almost every day, articles appear in the press denouncing the Japanese in America, and rumors of Japanese who are already out being murdered surge through the centers in waves. Some believe the Government is determined to empty the relocation centers come what may, and fear they will be crushed between this move and popular antagonism on the outside.

FACTORS STRENGTHENING FAMILY SOLIDARITY

Not all influences, however, have been in the direction of disintegrating family life. Members formerly living apart have come together to face evacuation in each other's company. This has been aided by a definite government policy to keep families together. The geographic isolation of the centers has reduced contacts with American culture and current events to a minimum. Young people who formerly thought of themselves only as Americans are now more under the influence of the culture of their alien parents. This is especially true of the younger children, who have no white playmates and who are being left in the centers as their older brothers and sisters move out seeking jobs.

Another factor contributing to family solidarity is that when people are rejected and made insecure, they must turn in some direction, and turning back to one's first security—parents—is a natural trend. The parents themselves also turn back to their early security, which was of course Japan. In the proportion that their hope in America is lost, so their hope in Japan is increased. There are traditionally well-established cultural patterns for the strengthening of family unity in times of stress, patterns which strongly emphasized filial duty and honor.

This fact has often been used as a point to prove that Japanese-Americans are never really citizens. Such an argument, however, is naïvely literal. It ignores what we have already stated about the assimilation of the second-generation Japanese, and it supposes that through some almost magical quality of the Japanese parents, their children are inhibited from psychological and social maturity. The argument displays lack of knowledge of the real and complex relationship between parents and children, in which there are many forces of attraction and repulsion.

However, to the extent that filial duty is a trait of Japanese family life, it is a potent force for the creation of good citizens. It seems, therefore, that the problem of the Japanese family is a quest for security in the face of strongly demoralizing and disintegrating influences, and from this various reactions occur. In some, disintegration actually takes place with features of apathy and confusion, strife and child gangs. In others, there is a renewal of effort to be absorbed into American life and be identified with it. With still others, there is appearing a kind of family solidarity that is protective, reactionary, and atavistic.

SUMMARY

As a result of the war, the Japanese family in America has been subjected to an unusual number of stresses, many of which consist in an increase of previously existing strains due to their status as a minority group. The principal influences arising since hostilities began are:

1. Following December 7, 1941, a large number of families lost the leadership of their male heads through temporary detention for investigation or internment for the duration of the war. At the same time, because of various restrictions and popular reaction, economic security was threatened or destroyed. As a result, responsibility fell on the young and inexperienced shoulders of American-born children. This shift had been going on to some extent previously, but now it was much accelerated. Difference of opinion, fear, and confusion split both communities and families.

2. As evacuation approached there was an increase in family solidarity as relatives moved together to be with one another wherever they were sent.

3. In the relocation centers, families were faced with totally new conditions of life. The people lived close together in crowded barracks, sharing eating and toilet facilities in common and with almost no opportunity for family privacy. The role of the father as breadwinner and the mother as housewife was gone. Child discipline, family work and rituals, and even the role of the home itself were greatly altered. The people felt that family life was disintegrating. The later government policy of getting as many people as possible out of relocation centers tended further to split some families as the older sons and daughters left, while the first-generation parents and younger children remained behind. Difference of opinion as to whether one should look toward America or Japan in the future has been a very important dividing influence.

4. At the same time that these factors were operating, others were contributing to increased family unity. Emotional reaction against evacuation and discrimination, the geographic isolation of the centers, lack of white contacts and great increase in Japanese contacts, and the drawing together of parents and younger children because of the departure of the older Americanized siblings, have all tended to bring families closer together.

CONCLUSION

Not long ago, one of us was speaking with a high military officer who has had considerable experience with Japanese-Americans in the Army. He was asked if he found them loyal, and he replied by pointing to the tradition of family loyalty and commented that it disposed them to develop great devotion to their officers and duty. He ended by saying, "There are no more loyal soldiers to be found anywhere, *but you must give them something to be loyal to.*"

In our opinion, this epitomizes the problem of the Japanese in America.