

OFFICE OF WAR INFORMATION
WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY

NB-1178

Mrs. Ruff
Text of Address by Dillon S. Myer, Director of the War Relocation Authority, over the National Broadcasting Company network at 10:45 p.m., EWT, Thursday, July 15, 1943.

During recent weeks, a great deal of public attention has been given to the War Relocation Authority, the relocation centers, and the Japanese-American people who live in these centers. Unfortunately, much of the information given circulation was untrue, and misleading. Much of what has been said has caused confusion, by focusing attention on some minor details and covering up the really basic issues.

The proper handling of the people of Japanese ancestry who were removed from their homes along the Pacific Coast into relocation centers is a matter of importance to every person in the United States. It is essential that everyone who gives thought to the problem keep certain facts clearly in mind.

First---enemy aliens suspected of being subversive were arrested immediately after Pearl Harbor and are now interned. They have never been in relocation centers.

Second---During the first month of the evacuation period -- in March 1942 -- the Japanese-American people were first told simply that they must move out of the Pacific coastal zone and were free to go anywhere else they liked. It was only after this voluntary movement had caused difficulties that controlled evacuation came into the picture. Relocation centers were established primarily to provide living quarters for the evacuees while long-range resettlement plans were being worked out.

The evacuation did not imply for one moment that all evacuees were guilty or even suspected of endangering the national safety. It was a precautionary move taken in view of the exceedingly critical military situation on the West Coast. The evacuees in the relocation centers are not charged with any crime or subversive intentions; they are a dislocated people who had to have some place to live-- and the relocation centers seemed to be the most feasible temporary solution to the problem. There is no reason to conduct the relocation centers as internment camps or prisons.

On the contrary, there are good reasons why they should not be so conducted. Two-thirds of the people who were moved into relocation centers were born in this country. They are American citizens, and 72 per cent of this citizen group have never even seen Japan.

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In the ten relocation centers, the evacuees are provided with most of the basic necessities of life--and the opportunity to earn a small amount of money so they may buy other things not provided by the government. They receive food, lodging, and medical care, and schooling is provided for the children.

The living quarters are barrack-type frame buildings, divided into family-size compartments--and furnished with cots, mattresses, blankets and heating stoves. There is no running water or cooking facilities in the barracks--but community bath houses and mess halls are located in each block to serve 250 to 300 people.

The school program is planned to meet the standards of the state where the center is located, but until recently there were no buildings put up especially for school purposes. Classes have been held in barrack buildings originally intended for living quarters or for recreation.

The medical service in a relocation center is barely adequate even as measured by wartime standards. Non-Japanese doctors and nurses are in charge of the medical staff in each center, but most of the staff is composed of evacuees.

Any community of--say--ten thousand people, eating three meals a day--will require a lot of food. Most of the relocation centers were able to produce very little of their own food last year--and so most of it had to be brought in. People who have seen the trucks going into the relocation centers loaded with food quite naturally have been impressed with the large amounts--and so many rumors have started that the evacuees in relocation centers are getting huge amounts of food--far more than other civilians.

I want to say right here and now that people in relocation centers are rationed--just the same as the rest of us. Most of the food is bought through the Quartermaster Corps of the Army. But there is a top limit of 45 cents a day per person which may be spent for food, and the actual cost has ranged from 34 to 42 cents a day. By way of comparison, the Army allows a maximum of 61 cents a day and actually spends 55 to 57 cents a day for each man. From the standpoint of quality, the food served in the centers is, of course, never better than Army standards. And on many items, such as beef, it is definitely inferior.

The government of the United States has an obligation to feed the evacuees in the relocation centers but--we are doing it in strict accord with rationing regulations--and with a keen regard for the heavy demands on the nation's food supply.

I won't take time to dwell on other details of the relocation center activities--except to say that the War Relocation Authority is operating with a minimum staff--and has attempted to give a maximum of responsibility to the evacuees themselves for providing the services needed by the community--and for managing their own affairs.

The wages for those who work are just about enough to provide for the necessities--12, 16, or 19 dollars a month--plus a small clothing allowance for each member of the worker's family. The evacuees are not compelled to work--but only those who do work receive wages and clothing allowances. About 90 per cent of the employable evacuees at the centers are now engaged in some kind of work.

In spite of the fact that the War Relocation Authority is responsible for managing the ten relocation centers--we don't feel that they are desirable institutions, or anything in which the people of the United States can take pride. It isn't the American way to have children grow up behind barbed wire. It may be possible to make good Americans out of them--but the very surroundings make a mockery out of principles we have always cherished and respected. It's difficult to reconcile democracy with barbed wire--freedom with armed sentries--liberty with searchlights.

