

THE HERITAGE OF THE NISEI

The days, the weeks, the months in 1941, were relatively peaceful ones for us, the Nisei. We were blissfully ignorant, sadly unaware of what kind of a future was in store for us. Then came that fatal day on December 7, when by the strange stroke of destiny, the monstrous Pacific war emerged from the smouldering cauldrons to rear its ugly head. Boiling hatred, unanticipated fears, and jitters swept our nation through and through.

Through several months of uneasiness, we, the Nisei, watched the gathering ominous clouds which were to culminate finally in our evacuation from the Pacific Coast. The struggle to prevent evacuation was a lost cause because we were too young, too few in numbers, too inexperienced, and too scattered to meet the challenge adequately. Perhaps, it was for the best that we came here,----that will be determined by the Nisei and the attitude that they will take towards the future.

Over three months have fled on speedy wings and now we live in a comparatively settled community.

From here on, it is the Nisei who must carry on. Upon them has been thrust the torch previously borne by the Issei. It is the same torch that the sons and daughters of other immigrants have borne. It is a torch of struggle, of ambition, of leadership, and of freedom.

With that torch we hold in our hands today, we have acquired a heritage----a heritage that may gain for us all that we can possibly hope for, but then too, we have acquired with it certain drawbacks which may need proper remedy.

But what is our heritage?

We can look at it in two different ways.

Pessimistically, we can look into the past and mention many things. We can point out the fact that we have been handicapped in countless ways. Like the offsprings of many other immigrant groups, some of us have suffered privation. We have been born physically different from the Caucasians; we have found that often we became victims of discrimination. Vocationally, we have found certain fields closed to us; socially, we have been unable to establish adequate contacts with Caucasians; psychologically, we have been brought up in a different environment and consequently, we have been extremely introverted; economically, our standard of living has not been too high.

We have blamed all this on discrimination --- true --- some may have been from that cause, but surely, not all. Thus, on the red side of the ledger, we find discrimination --- we blame all of our troubles upon that point --- some of us would claim that our evacuation was caused only by this, too.

Such are the disadvantages that we have acquired through our heritage, but what have we obtained that has been beneficial to us?

Optimistically, we, the Nisei, can say that we have been very fortunate. Our parents by dint of their hard work and fortitude, have blazed a way for us to follow; they have given us an education of which we can justly be proud, they have given us a high moral record untainted by sordidness, and they have built up homes, businesses, and farms for us. We can well be proud of our low criminal records and of the fact that only a small number of us have been liabilities to our government. Of course, temporarily, we have lost our homes, our businesses, and our farms, but only temporarily.

But our heritage does not end here. We have received from America, the right to its citizenship --- a sacred bond guaranteeing for us the rights to the fruits of democracy. It is a dynamic moving gift that can never cheapen its value. It is a heritage which nothing can mar because with it we have received the spirit of America -- the will to face anything, anywhere despite odds with a smile and to conquer it.

We are now evacuated. Soon, we will go to the relocation center --- the rights now are very limited ---- but surely, that spirit within us has not dimmed. --- it burns brighter and more lustreously. It is shining tolerantly within our souls.

Such is the heritage that we, the Nisei, have obtained and on us will depend the answer to the question -- what is to happen to the Nisei in the future.

If we should keep the spirit of Americanism symbolized by freedom and justice flaming in our hearts; if we face the future with a song in our souls and the will to work; if we properly utilize our intelligence and work optimistically toward our goals, then, we can win through.

I have laid before you your heritage and mine. It is a glorious heritage -- of independence --- of honesty ---- of hard work --- of courage --- of perseverance --- of ambitions --- of hopes --- and of faith!

And now, we, the Nisei, must remember our heritage and keep the the spirit of Americanism within our hearts. With a wholesome attitude and an undying effort, we cannot fail to build an even more glorious future.