for BETTER AMERICANS in a GREATER AMERICA





the story of the Japanese American Citizens League



Acknowledgements:

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A Tribute To Democracy

To the Japanese American Citizens League:

The significant and effective work of your organization and its Anti-Discrimination Committee on behalf of all persons of Japanese ancestry in the United States and Hawaii is a tribute to democracy within whose framework you plead your case and achieve your goals.

The members of the Japanese American Citizens League have proved anew that decency and justice cannot be long frustrated if we stand together to create new and better bonds of understanding between free citizens in a free nation.

Today our basic freedoms are threatened by a totalitarian philosophy. I know that you will continue to be resolute and courageous in our fight to preserve the blessings of liberty for ourselves and to make them available to all men everywhere.

HARRY S. TRUMAN

President

The United States of America

The White House Washington, D. C. August 10, 1950

Foreword

This brochure For Better Americans in a Greater America will let all the citizens of our land know in simple, clear terms the activities and ideals of the Japanese American Citizens League. Seldom in history is there to be found the record of a group of men and women, who having suffered as they have through discrimination, incarceration and physical outrage have held their heads high and without bitterness showed their devotion and loyalty to their country. They are an example that each of us may well imitate.

What they are doing is not merely in the interest of democracy in our land but points the direction in which all nations of mankind must inevitably move. Indeed the JACL is a powerful force in helping bring nearer to fruition the words of the Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations: "The recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".

And the measures which the JACL is seeking to have adopted, especially citizenship for their parents, the Issei, are so eminently just and fair that only those blinded by prejudice could oppose them.

They realize that it is not merely themselves who have failed to be treated "with justice and liberty to all," but other so-called minority groups as well, and the JACL has become among the spearheads of a struggle for an America that lives up to its announced aims. Wendell Wilkie said it with force and clarity: "The best answer to Communism is a living, vibrant, fearless democracy—economic, social and political. All we need to do is to stand up and perform according to our professed ideals. Then those ideals will be safe."

I have been proud of this organization, proud of my status as one of its National Sponsors, proud of the magnificent record of the Nisei in World War II and am sure that all who read this statement and who sincerely believe in a true America, will feel uplifted as they read it and will support by their deeds these efforts for fair play and the realization of our national ideals.

Monroe E. Deutsch Vice President and Provost Emeritus University of California

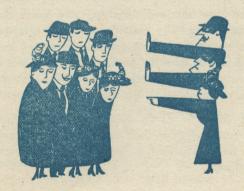
Santa Barbara, California July 23, 1951

"For Better Americans In A Greater America"

Americans of Japanese ancestry, or Nisei (rhymes with we say), are a comparatively new group in American life. There are 70,000 of them. The majority of their parents, Issei—meaning "first generation"—came as immigrants to the United States about the turn of the century, settling mostly in the Pacific coast states of California, Oregon, and Washington.

The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) is the national organization of the Nisei. Its objective is well defined by its slogan: "For Better Americans in a Greater America." The story of this organization is an account of a group of young Americans treasuring their birthright, defending it, and seeking to be worthy of it.

The history of the Nisei and their parents has made them acutely aware that democratic rights are not bestowed; they must be fought for. The immigrants from Japan came to the United States in search of freedom and opportunity. But they were misunderstood from the beginning because they were so different in appearance, customs and language. Rather than being praised for industry, they were accused of lowering standards of living. Instead of being considered pioneers in the still undeveloped west, they were regarded as intruders. Politicans



looking for a scapegoat referred to them as the "yellow peril".

But these new immigrants patiently endured the indignities and contributed to the country's growth. Their crime rate was low. Hardly any of them became public charges. Their children rarely became delinquents. They were peaceful, self-reliant Americans in every way

except the most important—our laws would not permit them to become naturalized citizens solely because of their race.

But their children, the Nisei, were American citizens by birth, and their parents looked to them to bridge the gap of misunderstanding and prejudice.

The Nisei inherited many of the problems as well as the pioneering courage of their parents. Many persons refused to recognize them as fellow Americans entitled to all the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship.

JACL Comes Into Being

As the older Nisei became of voting age, they realized acceptance by their fellow Americans might be facilitated through an organization.

