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PRESENT STATUS OF THE COMMUNITY
INTEGRATION PROGRAM IN CHICAGO

Talk by Ralph E. Smeltzer at the
W.R.A. Conference, Chicago
July 9, 1943

For the past six months, most of us have been largely concerned with the job of getting the largest number of evacuees relocated in the smallest amount of time.

Although we have not been satisfied with the number who have come out, nevertheless, we have made some achievement.

When we count up the number who have come to this city alone --2500-- we know we have made some achievement.

This very success has created another problem equally as difficult or perhaps even more difficult. This is the problem of integrating this many new-comers into the normal, on-going social life of the city. It is no small task.

To get 2500 young people out of a camp is one thing--but to integrate them into the community into which they resettle is yet another. Resettlement in Chicago is getting ahead of assimilation. If we fail to prevent in our resettlement program, social, religious, and recreational segregation, we are only sowing the seeds of future misunderstanding and public resentment.

We have in our hands the opportunity for which many sociologists have wished--that of assimilating a racial minority group. This opportunity is with us only for a short time; for unless the integration pattern energetically commences first, the pattern of racial segregation is sure to overtake us. This challenge is especially forceful at this moment when resettlers are coming at a relatively rapid rate. Unless quick action results, the battle against segregation is lost. The public is afraid of Japanese segregation which results in its counter-part, congregation.

The following quotation from the Chicago Herald-American of Friday, July 9, 1943, indicates the tenseness of the public's feelings in this regard:

"Complaints against some of the 2,500 Japanese sent to Chicago from internment camps reached the Federal Bureau of Investigation today.

"Citizens reported that the Japanese are forming "cultural" and "social" clubs, and loiter on corners on North Clark Street."

"It was charged before the Dies committee that the Japanese in Chicago are forming clubs."

Assimilation might be defined as the complete incorporation or absorption into our every community social activity where only the difference in physical features are noticeable. To accomplish this is a two-way job. First, we must counsel and urge the evacuees to get into Caucasian groups. Second, we must

counsel and urge the Caucasian groups to invite, welcome, and receive the evacuees into their intimate fellowship. Because of fear, self-consciousness, and timidity, the evacuees are reticent to aggressively make their way into Caucasian groups. Likewise, because of fear due mostly to a lack of information as well as normal reluctance to accept racial minority groups, well-established Caucasian groups are hesitant in doing their part in the integration process.

To overcome the inertia of the evacuees, the hostels and the relocation offices have organized strong counselling programs and discussion groups. On Monday evenings at the Brethren Relocation Hostel, for instance, all hostellers are required to attend a frank discussion on the subject, "How Can I Adjust my Personal Life in a New Community". Assisted by outstanding nisei or relocation experts of the city, a hostel staff member conducts a discussion of such topics as:

How are we different now from what we were before evacuation?
What is the outside world like?
How should I and how should I not apply for a job?
Where and in what form will I find discrimination?
What should be my conduct in public places?
What clothes should I wear?
How should I look for a place to live?

Then again on Thursday evenings, we conduct another discussion on the subject, "How Can I Adjust My Social Life in a New Community". Here are included such vital topics as:

What were the mistakes in our social life before evacuation?
Why did "Little Tokyo" develop?
What are their advantages and disadvantages?
What evidences are there already of unnecessary segregation here in Chicago?
What would be the ideal social adjustment?
How can we have mixed parties and dances?
Do nisei really want to be assimilated?
What can we do to get into Hakujin groups, churches, clubs, professional groups, etc.?
How much of our acceptance by Caucasians depends upon our own efforts?
How can other nisei be made to realize the importance of making the assimilation effort and of their own responsibility?

In order to reach those resettlers who have not gone through the hostels, as well as to follow up those who have, the Chicago Church Federation has organized a United Ministry to Evacuees. The staff of this United Ministry includes about fifteen Caucasian ministers of the city who are giving some of their time to visiting evacuees and counselling them concerning their social, avocational, vocational, personal and religious problems. Their primary aim is to assist evacuees find a satisfying place in the on-going Caucasian groups.

To this group of Caucasian ministers has recently been added a number of evacuee ministers and counsellors.

According to areas of this city, lists of nisei, their addresses, and other pertinent information have been supplied to this counselling staff. To further

assist this staff, a bulletin has been prepared which gives facts about the American evacuees in Chicago, the counsellor's integrating task, counselling suggestions, and resources available. The counselling suggestions urge all counsellors to continually keep the real needs of these people in mind; to suggest all of the wholesome social and avocational opportunities of the entire community for their consideration; to encourage them to continue their education; to not be over-sympathetic but to consider them as we would any other new-comers to a strange city; to strengthen their courage and enable them to "take" hardship, inconvenience, and discrimination in their stride.

Although this program has been under way for only about four weeks, recent reports indicate that more and more evacuees are finding their way into the churches, the park, clubs, the Y.M.C.A., and the Y.W.C.A. Just what percentage have found their way into such groups is difficult to determine at present.

The Chicago Park District with its fine staff of supervisors and well-equipped field houses is welcoming, counselling, and assisting evacuees find their place in the various part activities.

We hope that the desire of nisei for social activities will find a satisfactory outlet in mixed evacuee-Caucasian affairs through the sponsorship of various organizations throughout the city.

Although it may seem as if we have taken large strides toward implementing the integration process, we have only begun. This beginning has been with the churches because they seemed to be the most receptive at that moment. Other social agencies are now showing greater interest in this challenging program. As far as is practical, all agencies interested will and should find a role to play in this drama.

