

IMMIGRANTS AND CITIZENS OF
JAPANESE ORIGIN



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Immigrants and Citizens of Japanese Origin

By SHOTARO FRANK MIYAMOTO

THE adjustment of the Japanese minority to the United States has long been complicated, not only by the differences of racial and ethnic heritage, but also by the variable trends of international relations between the United States and Japan.¹ Frequently, the desire of the United States Government to preserve diplomatic relations with Japan tempered the tendency in the American public, especially of the Pacific coast, to express racial and cultural antagonism against the Japanese in their midst; but when international relations became strained, as they did during the Sino-Japanese War, the position of the Japanese minority was made doubly difficult.

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor naturally precipitated hostile tendencies latent in all these differences, so it is not surprising that the status today of the Japanese in this country is less enviable than that of any other minority group. To one who has lived in intimate contact with the Japanese here, the doubt of their loyalty expressed in the recommendations of the Tolson Committee² and in the decision of the Western Defense Command to evacuate both alien and citizen Japanese seems unjustified, but it is understandable that the situation which confronted them strongly inclined them to their view.

This situation drew its characteristics chiefly from the historical tendency on

the Pacific coast to distinguish categorically between "American" whites and "non-American" Japanese. Two factors which contributed much to this categorical division were, first, the concentration of Japanese along the Pacific coast; and, second, the history of anti-Japanese activity in this region. These conditions, when related to the danger from fifth columnists in modern warfare and to the mode of attack which Japan chose at the outset, created serious doubt following the outbreak of war with Japan as to the desirability of allowing the Japanese to remain on the Pacific coast.

POPULATION DISTRIBUTION

In 1940 the Japanese population in the United States was 126,947 (exclusive of 157,905 in Hawaii³), as shown in Table 1. The Japanese constitute

TABLE 1—JAPANESE POPULATION OF U. S. IN 1940 BY CERTAIN DIVISIONS AND STATES^{3a}

Region	Number	Per cent
<i>United States</i>	<i>126,947</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Pacific States	112,353	88.5
California	(93,717)	(73.8) ^a
Oregon	(4,071)	(3.2)
Washington	(14,565)	(11.5)
Remaining States	14,594	11.5

^a Per cent of total Japanese in the United States.

less than one-tenth of one per cent of the total population, but their concentration on the Pacific coast clearly marked them out as a group. This is vividly reflected in their population dis-

³ Data from Release of 16th Census of the U. S., 1940, Series P-9, No. 5.

^{3a} *Ibid.*

¹ Forrest E. LaViolette, "The American-Born Japanese and the World Crisis," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. VII, No. 4 (Nov. 1941), pp. 517-27. This article gives a careful analysis of these influences.

² Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration, *Preliminary Report and Recommendations on Problems of Evacuation of Citizens and Aliens From Military Areas*. H. Rept., 77th Cong., 2d sess., March 19, 1942.

tribution. Not only are 88.5 per cent of the total Japanese population in the three Pacific States, but 73.8 per cent of all Japanese are in California alone. Still more striking is the fact that ten counties of the Pacific States having the largest Japanese population include 64.2 per cent of all Japanese; and Los Angeles County alone has 29.1 per cent of all Japanese in the United States.

REASONS FOR CONCENTRATION

Carey McWilliams, indicating an important reason for the concentration, declares, "The Little Tokyos in California, for example, were premised upon a too narrow economic base."⁴ The figures on occupational distribution bear this out, for in 1940, of 48,691 Japanese workers over fourteen years of age in California, Oregon, and Washington, 45.2 per cent were in agriculture, 23.6 per cent in wholesale and retail trades, 17.1 per cent in personal services, only 4.1 per cent in manufacturing, and 10 per cent in all other occupations.⁵

The Japanese are primarily agriculturalists, but it must be emphasized that they specialize within agriculture, particularly in truck gardening, for which their physiological and psychological make-up seems well suited. Not only do the Japanese grow from 30 to 35 per cent by value of all commercial crops grown in California, but, as a result of specialization, they grow from 50 to 90 or more per cent of crops like snap beans, celery, strawberries, cauliflower, spinach, and tomatoes. Similar conditions hold for Washington and Oregon.⁶

⁴ Ernest Colwell, Carey McWilliams, and Louis Wirth, "Aliens in Our Midst," *The University of Chicago Round Table*, No. 217, May 10, 1942, p. 21.

⁵ Statistical Branch of Wartime Civil Control Administration, Western Defense Command and Fourth Army, Bull. No. 7, April 13, 1942, p. 1.

⁶ Select Committee Investigating National

There is specialization, too, in the wholesale and retail trades and in personal services, for the Japanese are principally engaged in the operation of fruit and vegetable markets, groceries, hotels, restaurants, and domestic services. These occupations draw their workers to large cities or their vicinity, which in part explains the concentration of Japanese around cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle.