Encouraged by their Issei parents, a handful of Japanese Americans met in Seattle in 1930 and formed the national Japanese American Citizens League with eight chapters. At this time the delegates passed two resolutions which testify that the matter of American citizenship was uppermost in their thinking. They called upon Congress to: 1. Amend the Cable Act, thus enabling Nisei girls who had married alien Japanese to regain their citizenship; 2. Grant American citizenship to Oriental-born veterans who had served America in World War I. Both of these measures were subsequently enacted into law.

As more Nisei attained their majority, more chapters of the JACL came into being. The activities of these chapters during the 1930's reveal that the Japanese Americans were busy growing up and were concerned largely with the problems of individual economic and social adjustments just like any other group of Americans. But these adjustments were complicated by the inherited prejudices.

Toward the close of the 1930's the problem confronting the Nisei became more serious as their fellow Americans, angered by Japan's aggression in the Far East, misdirected their condemnation against Japanese Americans.

Citizens Second Class

Came the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The hysteria of war, aided and abetted by economic greed, fanned the old prejudices. The Issei,

through no fault of their own, were quickly tabbed as enemy aliens. The combined impact resulted in the government's decision to remove all persons of Japanese ancestry—citizen and alien, without

hearing and without trial—from the west coast to inland relocation centers as a security measure. It was a step unprecedented in American history.

This mass evacuation of 120,000 persons, two-thirds of them American citizens, won for the Army official in charge a Distinguished Service Medal. The medal more properly should have gone to the evacuees who cooperated with their government even though it meant



the loss of freedom and millions of dollars of their property.

The feeling of being repudiated by their own government was a cruel blow to the Nisei. Even more bitter was the knowledge that a basic American principle was being violated when they were incarcerated for the crime of having Japanese forefathers. It was an especially grim experience for the 5,000 Nisei already serving in the U.S. Army who saw their families placed in desert camps ringed by barbed wire and guarded by army military police.

On the eve of evacuation, Japanese Americans flocked to join the JACL, hoping thus to avoid being evacuated, or at least that their loyalty would not be questioned. But the JACL could not reverse a government decision. Inevitably this failure led the organization to become the scapegoat for every ill that befell persons of Japanese ancestry in the long, dark days to come.

JACL officially protested the government policy to evacuate. But once this policy was explained on the basis of 'military necessity', JACL urged persons of Japanese ancestry to cooperate as a patriotic contribution to the war effort, to avoid possible bloodshed if troops had to be used to force people to follow the government policy, to

remove possible misunderstanding by the American public at large regarding the loyalty of Japanese Americans, and in order to be able to demand better and more humane treatment for the people from the government.

Almost overnight in this trying period, the JACL became a mature, fighting organization. Its courage was based on faith in America. Forthwith, it launched a vigorous program of public education, cooperating with government agencies set up belatedly to safeguard the welfare of the evacuees, fighting organized persecution in the courts. JACL pushed to the U.S. Supreme Court a test case challenging the validity of the evacuation. In California the Native Sons of the Golden West sought to remove the names of Nisei evacuees from voting rosters. The JACL took successful legal action to halt this attempt to pirate away their birthright.

Americanism A Matter Of Heart and Mind

The overwhelming majority of Japanese Americans did not allow their experiences to dim their

loyalty. Rather, such treatment provoked a greater desire to prove their love for country.

In 1942 JACL representatives petitioned the government to reinstate Selective Service which had been suspended with the evacuation for the Nisei. Early in 1943 the War Department decided to create an Army combat team made up of Americans of Japanese ancestry. Hundreds of volunteers from the relocation centers and from Hawaii joined Japanese Americans already in service to form the celebrated Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team. With "Go For Broke" as their motto—Hawaiian slang for "shoot the works" or "all or nothing" the 442nd became the most decorated unit of its size in the history of the U.S. Army. These G. I.'s fought not only for the nation, but also for acceptance for themselves and their families. An indication of how valiantly they fought the dual battle for democracy is to be found in the 18,143 individual decorations, 9,486 casualties and seven presidential unit citations, collected in seven major campaigns in Europe.

