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Community Analysis Section
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An Analysis of the Repatriate Group at Manzanar

On August 3, 1943 I attended a series of interviews in which Mrs. D'Ille of the Welfare Department discussed plans for travel to Tule Lake with members of the repatriate and expatriate group. On this day she was interviewing family heads (and also members of the family if they appeared) in order to determine whether all segregants would be able to travel or whether infirmities, pregnancies, etc. might necessitate special arrangements. She also answered questions which repatriates or members of their families asked and told them where they could obtain legal aid or information about property and baggage arrangements. Mrs. D'Ille very kindly took time to draw out information in which she thought I might be especially interested, and it is largely due to her thoughtfulness in this regard that some of the most illuminating particulars emerged.

While I was present the representatives of 27 families were heard. Ninety-three individuals were involved in decisions concerning these 27 families. One family was large, consisting of father, mother and seven children. In two others three children were involved. But most were families with but one or two children or were cases of couples with no children, with no children at Manzanar or with children in Japan only.

I was considerably interested, of course, in the reasons for repatriation by which these people have been motivated. One of the most conspicuous of these can be called the personal-family. It has been generated by the war but it is not due primarily to a feeling of patriotism or attachment to Japan. The first person to be interviewed exemplified this particular motivation. His initial question was "When will the Gripsholm sail?" He explained that his children are in Japan, caught there by the war while visiting relatives. Not long after Pearl Harbor he got a telegram through the Red Cross informing him that his daughter was very sick. He has not been able to obtain further word concerning her health. His one thought is to be reunited with his children and to determine the state of health of the girl who was reported ill. He signed for repatriation in the hopes that this would be the speediest manner of attaining these ends. The war enters into his thinking

mainly because it is the factor that prevents direct communication and reunion with his children. Evacuation divested him of all but personal property. In view of his concern over his children there is little to hold him here at a time of war, especially when he must live here under the unfavorable conditions created by evacuation.

Another man explained that he is much worried about his mother, who is seventy-one years old. He supported her on his earnings as a gardener, sending her money every month. Now his possessions are gone and he can do nothing for her until he gets to Japan, where he hopes to work and aid her once more. As a result of his overwhelming sense of obligation this man is taking his wife and three children to Japan. The children range in age from 11 to 15 years. None of them holds Japanese citizenship.

One of the finest and most respected men in the Center, a person who has worked faithfully in the welfare Division, told much the same story. He came to the office with his handsome wife and two beautiful daughters. He expressed regret that he felt obligated to make a decision to leave America, which had been his home since 1910. He also stated that he had no special interest in Tule Lake. "I like Manzanar best. I don't like to go to Tule Lake, but I can't help it," is the way he put it. "I have a feeling of responsibility for the old people in Japan; that is the only reason," he explained. "My mother, father and one sister are in Japan. My father is 72, my mother is 70 years old. I have been helping them and cannot do it as long as the war lasts and I am here. Also my wife has relatives in Japan about whom she is worrying." It is evident that this family would have continued to live in this country and that this man would have continued to discharge his obligations to his parents from this side of the sea had not the war come. The family had purchased a home, which has lately been sold, in the name of the eldest daughter. Had war been declared 10 years or even 5 years later the old people who are drawing the family to Japan would probably be gone and there would be no thought of return. As it is these worthy and peaceable alien residents and their two lovely and entirely Americanized children are being lost to this nation.

Quite often to the personal-family factor is added an economic element. This is the case with a man and wife who operated a restaurant in Los Angeles until the time of evacuation. Their equipment and most of their investment were lost. The man's father, who is in Japan, is old--"old enough so that I

should take care of him." Two children of the couple are in Japan with the grandparents. In this instance it is difficult to separate the personal from the economic factors. The man naturally wishes to be reunited with his parents and children at this critical time. But he also is plainly aware that he has lost his economic stake in this country and will inherit from his father, who is now old, if he can get to Japan. In view of what has happened to his fortunes in this country, the family assets remaining in Japan are now more attractive.

In another group of cases the economic motive, or what is better described as the economic-uncertainty element was definitely dominant. In these instances the family head has suffered severe financial loss and sees no way of rehabilitating himself in this country in the future because of age, because of legal obstacles (alien land laws, etc.,) or because of anticipated discrimination. In the past, Japanese in this country who suffered reverses could look for aid from relatives or associates of their own group. But the losses sustained during evacuation have been so general and so severe that this is now a forlorn hope. Therefore many who have lost heavily assume that whatever assistance they receive from others must come from relatives in Japan. Accordingly those who have kin in Japan whom they think may be in a position to help them, look to the Orient rather than to this country as the place where they will be best able to make a fresh start.

One old man, whose appearance gave unmistakable evidence of the years of toil on a celery ranch which he had developed near Venice, expressed this view in these words:

"I have a sister, a brother, and a daughter in Japan. I am 62 years old now. I have been here in America 43 years. I really am an American; I feel that I am an American, for I have been here 43 years. But I think of it this way. If the war lasts 5 years I will be 67 years old. It will be too late to start in again then. If I get back to Japan now I still can work; I can make enough on which to live. That's all I want. My daughter will help me out and I think it is cheaper to live in Japan than here. Here these young boys will get all the jobs. I'm sorry I'm an old grandfather. I never thought I'd be a nuisance in this United States after 43 years, but that's the way it is."

