

WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY


Washington

To WRA Staff Members:

The first report in this series was a paper issued from the Reports Division in October 1942 entitled Dealing with Japanese-Americans.

In that report some background facts of Japanese race and culture were discussed with special reference to relocation center conditions on life.

This second report on the causes of social unrest at relocation centers was originally prepared as a memorandum to the Director of the War Relocation Authority in December 1942. It was revised to its present form in January 1943 and is now being sent out to all project personnel at the suggestion of several Project Directors at the recent meetings in San Francisco, Denver and Little Rock.


Director

Attachment

February 1943

CAUSES OF UNREST AT
RELOCATION CENTERS.

RESTRICTED

Community Analysis Report No. 2
by John Embree

The incidents of last November and December at Poston and Manzanar brought into sharper focus a number of problems in social relations and administration at the project level. In particular, these incidents have demonstrated a need for all WRA personnel to look more carefully into the underlying causes of such flare-ups.

There are a number of factors inherent in the conditions of center life which may create difficulties regardless of how well the centers are administered. A recognition of these factors inherent in the situation may be of value because such a recognition may help administrators to understand critical situations as they arise, or before they arise, and to deal more intelligently with them.

Factors inherent in the situation.

1. A mass evacuation of people on the basis of Japanese ancestry, regardless of length of residence, citizenship, or past individual behavior, has created in many evacuees a sense of disillusionment or even bitterness in regard to American democracy. WRA personnel being the only government representatives with whom most evacuees now come in contact, it is this personnel that bears the brunt of evacuee criticism and resentment.
2. Another effect of relocation has been to create feelings of extreme social and financial insecurity as to the future. This may result in a reluctance to leave centers for outside employment. Anxieties associated with this feeling of insecurity form a fertile field for alarmist rumors.
3. The throwing together on the basis of racial lines of a group of people made up of a wide range of interests, educational background, and social class has caused many unfortunate situations, such as putting people with little in common together as neighbors in the same block.

Nisei who were becoming Americanized in California are now subjected to strong Japanese influences. A racial solidarity vis-a-vis the Caucasian administrative staff is another inevitable result of center life.

4. Experiences in assembly centers. Most residents in relocation centers spent weeks and even months in assembly centers before finally moving to their present "homes". This long uncertain waiting period, during which they had little opportunity or incentive for reorganizing community life has had a demoralizing effect on the individual and a disorganizing effect on traditional forms of community life and social control. (It should be remembered that evacuees in some assembly centers were subjected to many affronts to their self-respect -- government people entered their homes without permission; informers and government agents made everyone's life uncertain; one could talk to a visiting friend only for a short time and with a guard present. The psychological shock of being housed in stables is still far from overcome.

5. Physical conditions of life in the centers have also contributed to social disorganization. Eating in common mess halls has had the effect of weakening family solidarity and parental authority. The weakening of parental authority, in turn, has made it more difficult for law-abiding parents to restrain the activities of young men who may form gangs which can easily drift from anti-project administration to anti-American in attitude.

The lack of privacy and overcrowding within the barracks has a demoralizing effect on many evacuees -- again especially the younger generation. Added to this is the fact that latrines and showers are separate from the barracks and there is a lack of privacy therein. To a Japanese the lack of a deep bath is a great privation.

These living conditions are similar in some respects to those of slums and we may expect social phenomena similar to those found in slums to appear -- gangs, anti-police attitudes, and delinquency. The lack of adequate recreation facilities is also a factor in this situation.

6. Conditions of security controls. Armed guards, barbed wire fences, search lights, visits of government agents, all engender the feeling of being in a concentration camp. To expect people to be receptive to

lectures on democracy and freedom under such conditions is too much to ask of anyone, especially any American.

7. In general the speed of settlement in the centers, the heterogeneous population, and the artificial social and economic situations of center life have created a new society with no regular system of social controls. As with the old boomtowns of the West, the law is taken in one's own hands simply for the lack of any integrated set of social controls as represented by family and community organization, public opinion and folkways.

8. The factors inherent in the situations are different in the restricted areas of the Western Defense Command than in other areas. The greater restrictions imposed by the Western Defense Command area and the very hostile attitude of surrounding communities in Arizona and California makes life for the evacuees in these centers more difficult and unhappy. It is not simply coincidence that the only serious incidents have occurred in centers in the restricted area.

Factors related to project administration.

In contrast to the above listed conditions inherent in the situation, there are others which, being related to project administration, can be affected by WRA policy. Some of the points listed here may now be past history in some projects, but in others they are still more or less acute problems.

1. Out-groups. At many projects, as things were first organized, it was the volunteer nisei with a good command of English who landed most of the good jobs. Late-comers and those less fluent in English tended to be left out as well as those who regarded the boasting of one's abilities to be vulgar. These last, when they found that the administrative personnel accepted the volunteers at face value and made no attempt to search for other less forward talent, became disillusioned in some of the project administrators. The excessive attention given to JACL, an organization which for one reason or another has many enemies, has simply corroborated this attitude.