The Little Tokyos were premised on a narrow economic base, but the narrow economic base was premised on Japanese tradition and the conditions of optimum competitive strength of Japanese within the American economy. The family enterprise, which has been an outstanding feature of the economic system of modern Japan, was retained by the Japanese migrants. With this background they fitted themselves into the American economy at those points where they were least vulnerable to antagonism and where their method of family enterprise gave them the greatest advantage. The occupations which the Japanese have entered are largely those which can be conducted as family enterprise. It should also be pointed out that proletarians who are characteristically uprooted and mobile are absent from the economic structure of Japanese communities, while small entrepreneurs closely identified with the least mobile middle class are predominantly present.

A second factor determining the population distribution was the sentimental and kinship attachments to Japan. A large proportion of the immigrants came with the attitude of "birds

Defense Migration, *Findings and Recommendations on Evacuation of Enemy Aliens and Others From Prohibited Military Zones*. H. Rept., 77th Cong., 2d sess., May 1942, pp. 117-38. (Hereafter cited as Fourth Interim Report of the Tolson Committee.)

of passage," and due to difficulties of adjustment to a culture and race distinctly different from their own, they persisted in this attitude to some degree even when it was clear that few would actually return to Japan. It was short-sighted of the immigrant Japanese to retain this orientation to Japan, for it hindered the process of assimilation; but, on the other hand, widespread anti-Japanese feeling created circumstances unfavorable to rapid assimilation.

Thus, a third factor contributing to the concentration of Japanese population was the ineligibility of alien Japanese for naturalization,⁷ and their consequent weakness in fighting anti-Japanese agitation. The alien land laws, passed in California in 1913 and since legislated in several states, prohibit the ownership of land by aliens ineligible for citizenship.⁸ Laws such as these created a profound sense of insecurity and unwantedness, and did much to raise social barriers between whites and Japanese. The most unfortunate consequence of the ineligibility for naturalization was that it forced the alien Japanese to seek support from the Japanese Government in order to maintain their interests, and failed to allow participation in the American governmental process by which alone understanding and active interest in the institution could have been achieved.

STRUCTURE OF COMMUNITIES

The effect of these forces was to keep the Japanese largely within their communities. The structure of these

⁷ *Documental History of Law Cases Affecting the Japanese in the United States, 1916-1924*. Compiled by the Consulate General of Japan, San Francisco, 1925. See the "Ozawa Case," pp. 1-120. See also Yamato Ichihashi, *Japanese in the United States* (Stanford University: Stanford University Press, 1932), pp. 261-82.

⁸ Ichihashi, cited in note 7, pp. 298-318.

communities was considerably influenced by the ineligibility for citizenship of part of the population, for it stratified the group into the foreign-born generation without citizenship and the native-born generation with citizenship. This stratification was made especially distinct by the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, which broke off the inflow of alien Japanese, with the result that there were none to replace the disappearing alien generation. Of 138,834 Japanese in the United States in 1930, 51.2 per cent were foreign-born and 48.2 per cent were native-born; but of 126,947 Japanese in 1940, only 37.3 per cent were foreign-born and 62.7 per cent were native-born.⁹ In 1940 the median age of foreign-born Japanese in the Pacific States was 50.1 years,¹⁰ and the median age of native-born Japanese is estimated at about 19 years. (The terms "Issei," first generation, and "Nisei," second generation, will hereafter be used.)

Because of the youthfulness of the Nisei and their economic dependence on the Issei heretofore, the Issei maintained authority in the community and had the greater influence in shaping its life. The communities were in part a reconstruction of the system of social relationships characteristic of Japanese village life. The tradition of collective obligation with its locus in the family, extending out to the kinship group, the *ken* (prefectural) group, and the community as a whole, was re-established here.

JAPANESE ORGANIZATIONS

The central organization co-ordinating the activities of a community was the Japanese Association, organized na-

⁹ Data from Release of Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940, Series P-9, No. 5.

¹⁰ Calculated from Table 4 in the Fourth Interim Report of the Tolson Committee, p. 95.

tionally as the Japanese Association of North America. Roughly speaking, it combined the functions of town council with limited authority, chamber of commerce, and social service agency. Its membership was voluntary, and it was financed through nominal dues and donations. Although most families subscribed to it as a matter of course, only relatively few actively participated in it, except when community programs were undertaken.

The significance of the organization today lies in the fact that the Federal Bureau of Investigation regarded the Japanese Association as one of the dangerous groups in the Japanese communities and apprehended most of its leaders. Such a view overlooks the service which the association rendered in adjusting immigrants to American society, but there was undeniably a contradiction in the policy of the association that was bound to cause suspicion among Americans. On the one hand, it vigorously supported Americanization programs, community chest drives, Red Cross funds, and sales of liberty bonds; on the other hand, it gave active support to the Japanese point of view, especially in the Sino-Japanese War. Apparently, the organization could neither resolve the contradiction nor decide which policy would best serve the interests of the community.