Eyes and Ears
Of U. S. Forces

Nor was the Nisei army record confined to the
European theater. Though less publicized because of the nature of their work, close to
10,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry served in military intelligence

units as the "eyes and ears" of the U.S. forces in the Pacific. They were with every major unit in every Pacific engagement from Attu and Guadalcanal to the march into Tokyo and the occupation of Japan. Interpreting intercepted communications, interrogating prisoners, translating captured documents, persuading die-hard enemy soldiers to surrender, the Nisei saved thousands of American lives and helped shorten the war in the Pacific by many months. Even the Navy and



Marines, which refused to induct Nisei, "borrowed" these language specialists.

These Nisei faced a double risk in the Pacific, not only from the enemy, but also from their fellow G. I.'s who could easily mistake their identity. As Gen. "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell said in tribute to them, "The Nisei bought an awful big hunk of America with their blood".

As internal restrictions were eased, other Japanese Americans and Japanese aliens left the relocation centers to work in the beet fields and in defense plants. Alien Japanese served with the Office of Strategic Services, taught American G. I.'s the Japanese language, wrote leaflets which were rained down on the enemy, and drew maps which guided the B-29's over the Japanese homeland.

The outstanding record of persons of Japanese ancestry during World War II convincingly proved President Franklin Roosevelt's statement that "Americanism is a matter of mind and heart, Americanism is not....a matter of race or ancestry." Despite widespread rumors to the contrary, the official files of every government investigative and intelligence agency show conclusively that not a single resident alien Japanese or an American of Japanese ancestry committed an act of sabotage or espionage before, during, or after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

During the latter part of 1943 and 1944, the Govern-Land Of ment's program of resettlement (i. e. evacuees were The Free permitted to leave the relocation centers and move to communities in the East and Midwest) got under way. Although war still raged, Japanese Americans were being accepted in communities throughout America with the exception of the west coast which was still closed to them. This acceptance was due in part to the exemplary conduct of the evacuees themselves, in part to the many Americans who showed that they understood the meaning of democracy. But the largest part of the credit must go to the reports from the European front where the Nisei G. I.'s were more than proving themselves under fire. The War Department's experiment and the Nisei's loyal response to the formation of the combat team which was to be "the symbol of the loyalty of Japanese Americans" was paying off.

JACL stepped up its program of public education and established regional offices in Denver, Chicago and New York to assist in the resettlement program. As Japanese Americans sank roots into new communities, it was only natural that JACL chapters should be formed wherever Nisei resettled in appreciable numbers. At the same time JACL's membership, heretofore restricted to Japanese Americans, was opened to all Americans.

Late in 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court announced in the JACL-sponsored Endo case that citizens could not be legally detained in the relocation camps. Simultaneously, the Army revoked its west coast



exclusion orders. The reopening of the Pacific coast finally revealed the hand of race baiters. Having lost the fight to exclude the evacuees legally, these groups resorted to intimidation, threats, and even violence to discourage their return to homes, farms and businesses. On shameful record are more than 100 cases of arson, beatings and shootings against returning evacuees.

By their own actions, these terrorists showed that their cry of "evacuate the Japs as a military necessity" was largely a sham. Their concern for national security turned out to be only a by-product of their effort to exploit race prejudice for personal economic gain.

But American decency and fair play won out, and about three-fourths of the evacuees moved back to the west coast. Again, JACL was in the vanguard by establishing "outposts" in San Francisco and Los Angeles to help in the adjustments of homecoming.

A further acknowledgement of the loyalty of Japanese Americans was the announcement by the Navy late in 1945 that Nisei would be acceptable for enlistment.

"To Secure These Rights"

JACL representatives assembled at the first postwar national convention in Denver in 1946 with the sober realization that the organization must

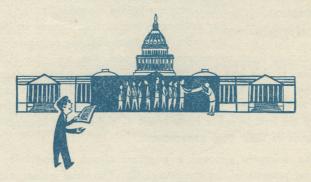
spearhead the fight to secure, once and for all, the rights for which Nisei G. I.'s had gone "for broke". Their wartime experiences had taught them the realistic lesson that only in organization is there strength and security; that disunited and defenseless minorities are the first to suffer curtailment of rights in an emergency even at the hands of their own government.

