

*Bigelow*

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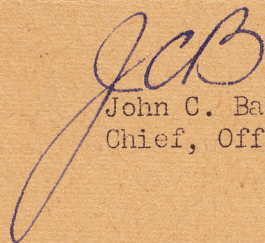
November 19, 1942

To: All Project and Regional Directors  
Attention: REPORTS OFFICERS  
Subject: Newspaper attack on Japanese Americans by Marjorie Young

On November 1 there appeared in a number of Sunday editions papers given to sensationalism an article by Marjorie Young entitled, "America's Strangest Problem: What to do with thousands of new babies here" in which the proposal is made that all men be separated from all women and the existing children have their American citizenship taken away.

This proposal is made as a climax to an article made up of remarks on a visit to an assembly center and full of half truths about Japanese culture into which the writer manages to infuse a steady implication that every last person of Japanese ancestry in the United States is in some mysterious manner a Shintoist, a Mikado worshiper, and a sinister influence in America.

The accompanying memorandum by Mr. Embree is NOT intended for publication and we do NOT recommend that any reports officer take the initiative in bringing it to the attention of newspaper editors or reporters. It was prepared merely to provide you with ammunition in case you should be asked about the charges contained in Mrs. Young's article.

  
John C. Baker  
Chief, Office of Reports



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Washington, D. C.

November 13, 1942

To: John C. Baker, Chief, Office of Reports

Subject: Newspaper attack on Japanese Americans by Marjorie Young

The following brief analysis of Mrs. Young's article might be of interest to you and to reports officers on the projects.

First of all, the author falls into the typical error of thinking that culture is inherited. Second, she uses a picture of the surrender at Corregidor with the heading "How the Japs take care of our boys over there" and contrasts it with our treatment of American residents of Japanese ancestry in an assembly center. (A popular but fallacious comparison. The proper picture to contrast with the Corregidor photo would be one of Japanese prisoners taken at Guadalcanal. Evacuees, of course, are not at all comparable to prisoners of war).

The author's references to Japanese culture might be difficult to discuss if one were not familiar with Japanese culture. They are discussed here in the order of their appearance in the article.

1. Japanese christening ceremony. When a child is 3 or 5 days old in Japan, there is usually a naming ceremony at which time friends and relatives are called in to drink and celebrate. Most of the older, first-generation mothers have followed this custom, though on a restricted scale, in California. It is quite possible that some young American-born evacuees are actually ignorant of this ceremony and not merely "pretending" ignorance as Mrs. Young implies. At any rate, the naming ceremony is simply an old folk custom with no sinister connections.

2. There is of course no evidence for "plenty boy babies" being born to Japanese in war years. Only a moron could take a remark like this seriously.

3. The remark about differential marriage fees for Japanese and Filipinos in Manila is one of those things which are quite uncheckable. It bears all the earmarks of a rumor.

4. Shinto. To Mrs. Young the Shinto religion seems to be stronger than any other religion in the world since it is, according to her, biologically inherited.

Briefly, Shinto includes the vast body of native Japanese beliefs in deities of nature--the water, the sun, the forest, the river, etc.,



as well as patron deities of villages and towns. Furthermore, it includes the early mythology whereby the present Emperor is descended from the sun goddess. In Japan most people belong to a Buddhist sect and at the same time observe rituals in connection with local deities and spirits as well as those associated with State Shinto.

Buddhism, being connected with family affairs and especially funerals and memorial services, has come across the ocean in much better shape than Shinto which is so closely allied with local places and spirits. As a result, in California and Hawaii before December 7 there were dozens of Buddhist temples and priests for every one Shinto shrine. Shinto as it came across the seas came in two forms, both appealing chiefly to the elder generation:

(a) Faith Healers like Inari priests who cure by the aid of Inari, god of rice and good fortune, whose messenger is the fox.

(b) Official Shintoists, the super-patriotic priests who teach the divinity of the Japanese, the sacredness of the Emperor etc. It was with good reason that all Shinto priests of this latter category were interned when war broke out. But what is not often realized is the fact that only a small fraction of the Japanese in California and Hawaii regularly attended such state Shinto shrines. Nearly all the active religious practices of older Japanese in this country are either Buddhist or popular Shintoist such as the faith-healing Inari priests. (In this connection, see chapter 7 of Suye Mura and chapter 9 of Acculturation Among the Japanese of Kona, Hawaii by J. F. Embree).

5. "For years Japan has sent her people . . . . establishing colonies for the mother country."

It is common but nonetheless erroneous to look upon the Japanese in the United States and Hawaii as colonists comparable to the people sent from Japan to the Philippines during the past 15 years. The fact is that the Japanese government for 250 years prohibited any subjects from leaving Japan on penalty of death. During the first decades after Perry's visit this rule was relaxed only slightly and the first group of contract laborers to come to Hawaii were virtually smuggled out of Japan by contractors for the Hawaiian sugar planters. During the whole first period of Japanese immigration to Hawaii and the U. S. the Japanese government was much more concerned with keeping her people at home than with sending them abroad. It was not until after the last world war that this policy definitely changed and the government began deliberately encouraging emigration overseas especially to the mandated territories in the South Seas, the Celebes, and the Philippines.

6. Again the birth rate. Here it may be noted (a) that the birth rate of the second generation Japanese, like that of second generation immigrant groups from Europe, is much less than that of its parents, (b) that as the younger generation achieves higher economic



and social status, its birth rate also declines, a tendency observable in all population groups in the United States. In other words, there is nothing peculiar or sinister in the Japanese American birth rate to distinguish it from that of other immigrant groups.

7. The incident involving Mrs. Young's attempts to question people about their gardens deserves only brief comment. It may be worthwhile to philosophize on the mysterious qualities inculcated in the Oriental mind through training in painting and miniature gardening, but such speculation has little bearing on the American Japanese. Most of the older people in the United States come from poor parents in Japan and would hardly have had the opportunities for an upper class education--the only kind that goes in for extended courses in such leisure time activities as miniature gardens and tea ceremonies.

8. The Zodiac. The Asiatic Zodiac is common to both China and Japan, in fact Japan acquired her use of it some centuries ago from China. The 12 animal symbols for months are much used in Japanese and Chinese astrology just as those of the European Zodiac are used by astrologists in this country.

The 3 monkeys of Nikko are the famous "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" simians. They are not frequently found by the roadside. If they symbolize India, China, and Japan, they do so only to a few literary people. Furthermore, if this has any political significance, it could well mean that the Chinese as well as the Japanese "plot their years ahead".

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Articles such as this of Marjorie Young's hew dangerously close to the Hitler line. One of his chief aims, well served by this article, is to divide minority group against minority group, thus weakening the American home front.

Attacks on the Americans of Japanese ancestry on grounds of race make Americans of African, Jewish, German, or Chinese ancestry uneasy and simply corroborate Japan's charges that we talk democracy and act racism.

All precedents established by our treatment of Japanese Americans can later be used against other American groups just as Hitler's precedents established in his persecution of the Jews were later used against Socialists, Catholics, and others (e.g. internment, removal of citizenship, etc.)

John F. Embree  
Senior Archivist