But, in spite of these discouraging surroundings, Americanism is predominant in the relocation centers. It is taught in the schools--in the adult education classes--through organizations such as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, 4-H Clubs, Future Farmers of America, Girl Reserves, and Parent-Teacher Associations. Several of the centers have U.S.O. Clubs or similar arrangements for the entertainment of soldiers of Japanese ancestry who come back to the centers to see their families or friends.

However, there are some people in the relocation centers who have indicated that they prefer to be Japanese rather than American. And there are others whose records indicate that they might endanger the national security. Accordingly, we are planning within the next few weeks to segregate these pro-Japanese people and establish them in a single center where they will live for the duration of the war or until repatriated to Japan. It has taken time to gather enough information for such a program of segregation. We now have the necessary information and we expect to carry out the program as soon as transportation can be obtained to make the move.

We feel that the remainder of the population--those who are thoroughly American in their loyalties--should not be required to remain in relocation centers. They can make a much greater contribution to the war effort by working on farms, in factories, and in other places where their abilities can be used to best advantage.

In the spring of last year, when the evacuation was only beginning, there was an insistent demand from sugar beet growers and refiners for evacuees to work in the beet fields of the Western States. Before the harvest season was over, about 10,000 people from the centers had gone to work in the fields of the West--and they harvested enough beets to provide a year's sugar ration for about 10 million people.

The results of that program were generally good from every point of view. And so the War Relocation Authority went one step further. Starting in July one year ago, we began to work out a program whereby evacuees with sound records might leave the centers indefinitely to take jobs and establish homes in normal communities. Up to the present time, about 10,000 of the evacuated people have taken advantage of these procedures and have gone out on indefinite leave to establish themselves mainly throughout the interior sections of the country. In addition, approximately 6,000 have gone out on seasonal leave for work chiefly on farms throughout irrigated sections of the West. And in all these months, not one case of disloyal activity on the part of these people has been reported from any reliable source.

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Within the past few weeks, there has been a great deal of public discussion about the release of people from relocation centers. The procedures for granting release and the methods of investigating individual evacuees have been widely misunderstood. So tonight I want to state those procedures just as clearly as I can in order that the public may have the true facts. Over a period of many months, we have gathered a considerable amount of information on each evacuee 17 years or over -- information on their individual backgrounds and interests and their past employment records. Before any evacuee is granted indefinite leave, this information is carefully checked at the relocation center. If there is any indication that the evacuee might endanger the national security or interfere with the war effort, permission for leave is denied.

In addition--as a further precaution--we have submitted the names of all evacuees past 17 to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The FBI has now checked nearly 90 per cent of these names against its files and has supplied us with whatever information it had on the individuals involved. We have been using this information in determining eligibility for leave. But I want to emphasize the determination is made by WRA and not by FBI.

There are certain classes of evacuees who automatically are denied leave: one-- those who have asked to be repatriated or expatriated to Japan, two-- Shinto priests, three-- American citizens who have refused to swear allegiance to the United States and four-- those who have been denied leave once because of bad records. At the same time, there are thousands whose records show no reason why they should not be permitted to leave the centers.

The main point I want to make concerning the granting of leave to evacuees is this: the War Relocation Authority is exerting all proper precautions for the national security--and at the same time is providing the means for loyal American citizens and law-abiding aliens--to take their place in the national life and enjoy the freedoms which are assured by the Constitution.

The War Relocation Authority recognizes that the foremost task before the people of this country is to win the war. This means concentrating on fighting the enemy -- rather than fighting among ourselves -- and using all our available manpower where it can do the most good.

We have faith in the American democratic way of life, with equal rights, privileges, and responsibilities for all, regardless of race, creed, or national origin.

We assume that the great majority of the people of Japanese ancestry now in this country will stay here during the war and afterwards.

We have confidence in the ability of the armed forces to wage the war, and of the authorized intelligence agencies of the Government to give proper surveillance to all suspected or potential enemies within our country.

We believe that it is possible to distinguish between the loyal and the disloyal people of Japanese ancestry, as well as with other national or racial groups, to a degree which will insure the national security.

We believe loyalty grows and sustains itself only when it is given a chance. It cannot flourish in an atmosphere of suspicion and discrimination.

Let me repeat -- the manner in which the WRA conducts its program is of concern to all the people in the U.S. And it has a significance which goes far beyond the boundaries of this country. Our actions are being watched in Japan, where thousands of American soldiers and civilians are held as prisoners or internees; undoubtedly they are being watched in China, India, Burma and other countries whose collaboration is necessary if we are to defeat our enemies surely and quickly. These countries are watching our actions to see if we mean what we say when we talk about racial equality.

So it is important that we all approach this problem sanely and calmly, without racial emotion or hysteria. As I have said before, let's not handle this problem as Hitler would handle it in Nazi Germany, or as Tojo would approach it in Japan. Let's do it the American way.

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