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SAMPLING OF WEST COAST
PRESS CLIPPINGS - JULY 1944--AUGUST 1945

By Irene Webb, Editorial Clerk

A check of the newspaper clippings for the past year shows a switch-over in public sentiment on the West Coast toward the program undertaken by the War Relocation Authority from a position of four-to-one against in July and August, 1944, to four-to-one in favor in July, 1945.

The change in sentiment began with the first reports of the valor of the Japanese American soldiers in the European Theater in the Fall of 1944, and with constant insistence on the constitutional rights of the American Japanese, finally converted some and took the wind out of the sails of the opposition to a degree that it was becalmed into accepting the relocation program, even if many didn't like it.

The statistics as lined up in the accompanying chart do not present the entire picture, because these figures do not depict the length, position and general attitude of the newspaper stories as published. A year ago the sentiment was extremely antagonistic, groups and individuals were active and vocal in their opposition, unfavorable stories were given space and prominence, while the favorable publicity was largely from WRA releases or actions of groups or individuals in sympathy with the program. This favorable publicity was given scant space or "buried".

The present picture is entirely different. The majority of the press is won over, the rights of the Japanese are defended by streamer headlines, editorialized news, by cartoonists and columnists, by the general public in letters to editors, and incidents of terrorism and discrimination have subsided, although not entirely eliminated.

These results were not achieved by passive means. True, the heroism of the Nisei soldiers carried great weight, but while they were fighting and dying for their country, members of the American Legion were active to bar them from membership and to prevent the return of the Japanese to the West Coast. The incident at Hood River, Oregon, when the American Legion removed the names of all Japanese Americans from the honor rolls, months after the Italian campaign where the Nisei had played so prominent a part, is only one indication of the difficulty faced in winning over those opposed to the American Japanese into reaccepting them in their home communities.

So adamant was the stand of these citizens of Hood River, representing much of the attitude of rural communities on the West Coast, that it was only after nationwide condemnation of the action of the Hood River American Legion, by severe censure from Secretary of War Stimson--"It is wholly incongruous that servicemen of Japanese extraction....should be subjected to unworthy discrimination"....from Mr. Cozzens of WRA "You have betrayed the Legion by a deliberate insult to our Army, its uniform and the brave men who wear it. You have attempted to loosen the cornerstone of our democracy by striking at one racial group of descendants...." and from other Legion Posts and members of the armed forces the world over that the names of the American Japanese were restored to the honor rolls.

Commencing with the first period, during which the hunger strike at Tule Lake played an important part in the news, it was "let 'em starve", "ship 'em back to Japan", etc. During August and September, there were increasing attacks on WRA spending, "spreading Japanese propaganda while our sons are dying"; Granges were organizing against the WRA and the program of returning the Japanese to the West Coast, while individual Japanese began to sue for their rights under the Constitution to return to their homes.

The return of Esther Takei, a high school girl, to attend Pasadena Junior College, precipitated a deluge of publicity in Southern California, with one George L. Kelley trying to stir up a vociferous protest against her return. Excitement ran high, but when it was revealed by the authorities that the return was with the endorsement of the Western Defense Command, and that the Army and WRA had observers watching the situation, the storm soon blew itself out.

Then came a period filled with adverse public reaction to the information circulating that the Japanese were to be permitted to return to the West Coast, and countering it, mounting reports of the performances of the Nisei troops in the Italian campaign. Sentiment of the first group was counterbalanced by the second, as individuals and groups began definite action against race discrimination in the face of such reports.

There followed the recommendations of the California State Senate Fact Finding Committee to President Roosevelt, The Western Defense Command and the War Department "strongly urging" them "not to permit the return of Japanese to the West Coast and particularly California for the duration of the war," because of threats of "riots, turmoil and possible bloodshed".

But in December, amid loud protest from certain California legislators in the State and congressmen in Washington, the Army lifted the ban against the American Japanese to permit those known loyal to return to the West Coast. This brought forth a terrific repercussion from both the public and the press, but the movement to bring them back, backed by military authority and with the WRA running interference for them, went on. In January returnees began arriving, and with their arrival some opponents began to realize on their threats, and discrimination and terrorism sprang up.