The delegates adopted a program aimed at rectifying injustices against persons of Japanese ancestry. The chief points were:

- 1. Legislation to change the undemocratic law which classified Issei as "ineligible to citizenship" even though they had resided in the United States for a half century or more;
- 2. Some sort of compensation for property losses suffered in the evacuation;
- 3. Stays of deportation for deserving alien Japanese who had lost their status as treaty merchants on the outbreak of war.

The National JACL saw that such an ambitious program could be effected only by a program of public education beginning with communities which had been receptive to Japanese Americans. Accordingly, new chapters of the organization were established in the east and midwest and old chapters were reactivated as the Nisei returned to their former homes on the west coast. Now, the JACL membership roster reflects the extent to which Japanese Americans have dispersed themselves permanently throughout America. Whereas before the war JACL chapters were found only in half a dozen states in the Far West, now there were chapters in 23 states and the District of Columbia and several hundred National Associated Members in a dozen additional states and the Territory of Hawaii. Thus, out of the war, the Japanese American Citizens League emerged a truly national organization both geographically and in scope of program.

Voice
To implement the new national program, a JACL
Anti-Discrimination Committee was incorporated
and an office opened in Washington, D. C. The
JACL had not forgotten that prewar official Washington had been woefully ignorant about this group of Americans and had allowed west
coast pressure groups to dictate the national policy with respect to their



wartime treatment. JACL leaders realized, too, that there are no spectators in a democracy, that good citizenship meant active participation in chaping policies. And so the organization became the collective voice of the Nisei in a democracy.

Since JACL represented a small national minority without effective voting power or political influence, its approach to official Washington was in the form of a sincere appeal for simple justice backed by an irrefutable record of loyalty tried by fire.

And the response? By the time JACLers convened for their next National Convention in 1948, Congress had passed an act to compensate for evacuation losses, and had consented to place deportation of Japanese treaty merchants on the same basis as any other nationality, thus

assuring them of being able to stay with their American-born families.

Thus, two of the items on JACL's national legislative agenda had been realized, leaving as unfinished business the elimination of race as a qualification for naturalization.

In addition, through JACL representation, the Soldier Brides Bill was amended to permit Japanese spouses and children of American servicemen to enter the United States without regard to immigration quotas. This was the first time since the Exclusion Act of 1924 that persons from Japan had been admitted into this country for permanent residence, thus marking another step toward equality of treatment for persons of Japanese ancestry under American law.

Congress also passed more than 200 private bills benefitting individual Issei and Nisei in the United States. Significantly, every one of these bills passed without a dissenting vote.

Although a measure authorizing compensation had been passed, the adjudication of claims had bogged down in administrative red tape over narrow legalistic interpretations. The result was that several times more money had been consumed for administrative purposes as had been paid to the evacuees. An amendment to the claims law, authorizing compromise settlement, was pushed by JACL. Under this new program, the whole procedure has been expedited and claimants are now being paid much more rapidly.

The California Legislative Committee of the National JACL Anti-Discrimination Committee was organized to coordinate efforts to place persons of Japanese ancestry upon an equal basis with all other residents so far as the statutes and practices of the state are concerned.

Specifically, this Committee has helped to rectify several injustices. Liquor licenses, revoked because of racial bias during the war, are being restored to Japanese Americans. Escheat monies—money paid in out-of-court settlements to the state to keep land titles clear—are being returned. Sport fishing licenses for "aliens ineligible to citizenship" have been reduced from \$25 to \$10, thus putting Issei on the same hasis as other aliens.

Perhaps these are small matters individually. But the significance lies in the fact that California, traditionally hostile to Japanese Americans, is now thinking of them on a basis of equality with other residents of the state rather than a group to be persecuted. This has been a long step forward.

Through Courts Of Law

Meanwhile, JACL was carrying its campaign for equal rights to the courts. The fight to eliminate California's Alien Land

Law, which prohibits "aliens ineligible for citizenship" from owning land, moved nearer its goal when the U. S. Supreme Court established in the Oyama Case the right of an alien parent to make a gift of a parcel of land to his citizen child. In the Takahashi Case, the U. S. Supreme Court invalidated California's law denying fishing licenses to resident Japanese aliens. JACL also participated in the campaigns which brought about repeal of alien land laws in Utah and Oregon.