Numerous business associations organized the communities along occupational lines, and functioned to minimize competition within the group and mobilize for action against threats from outside the group. The *kenjinkai* (prefectural associations), which were social groups based on provincial ties in Japan, promoted social and mutual-aid relations on a larger scale than was possible within kinship groups.¹¹ By

¹¹ Fumiko Fukuoka, *Mutual Life and Aid Among the Japanese in Southern California With Special Reference to Los Angeles*, Mas-

their very nature, organizations like these, as well as the Japanese newspapers, the Japanese-language schools, the Buddhist churches, and even the Japanese Christian churches, tended to introvert the communities and make them appear alien in American eyes.

THE NISEI POSITION

The forces that shaped Nisei life are similar to those that influenced the Issei, except that the Nisei are American by training and citizenship and show a natural sympathy for American life and custom. But with them, too, there existed the uncertainty as to who was their protector, the United States or Japan. The ambiguity of their position was reflected in the problems of dual citizenship and of the Japanese-language schools. Due to conflicts in the laws of nationality of Japan and the United States, the Nisei formerly were from birth automatically registered as citizens of two nations. In 1924 the Japanese law was changed, and since then the majority of Nisei have not registered with the Japanese Government or have withdrawn their Japanese citizenship;¹² but of those who retained their dual status, a large number seemed troubled by the question of whether or not they could find desirable economic and social opportunities in the United States. Japanese citizenship, to them, was something on which to fall back in an emergency. Similarly, the purpose of the Japanese-language schools, ineffective though they have been in teaching the language or anything else, was conceived to give the Nisei a tool for economic and social adjustment.

Only in recent years have the Nisei

ter's thesis, University of Southern California, 1937.

¹² E. K. Strong, *The Second-Generation Japanese Problem* (Stanford University: Stanford University Press, 1934), pp. 140-44.

matured sufficiently to start taking leadership in the communities. The chief political agency of the Nisei has been the Japanese-American Citizens' League. The organization was successful in a few notable, though isolated, instances in safeguarding Nisei and Issei interests, but otherwise its program was weak, for it could offer no concrete rewards to participants in the organization. The league, for instance, was unable to devise means to increase Nisei employment or improve their social status in American society. The weakness of the organization is apparent in the neutral stand which it was forced to take on the issue of the Sino-Japanese War.¹³

WAR RESTRICTIONS

The outbreak of war between the United States and Japan caused an unprecedented impact on the Japanese communities. Although the Japanese were psychologically prepared for this crisis through long periods of thought about the contingency of war between the United States and Japan, the complexity of the problem prevented the formulation of any plan of action. Governmental restrictions came immediately, and major dislocations of Japanese activities resulted. On December 7, the Federal Bureau of Investigation started a round-up of alien-Japanese leaders that resulted in the internment of hundreds of them during the ensuing months. The intent of these apprehensions was largely precautionary, for as John H. Oakie says:

Some aliens, suspected of subversive activity, had long been under surveillance by agents of the Bureau, but most of those detained were taken up because their position in business, in Japanese associations, or in Japanese communities, made them possible organizers and leaders of fifth-column activity.¹⁴

All licenses for business transactions held by alien Japanese were revoked by the Treasury Department. The Federal Bureau of Investigation forbade travel by alien Japanese and American-born Japanese alike. The result of these orders was that business came to a standstill for the alien Japanese, and movement was drastically curtailed for all Japanese.

Although these severe regulations were gradually relaxed, they were effective in producing a fundamental reversal of status relations in the Japanese communities. The contraction of Issei activity caused overnight the change to Nisei leadership which otherwise might have required several more years to fulfill. The Japanese Association immediately became nonfunctioning, and was replaced in importance by the Japanese-American Citizens' League, now the only national organization of Japanese. Organizations related to Japanese tradition, like the Buddhist churches, the *kenjinkai*, and the language schools, disbanded and left the field to Christian and American associations. The chief weakness in this newly gained status of the Nisei was that they lacked political bargaining strength, whereas the Japanese Association, though not an agency of the Japanese Government, nevertheless had the invisible support of that government.

THE MAJORITY ATTITUDE

But even as the Nisei came into dominance with their clearly American point of view, the distinction between Nisei and Issei, which had been carefully nursed throughout the history of these communities, broke down in the eyes of the majority group. After December 7, Issei and Nisei alike were categorically and indiscriminately labeled

¹³ Forrest E. LaViolette, *op. cit.*, pp. 522-23.

¹⁴ John H. Oakie, "Japanese in the United

States," *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. XI, No. 2 (Jan. 26, 1942), p. 24.