There was a definite public reaction, however, to actual terrorism, which helped sway sentiment over to the American Japanese. Most of the law enforcing agencies set out to back up the laws of the State, and except for a few isolated instances of mockery, such as the Sumio Doi-Watson Brothers case, both law abiding and law enforcing citizenry stood ready to back up the Army in permitting the Japanese to return to the Coast.

Press notices, with a decidedly unfavorable preponderance a year ago, teetered about evenly divided during the winter and spring. However, the tide definitely turned in favor of the program with the publication of the casualty and decorations lists from overseas--with so many Nisei names among them--and when the full impact of the implication behind racial discrimination against one group began to hit home; general realization that the stage was being set for further discrimination against other groups, thus violating the principles of Americanism and the purpose for which the war was fought.

No group gave louder voice to its reaction than did the fellow soldiers who fought with the Nisei, and the service overseas press. The West Coast press clippings during June and July became voluminous with these men making their sentiments known.

Labor unions also came into the picture with discrimination against individual Japanese as they tried to find work, but hasty action by union leaders furthered by WRA activities, soon quashed this form of opposition.

The Federal Government let it be made known that it meant business in permitting the Japanese to return. In the Sumio Doi case, the U. S. District Attorney's office took action against the defendant Watson Brothers, who had been whitewashed in the local courts, on illegal possession of dynamite.

Finally came the first group evacuation from Rohwer, Arkansas, with much unfavorable comment, but the train moved on in, and for the most part the Japanese were welcomed back and permitted to take up their old lives or helped by WRA and sympathetic civic groups to make new ones.

The following chart, listing numerically press clippings for the various periods throughout the year, and the subjects predominating the news during that period is a cross-section sampling which shows the general trend of public and press sentiment.

		Favorable	Unfavorable	F actual
July 15 to Aug. 15, 1944 (Tule Lake Hunger Strike)	Items	46	262	16
	Letters to Editor	2	0	
	Editorials, Comments, Actions	1	7	1
Aug. 15 to Sept. 15 (Granges Organize--Nisei Sue to Return)	Items	139	499	25
	Letters to Editor	8	4	
	Editorials, Comments, Actions	18	32	
Sept. 15 to Oct. 1 (Esther Takei)	Items	48	317	1
	Letters to Editor	2	3	
	Editorials, Comments, Actions	10	15	
Oct. 1 to Nov. 30 (Reports of Nisei Soldiers Overseas--Anti-Jap Return Sentiment)	Items	755	750	14
	Letters to Editor	9	30	
	Editorials, Comments, Actions	26	52	
Dec. 9 to Dec. 16 (Senate Fact Finding Committee Report)	Items	58	56	10
	Letters to Editor	7	0	
	Comments, Actions, Editorials	9	11	
Dec. 18 to Dec. 23 (Army Lifts Ban)	Items	31	76	10
	Letters to Editor	10	10	
	Editorials, Actions, Comments	16	25	
Dec. 26 to Jan. 8, 1945 (Repercussion of Army Lifting Ban)	Items	100	79	
	Letters to Editor	22	31	
	Editorials, Actions, Comments	14	9	
Jan. 9 to Feb. 10 (First Returnees)	Items	310	264	96
	Letters to Editor	45	60	
	Comments, Actions, Editorials	71	73	
Feb. 15 to March 24 (Incidents Grow Numerous)	Items	59	80	12
	Letters to Editor	5	0	
	Editorials, Actions, Comments	7	5	

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		Favorable	Unfavorable	Factual
March 15 to April 30 (Civil Authorities Act to Protect Japanese)	Items	103	181	9
	Letters to Editor	12	10	
	Editorials, Comments, Actions	19	17	
April 30 to May 28 (Watson Bros.-Sumio Doi Dynamiting Case)	Items	381	230	8
	Letters to Editor	74	14	
	Editorials, Actions, Comments	30	20	
May 28 to July 7 (Casualty Lists Published- Union Actions)	Items	878	452	50
	Letters to Editor	114	75	
	Comments, Actions, Editorials	155	99	
July 7 to Aug. 11 (1st Group Evacuation- U. S. Dist. Att. takes legal action)	Items	706	179	29
	Letters to Editor	54	9	
	Editorials, Actions, Comments	25	21	