Another case which belongs to the same category is that of a man who lost most of his assets in a restaurant he operated in Los Angeles for fifteen years. He has a father and two brothers in Japan and feels that it will be safer to start over in the country of his origin after the war.

In another instance a man and wife and the wife's parents are eager to reach Japan. They feel that they have a better alternative than trying to restore the family economy in this country, for the woman has a relative who owns an important mining property in Manchuria, and they hope to share in this wealth.

Still another man has a ninety year old father in Japan from whom he will inherit property. Now that he is dispossessed here the family property looms large in his future plans.

Still another motive for repatriation can be termed cultural-national. In these instances the individual feels his affiliation with Japanese culture so strongly or his sympathy as a national of Japan is so decidedly with the mother country, that he feels he should be in Japan at this period of crisis and conflict. A good example of this attitude was that of a man who declared, when he was asked why he wanted to repatriate, "One of the main reasons is to put myself definitely on record as a Japanese. That's the main thing." He was quick to point out the "Japanese" character of the whole family saying: "My wife is a Nisei; she was born in this country. But she was taken to Japan at 18 months and came back at the age of 17. She is Japanese." This man's resentment at the United States and his self-identification with Japan were unmistakable. But these emotions, it should be stated, cannot be entirely separated from the economic picture. Of his former business he said grimly: "I used to live in West Los Angeles and work at the nursery business. At evacuation it was all cleaned up."

A young man, a kibe, who has spent 7 of the last 10 years in Japan and whose parents are in Japan, feels that it is his obligation to the Japanese government to return at the earliest possible moment. He explained his position thus: "I came to the United States in 1940. When I left I told the Japanese government that I would be back in two years. I married here, got a wife here and we have a baby. That's all I have left of my trip to the United States." His stay in this country has been "a trip" to this man and repatriation is the logical and honest step for him to take.

A second young man, also a kibe, seemed hostile and sullen. He returned to this country in 1938, after 16 years in Japan. When asked whether he had been working he replied, "I haven't been working (at Manzanar) lately. I don't feel like working, It's too hot I guess."

The most pathetic instance of this kind was that

of the issei father who is paying a high personal price for sending his two boys to Japan for their education. The boys were sent to Japan in 1924. One returned in 1937, the other reentered the United States in 1941. Both, though they are American-born, have requested repatriation. Their foreign-born father refuses to do so. The old man came to the hearing with the one son with whom he is on speaking terms. He testified that he had little control over the boys, particularly over the one who had returned in 1941. He said that he would go with his sons to Tule Lake but that he did not wish to return to Japan and would not do so, though the boys would go at the first opportunity. The old issei, as a result of long and continuous residence in this country has become more assimilated and Americanized than his native-born sons!

There were a few cases that did not lend themselves to the three broad categories mentioned. One is that of an uneducated and poorly endowed farmer from the Florin, California region who wishes to take his family of nine to Japan. He has no living relatives in Japan. There is no property there which he expects to obtain. All that sustains him in his request for repatriation is the sense of helplessness and frustration at having lost his farm, and the pious hope that he will be somehow better treated and more fortunate in Japan. Out of loyalty to the parents the older children have signed individual repatriation forms, though they are obviously dismayed at the turn of affairs. Said the oldest girl:

"I don't know whether I would be willing to live in Japan the rest of my life. But whatever my father decides is all right. At times like these I don't want argument in the family and I don't want to have my father worrying about me."

The oldest boy, who has just reached the age of 18, decided to sign the individual repatriation request on the same grounds, declaring:

"If I have to go I will. If my parents go to Tule Lake I'd better go too."

That the father has little conception of the legal and political implications of what is taking place is indicated by his remark: "I want to be sure that my son can come back to America after the war."

Probably the most touching of the cases which do not yield to neat classification is that of a man and wife, neither of whom is in good health. When asked about their motives and whether they had many relatives or particular interests in Japan, the old man responded:

"No, I have only one sister in Japan and she is poor. The reason I signed it was that I understood that for every Japanese that went to Japan, an American would be brought back to this country. For that reason I signed it and I want to leave it that way even though it is disappointing, the number of Americans that have got back."

To summarize: The dominant motivations for repatriation requests of 27 families at Manzanar have been analysed and classified. Since this is almost half of the total number of families involved, it is considered a fair sample. With few exceptions (allowing of course for overlapping and multiple factors) the dominant motives can be brought under three headings, namely, personal-family, economic-uncertainty, and cultural-national. By far the greater number of cases fall into the first two categories. The first category exists primarily because Japanese immigration to this country has been so recent that kinship and personal ties between the immigrants and relatives in Japan have not been finally severed. The second category is largely the result of evacuation. Active disloyalty to the United States or hostility against this country are not, consequently, the driving forces behind repatriation requests, despite the popular belief to the contrary.

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