"Japs." There exists no distinction in common terminology between the Japanese in the United States and the "Japs" against whom this Nation is fighting; there are no qualifying terms like "Nazi" Germans and "Fascist" Italians that distinguish the enemy from those who may not be the enemy. It may be noted that the latter is an ideological identification; the former, a racial identification.

It was the inability to distinguish between loyal and disloyal Japanese that the Tolan Committee considered the strongest argument in favor of evacuation of all persons of Japanese ancestry. The Committee says of the arguments presented by witnesses favoring evacuation, "Most commonly it was said that homogeneity of racial and cultural traits made it impossible to distinguish between the loyal and disloyal."¹⁵

Whatever difficulties exist in making this distinction arise principally from the fact that the Japanese in the United States, especially the Nisei, have never been in a situation in which they could freely commit themselves to one loyalty or another. Their adjustment has been confused by contradictory pressures arising from cultural and racial conflicts, international power politics, personal demands for out-group recognition opposed by shortsighted ethnocentrism, and the feelings of insecurity resulting from all these. By the nature of their position today, in which the United States alone can be their home and protector, it seems doubtful that many disloyal members would appear among the Japanese in this country, but history alone can prove the truth of this contention.

On the whole, the majority group showed a remarkable stability in its attitude toward the Japanese at the on-

set of war, though suspicion of the latter was latently present; but doubt of Japanese loyalty was heightened by rumors of Japanese saboteurs. Newspapers headlined garbled reports of sabotage by Japanese at Pearl Harbor, and gave scant space to the denial of sabotage reported by Captain W. A. Gabrielson, Chief of the Honolulu Police.¹⁶ Seattle papers headlined the arrest and indictment of two Nisei lawyers who were charged with acting as agents of the Japanese Government without license from the United States Government. The charges preferred against the men and the reports of the two trials gave the impression that these men had committed gross acts of treason of which their guilt was certain; but their acquittal by white juries whose deliberations were restricted to rather innocuous points received brief notice. There is some evidence that economically and politically motivated persons and groups employed this agitation for their own ends.

THE EVACUATION AND AFTER

The orders for evacuation issued since March 24, 1942 by Lieutenant General J. L. DeWitt, Commanding Officer of the Western Defense Command, affect almost all the Japanese in the states of California, Oregon, Washington, and Arizona, which constitute nearly 90 per cent of the Japanese in this country. Because of the military urgency for immediate evacuation and the absence of precedence to such a program, the removal was inevitably attended by confusion and hardship for the evacuees. The chief source of difficulties was the inadequacy of definite information regarding evacuation procedures and the resettlement program. As a result the evacuees found themselves unable to

¹⁵ Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration, *Preliminary Report, op. cit.*, p. 14.

¹⁶ Fourth Interim Report of the Tolan Committee, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-58. Distinction must be made between sabotage and espionage.

plan their movement intelligently, and, as may be expected, the uncertainty was a source of much resentment among them.

Despite the disturbing circumstances of the early phases of this undertaking, the Army and the Wartime Civil Control Administration showed a high degree of human consideration in their treatment of the evacuees, and there is evidence that the War Relocation Authority is putting forth every effort toward a favorable adjustment in the resettlement centers.

But the problems that remain are even more difficult than those that are now past. Among the evacuees there is concern about their treatment in the relocation centers should the tide of war turn against the Allies; and they wonder about their position in the post-war United States, as to whether they shall be permitted to return to their former homes on the Pacific coast. For the Government, there are the questions of financing this vast project, of replacing the Japanese farm operators and laborers, and of continuing the assimilation of Japanese under the unfavorable circumstances of isolated camp life.

JAPANESE ATTITUDE TOWARD THE WAR

Following all this, the attitude of the Japanese toward the war is difficult to estimate, for at present it remains in a state of flux. The official view of the

Japanese-American Citizens' League, which has acted as interpreter and administrator between the Government and the Japanese people throughout this period, is that the Japanese would have preferred to be treated like other Americans in the war effort, but if evacuation is a military necessity, the Japanese will co-operate as a sign of their loyalty.

Among the Nisei public, however, there is an undercurrent of resentment against the deprivation of their citizenship rights behind barbed-wire fences on American soil. The basic characteristic of Nisei attitude is that they want to act like Americans and be accepted as Americans; but their life sometimes seems a series of retreats from the latter's hostility. As for the Issei, their attitude is closely allied with the interests of their families and homes. Their resentment of the evacuation is directed against the deprivation of their established homes, but the fact that thousands of their sons are in the American Army does much to reinforce their desire for a quick American victory. Some Japanese have accepted the evacuation as a protective measure against majority group hostility.

While the active loyalty of Japanese in the United States fluctuates with the treatment which they receive from the majority group, there is little indication of the type of disloyalty found among fifth columnists and saboteurs.

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