That All JACL has helped to make an increasing number of Americans aware of their fellow citizens of Japanese ancestry and their problems. Among the accomplishments were an intensive education campaign carried to the voters in California to defeat a proposition designed to tighten the state's alien land law; a gala homecoming was arranged for the heroes of the 442nd returning from Europe; high ranking government and military officials at JACL invitation attended reburial ceremonies for Nisei soldier dead at Arlington National Cemetery (the first time in the country's history that American soldiers of Japanese ancestry had been laid to rest in the nation's shrine); appropriate

ceremonies were arranged for the renaming of an U.S. Army transport



in honor of Pvt. Sadao Munemori who had been posthumously decorated with the Congressional Medal of Honor; JACL played an important role in the production and promotion of the motion picture, "Go

For Broke," Metro Goldwyn Mayer's tribute to the war record of the 442nd Combat Team.

So sweeping was JACL's education campaign that practically every leading newspaper in the country of all political convictions pointed out editorially that the country's refusal to grant naturalization privileges to the parents of Nisei servicemen simply because of their race was a blot on democracy.

Locally and nationally, JACL has been quick to oppose discrimination and alert to prevent friction before it develops. Usually this called only for information and education. Once the facts were made known the situations seemed to smooth themselves out. But there were other times when vigorous action was necessary to avert a wrong.

JACL has pointed out the injustices in proposed measures introduced into the Congress and in the state legislature which jeopardize the status of aliens because of their ineligibility to citizenship. It has fought discrimination in cemeteries and has protested the production and showing of "hate" films depicting Japanese Americans in a false light. Through JACL, misinterpretation in certain public school textbooks concerning the conduct of Japanese Americans during wartime have been replaced with the facts of their record of loyalty.

For All

Nor has JACL's campaign for equal rights been confined only to persons of Japanese ancestry. Realizing that a threat to the rights of any minority group is a threat to all Americans, JACL has actively supported the President's entire civil rights program, state and federal Fair Employment Practices Committees, statehood for Hawaii, anti-lynch and anti-poll tax bills, the abolishment of Jim Crow in Washington, D. C., and the end of segregation in the U. S. armed forces.

JACL also has joined with other national organizations in opening up the membership of the American Bowling Congress to everyone regardless of race, participated as "friend of the court" in the case in which the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated restrictive covenants and in segregation cases involving interstate transportation and public education.

Among The Nation's The JACL story is not complete without referring to its weekly newspaper. The Pacific Citizen. During the war The Pacific Citizen became the voice of Americans of Jap-

anese ancestry crying out against injustice, exposing un-American practices of individuals and organizations on the home front. Its authentic reports about Japanese Americans made it especially valuable for individuals and government officials who were in any way concerned with their problems and activities. Its hard hitting, provocative editorials were quoted liberally and its contents were constantly referred to.

Commented Richard R. Walsh, editor of Asia and America.

"I admire it for its Americanism, its clear loyalty to our country. I admire it for the wisdom and good temper with which it has dealt with the treatment given to our Japanese American citizens. It would have been natural if notes of bitterness had crept in, but they do not; instead the paper constantly shows sympathetic understanding of the racial prejudice which unfortunately exists in so many otherwise decent Americans."

The Pacific Citizen continues to mirror faithfully the aims, aspirations and activities of Japanese Americans.

Unfinished
Business
Today persons of Japanese ancestry enjoy a greater degree of acceptance in America than ever before.
Across the country the enthusiastic audience response to MGM's "Go For Broke" is interpreted as appreciation of the loyalty of the Japanese Americans and their fight for equal recognition as well as for the film's entertainment value.



JACL feels this tremendous reservoir of good will must be utilized to enact permanent democratic legislation, including the granting

of naturalization privileges to all resident aliens regardless of race. So far, Congress has not seen fit to eliminate race as qualification to naturalization. Under present laws, the mother of the Nisei hero who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously cannot receive an old age pension in California simply because she happens to be a Japanese alien. And thousands of Japanese Americans, remembering that they had been evacuated simply because they were offspring of Japanese aliens, realize that they are only second class American citizens so long as their parents are denied equality.