Thus, in one way or another, there has grown up on most projects a large "out-group", which is dissatisfied, has little responsibility, and is consequently uncooperative with WRA administration, especially with nisei office holders.

The undermining of the authority of issei and of the social control functions of Japanese societies such as the Kenjinkai contributed to this uncooperative atti-

tude in the first generation. The issei having lost both economic and social predominance tend to be un-cooperative with the administration and some even go so far as to encourage nisei non-cooperation.

Special efforts should be made to enlist members of out-groups to useful work, and through a recognition of their abilities give them a feeling of responsibility for the welfare of the center. The traditional leadership and responsibility of older men (whether issei or nisei) should also be recognized.

2. Many WRA promises to evacuees have, for one reason or another, not been fulfilled. Work payments have often been delayed, and leave clearances slow. Sometimes people at projects have made promises in these matters which they have been unable to keep. This undermines faith in project administration as well as in the sincerity of the Federal Government.

3. Related to (1) and (2) are a number of unhappy situations which have developed as a result of a changing or uncertain employment policy, both at the project and national level. Frequently individuals have been assigned to jobs they felt unqualified for, others have had their special training in one field or another ignored; work payments, as noted above, have not always been prompt.

4. Growth of caste attitudes. This is related to a factor inherent in the situation, i.e. the fact that the WRA administrative staff is "Caucasian", while the evacuees are "Oriental". Too often this gives rise to attitudes of superiority on the part of the administrative personnel. Citizen evacuees feel the distinction keenly.

5. Affronts to evacuee ideas of propriety. Among older Japanese it is not considered proper to slap one another on the back. They also look askance upon WRA staff members acting in too friendly a way with evacuee assistants, whereby they call one another by their first names, etc. Together with this traditional, (and useful) Japanese culture patters are sometimes ignored -- e. g. use of the go-between, use of committees of older men for responsible work in local government, respect for age in Japanese society (placing young men in responsible positions on the police force, for instance, is not always a good policy),

6. Division of authority and an openly discussed disagreement among administrative personnel. This is always bad and under conditions of center life undermines respect for WRA.

7. Inefficient use of agricultural machinery, of evacuee workers, etc. also leads to disrespect of the administrative staff by evacuees who in California were very careful and efficient users of both manpower and machines.

Signs of trouble.

There are a number of symptoms of impending trouble. When they appear it is well to look behind them for motivation. It is also well to consider the consequence of any move to deal with what may appear on the surface to be a simple situation.

1. Beatings. A man may be assaulted for what appears to be simply a personal grudge. Often, however, the man beaten is looked upon as an informer or in some way has come to serve as an attackable symbol of WRA administration, which in turn symbolizes the forces that caused evacuation. In such a situation it is extremely unwise to arrest a man simply on suspicion. The troubles at both Poston and Manzanar came out of just such arrests on suspicion.

2. The growth of young men's gangs. These are probably the result of conditions inherent in center life. Every effort should be made to turn the activities of such groups to constructive ends in order to counteract a natural tendency for them to indulge in anti-administration activities.

3. Labor troubles. If conditions are ripe for it, the firing of a single man may result in a general strike. Care should be taken in times of unrest to be sure to dismiss employees only for a very good cause. In fact, employment policies can be very important -- making for the smooth running of a project, or being a constant source of trouble. The comments on caste attitudes apply here.

4. Mess hall troubles. These are more likely to be due to personal squabbles than are employment troubles, but if not carefully handled they can also become a focal point for a large-scale demonstration.

The causes of events such as those listed above should be discussed and analyzed with a number of evacuees of different groups, e.g. anti-JACL nisei as well as JACL members, issei without as well as those with strategic jobs (e.g. chefs or foremen), men from special backgrounds such as fishermen, farmers, retailers. Representatives of such social groups can be very helpful in getting at the basic causes of frustration and dissatisfaction among center residents. The very discussion of some of their problems will provide a means of releasing pent-up grudges and so help in creating a more cooperative attitude.

Attention should also be paid to any other relevant factors that might create or contribute toward an incident: the building of a barbed wire fence, the visits of FBI men, long delay in providing some promised item to the residents.

At present the sincerity of the Government, as represented by WRA, is seriously questioned by many evacuees. The things that were done to them in California, and the effects of assembly center life, will not be forgotten for many years to come. For this reason it is unwise to assume that just because WRA is sincere in its efforts to solve the problems created by evacuation, that the evacuees should accept protestations of sincerity at face value. There is, however, a continuity of direction in WRA policy which it is worth bringing out from time to time: a direction away from restriction and loss of civil rights towards a full restoration of civil rights and racial democracy. The facts of history show a continuous trend in this direction:

- (1) The inauguration of the leave policy.
- (2) The reopening of the Army to Japanese-Americans as soldiers.
- (3) The removal of the restricted area boundary 60 miles west to leave Poston and Gila outside the area.

