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Our 110,000 New Boarders

Condensed from The Baltimore Sunday Sun

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WRITING a school essay on "Life in a Relocation Camp," a small Japanese boy led off recently with this innocent observation: "Never before have I seen so many faces at government expense."

The child had seen only a few thousand around his camp, but Uncle Sam is actually looking at 110,000 of these new faces and feeding them at a cost of \$50,000 a day (45 cents each) while the war is on, and possibly also for the duration — which, according to one wit, will last even longer.

The taxpayer may wonder how an industrious, productive group that has \$200,000,000 in property holdings and an annual agricultural production of \$100,000,000 in California alone could be changed overnight into wards of the government and guests of the Treasury at a time when industry and agriculture suffer from a manpower shortage.

The taxpayer is told that the

Why spend \$80,000,000 a year to keep in sterile "Relocation Camps" thousands of Japanese-Americans who might be loyal fighters or industrious food producers?

Pacific Coast was in danger of invasion; that the presence of these Japanese was a potential spy-sabotage-fifth-column menace and to evacuate them was a military necessity. The taxpayer will wonder why the Japanese who comprise 37 percent of the Hawaiian Islands' population weren't just as much of a menace *there*, and why it hasn't been necessary to evacuate or intern more than a handful of them. Taxpayers may also wonder why our East Coast isn't also vulnerable, and if so, why all Germans and Italians — aliens and citizens alike — haven't been similarly evacuated inland, put into camps under armed guard, and fed at government expense.

Well, the taxpayer can shrug the

whole thing off and relax on the broad bosom of a new bureaucracy that possesses a vested interest in the new jobs, pay rolls and budgets which grow out of maintaining the interned Japanese. Or he may rise to inquire how the sunkist hysteria of West Coast pressure groups could transmute an old local, political, economic and race feud into a national burden and an international reproach.

The taxpayer has not been told the true story of these 110,000 Japanese — 70,000 of whom are American citizens. He doesn't know that the War Relocation Authority has asked for \$80,000,000 to maintain them for the next fiscal year. Nor does he realize that 50,000 of these interned persons are employable; that for a fraction of what it costs to maintain them they could be individually investigated by FBI and Military Intelligence operatives, all questionable elements segregated, and the majority freed to work in agriculture and industry, or to enter the armed services.

We have 5000 American-born Japanese soldiers in the U. S. armed forces right now; we have as many more who would qualify for duty.* If young second-generation American citizens of Japanese ancestry now interned were permitted to fight for this country, the morale of the camps would be improved immeasurably,

*As this article goes to press, it is announced that American-born Japanese will be permitted to enlist in special army units.

and older Japanese would no longer be able to say: "For 40 years we have been sending our children to American schools to become good Americans; now they are not permitted the honor of fighting for America."

The taxpayer should acquaint himself with a few facts about the "Japanese problem." Two thirds of the 110,000 new boarders are American citizens whose average age is around 21. These are the Nisei, or second generation. The other third are the Isei, the first generation, whose average age is 59. They were the farmers and other workers who came into this country until our so-called gentlemen's agreement with Japan in 1907, followed by the Exclusion Act in 1924, cut off the supply. Some of the second generation are the Kibei, meaning "those who have returned to America." Their classification is significantly political since, though American-born, they have been wholly or partly educated and indoctrinated in Japan. They could be identified and segregated.

As for the aging Isei, when they are all gone (in another decade or so) the problem of Japanese *aliens* will have solved itself. Meanwhile, they represent a large pool of skilled agricultural workers who should be available to raise food.

And most of the 70,000 who are American-born citizens, educated in our schools and colleges, are so thoroughly indoctrinated with our education that only a few can read or speak Japanese. The army has a Japa-

nese-language camp in Minnesota for training personnel to interrogate prisoners and perform other duties in combat zones. Officers sent to comb the relocation camps found less than 300 who knew enough Japanese to carry on a simple conversation or read an elementary schoolbook.

The American Legion in California demands "repatriation" of all West Coast Japanese, but offers no explanation of how the American citizens among them can be "repatriated" to Japan at the moment. The Native Sons of the Golden West suggests that a constitutional amendment disfranchise these citizens as the first step toward sending them back to Nippon. It is hardly conceivable that recommendations so contrary to our democratic principles could become national policy. If entire groups can be disfranchised because of race, why stop with the Japanese? And who will be left when everyone starts moving everyone else out of the country?

Commodore Perry, who thought he was merely opening Japan to American commerce, also opened America to Japanese labor. In 1870 there were only 55 Japanese in the United States. But the rich, undeveloped empire of the West needed cheap labor, so Japanese coolies were imported.

Japanese could work longer and harder and live on less. They were a "commodity." But soon they organized into labor gangs, and as they gained strength they organized

strikes and boycotts, particularly at harvesttime, forcing their wages up until they were being paid more than white workers.

In short, they started out working for less, and infuriated labor; they wound up working for more, and infuriated management.

This was the condition responsible for the economic and social conflicts, race discrimination and political footballing that forced most of the Japanese into congested and indigestible communities.

That in itself was an unhealthy pattern. But the present relocation camp setup is worse, since it puts behind barbed wire the alien and American citizen, the loyal and disloyal alike. The taunts of the older and alien Japanese are difficult for the second-generation American citizens to answer: "A lot of good it does you to be an American and believe that stuff they taught you in school. Look where you are now — right in here with us."

The relocation camps are in isolated regions of California, Arizona, Arkansas, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming and Colorado. Each contains 7000 to 18,000 Japanese. They have no sidewalks, street lights, phones, taxis, buses, restaurants, movies, drug-stores, grass or trees. Rich and poor, old and young, married and single, aliens and American citizens, all live in one-story wooden barracks. An entire family is crowded into one 20-foot-square room.

Each block of 10 or 12 barracks

has its mess hall, laundry, baths and latrines. A number of such blocks make up the mile-square center around which is a barbed-wire fence and a row of towers manned night and day by armed guards. The food, simple but adequate, is cooked and served army style. There is a large measure of self-government in the camps. Tensions and conflicts do exist. Put a fence around any city block and allow no one to get out for months — think of the family quarrels, and fights among the neighbors!

How the interned Japanese feel was summed up by one child who said to his mother: "Mama, why are we here? Let's go back home to America."

So far, however, there has been amazingly little trouble. There were a few strikes, and a serious riot at Manzanar, California, which was caused by internal political conflicts. Soldiers on guard outside the camp were called; tear gas proved inadequate and the military police opened fire, killing two innocent bystanders and wounding 20 rioters. Everything is now under civilian control again.

The WRA admits that the camps are an emergency measure and not a permanent solution. The present policy is to give indefinite furloughs to evacuees as soon as they can be cleared by investigation and are assured employment outside of defense

zones and in communities where they will be received without hostility. Employment centers are being set up at Salt Lake City, Kansas City, Cleveland and Chicago; many church groups and social service agencies have promised to help integrate reliable individuals into communities where they can be used in agriculture, industry, and clerical and domestic jobs.

To date less than 1000 have been relocated, 400 of whom are college students, and it is too early to judge how successful this dispersal policy will be. But it boils down to how our communities will react, and the experiment will be a test of our ability to solve the larger race problems which we shall inevitably inherit after the war.

To sum up for the American taxpayer: He has suddenly fallen heir to 110,000 new boarders, who *could* become permanent. Thousands of them should be in our armed forces, where many of them want to serve. Many more thousands are skilled workers who could and should be used in our fields, factories and homes.

The taxpayer should insist that these Japanese be treated just as though they were Germans or Italians — potential troublemakers should be screened out, the others removed rapidly from the public trough and put back into useful production.