General Mark Clark, to whose command the 442nd Japanese American Combat Team was attached, wrote the Congressional Subcommittee considering a bill to grant citizenship privileges to all regardless of race:

"As I recall the outstanding feats of valor in combat of the members of the 442nd, the number of Purple Hearts awarded to them because of wounds received in battle, and the extremely low hospital rate because of their eagerness to return to the line after having been wounded, I can only urge that the rights of citizenship in our great America be given to the parents who furnished us with such outstanding young manhood, men who willingly gave their all that America could live.

"The parents of these heroic Nisei should have the privilege of the democracy their sons helped to preserve."

Security

From all the foregoing, it can be seen read-

Through Unity ily that the Japanese American Citizens League exists because there are problems and adjustments peculiar to Americans of Japanese ancestry. The term "Japanese American" appears in the name of the organization merely to identify the problems; it does not identify the constituency of the organization, for membership is open to all Americans who believe in its purposes and are interested in its activities. The Japanese American Citizens League is dedicated to hastening the day when Americans of Japanese ancestry face only those problems which have no racial

simply as Americans without any racial identification.

The Japanese American Citizens League is incorporated as a non-profit organization under the laws of the states of California and Utah and is tax exempt.

implications and are no different from the ordinary problems faced by all Americans, when Americans of Japanese ancestry will be known

JACL's governing body is the National Board, members of which are elected at each biennial National Convention held on the even numbered years. The legislative powers reside in the National Council which is composed of two representatives from each Chapter. The Chapters of the organization are grouped geographically into eight Dis-



trict Councils: East, Midwest, Mountain Plains, Intermountain. Pacific Northwest, Northern California-Western Nevada, Central California and Pacific Southwest.

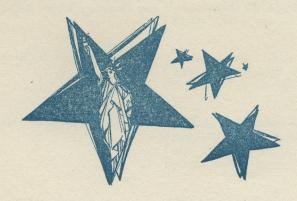
The organization is supported through membership dues and contributions. Membership which exceeds 10,000 is through its eighty-one Chapters, but in addition, there is a National Associated Membership for those who desire to be affiliated but who reside in areas not served by Chapters. JACL also maintains a National Credit Union for members.

The local JACL Chapters are the grass roots support of the national organization's program. They carry on local programs of public education, community welfare, youth development; hold informative sessions on current events, sponsor athletic leagues, plus a host of other activities for their members as varied as square dancing, get-out-the-vote campaigns, and fishing derbies; serve as channels for the wider participation of Japanese Americans in the total life of their respective communities.

In The American Way

The current acceptance of Americans of Japanese ancestry, as contrasted with their position in 1941 as one of the most despised minorities in this country's history, is both a measure of the effectiveness of the Japanese American Citizens League and a demonstration of the ability of a democracy to redress wrongs within its framework.

In its ceaseless struggle for the extension of the rights and privileges of America to every citizen, JACL has been guided by the spirit of its "Japanese American Creed". It was authored by Mike Masaoka, JACL's present National Legislative Director, read before the United States Senate and printed in the Congressional Record May 9, 1941 as follows:



"I am proud that I am an American citizen of Japanese ancestry, for my very background makes me appreciate more fully the wonderful advantages of this nation. I believe in her institutions, ideals, and traditions; I glory in her heritage; I boast of her history; I trust in her future. She has granted me liberties and opportunities such as no individual enjoys in this world today. She has given me an education befitting kings. She has entrusted me with the responsibilities of the franchise. She has permitted me to build a home, to earn a livelihood, to worship, think, speak, and act as I please—as a free man equal to every other man.

"Although some individuals may discriminate against me, I shall never become bitter or lose faith, for I know that such persons are not representative of the majority of the American people. True, I shall do all in my power to discourage such practices, but I shall do it in the American way; above-board, in the open, through courts of law, by education, by proving myself to be worthy of equal treatment and consideration. I am firm in my belief that American sportsmanship and attitude of fair play will judge citizenship and patriotism on the basis of action and achievement, and not on the basis of physical characteristics.

"Because I believe in America, and I trust she believes in me, and because I have received innumerable benefits from her, I pledge myself to do honor to her at all times and in all places; to support her Constitution; to obey her laws; to respect her Flag; to defend her against all enemies, foreign or domestic; to actively assume my duties and obligations as a citizen, cheerfully and without any reservations whatsoever, in the hope that I may become a better American in a greater America."

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