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ONE DAY'S OBSERVATION OF WHITE RIVER VALLEY SITUATION

April 17, 1945

- I. Locality: Renton, Orillia, O'Brien, and Kent, Washington
- II. People interviewed:
- | | |
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| WRA Relocation Supervisor (in Seattle) | 1 |
| Owner, Grocery Store | 1 |
| Owner, Hardware Store | 1 |
| Banker | 2 |
| Superintendent of Schools | 1 |
| Principal, Grade School | 1 |
| Minister | 3 |
| Housewife | 1 |
| Real Estate man | 1 |
| Ex-mayor | 1 |
| General: Stores, restaurants, garages, etc. | |

*III. It is regretted that Auburn, Sumner, and a few other communities could not be covered and also that the local farmers, land-owners could not be contacted.

IV. Definitely certain is the fact that our long-time friends have remained friends. Neither the evacuation nor anything which followed it has changed their friendship towards us. It is gratifying to know that the clergy by and large have been taking a firm stand in favor of the returning of the evacuees and have not hesitated to make public pronouncements to that effect. "Our friends," however, unanimously and consistently advise us not to return to the Valley for a little while because the sentiment is still a little too rough. They say any Japanese who is making a living somehow elsewhere might as well stay out of the Valley for the time being.

They all agree that only a handful of people are agitating the entire Valley out of selfish motives, and the majority of the people are aware of it; therefore, they all agree that if Japanese came back, the majority would accept them without any difficulty. But they all are afraid that the agitators might do something radical to the first few returning Japanese. As our friends, they say, they dare not advise us to come back into such a situation.

According to one man's observation, the economic motive is not the only cause. The war itself has contributed a great deal to the development of anti-Japanese sentiment, especially among the relatives and friends of those who have become war casualties in the Pacific war. Of course, in this type of "anti" sentiment is always found the utter confusion of Japanese, the enemy, and the Japanese in the United States.

* No direct contact with the "anti" people was attempted, for obviously it was impossible to do anything with or about them within such a short space of time; furthermore, what they were saying or doing was well understood.

According to another man's observation, a few Nisei came back, primarily to look around but with a chip on their shoulder. They are not bad people nor morally undesirable. But from the standpoint of public relations they were not the right kind of people. They antagonized the local people and made the situation very much worse.

- V. Activities of the Remember Pearl Harbor League are causing sheer disgust among the intelligent citizens, who, however, have not been very articulate in expressing their views. At the same time, it is frankly admitted that the League has not failed to put a lot of pressure upon the local people in the anti-Japanese direction by way of intimidation. Among the dealers of fertilizers, seed, etc., and the buyers of farm produce is an agreement that they would not either sell to or buy from Japanese farmers, and any one who shows willingness to deal with Japanese is instantly boycotted by the others and by all the producers. By the same token, the land-owners are opposed to renting their land to Japanese farmers, not that they all hate Japanese farmers, but because they are afraid to be boycotted by their fellow citizens.

At present this intimidation method is very effective and proving successful mainly because there is no Japanese farmer around to deal with. It will cease to be effective only when there are enough Japanese farmers producing enough goods to make it utterly silly not to deal with them.

- VI. Sizing up the situation, I have reached the conclusion that at the earliest possible date a religious and/or civic leader or leaders from among the evacuated Japanese must return to the Valley to prepare for the returning of the evacuees.

1) As long as Japanese stay away from the Valley, the anti-Japanese movement, especially by way of intimidating the good and decent citizens who are friends of Japanese, will not cease. In order that "our friends" could prove their stand to be true, just, and right, "we" must not only be talked about but also must be actually and constantly seen. An "anti" movement against a group image without real people who belong to the group is extremely effective, but efforts to counteract it can never be effective as long as the arguments for or against them remain the sphere of the abstract.

2) The first few returning evacuees must necessarily face difficulties and possibly intimidation of one kind or another. Even though the Government agencies, especially the WRA, are giving their assurances of protection of not only their life and property but also their business, they will need moral support because until some one returns there, those assurances remain "untested" and their hesitation and doubt may be to a certain extent justified. The presence and activities of a leader from among their own will be reassuring to them.

3) Our friends in the Valley also need strong moral support. The local leaders, religious and civic, must have a focal point in order that they may make an organized effort for us. A Japanese leader will provide them with this very thing. When the local leaders become better organized and articulate, the local land-owners, dealers, and people on the street will be free from the

intimidation of "anti" people.

4) Sooner or later somebody must return there and break the situation. On one hand, it seems to me that the longer we stay away the worse the situation grows. On the other hand, the closing of the relocation centers make our situation exceedingly imminent. We cannot be complacently saying "those who are somehow making a living elsewhere may well stay where they now are" because a large number of people will have no place to make a living after December 31, 1945.

VII. As to the evacuees from the White River Valley, a few remarks are in order.

1) There are only a small number of Japanese who own property in the Valley. Most of them have already relocated somewhere or another. Most of them, however, are anxious to return to their own homes. But at the same time they can afford to mark time if they have to, for they are making a living on their own. Most of them have made a visit to the Valley to look into the situation and have been advised to stay away for the time being.

2) The majority of the people (approximately 50 families) who used to be tenant farmers are mostly located at Heart Mountain Relocation Center. Most of their grown-up sons are now in the United States Army - on whom the entire family have to depend in order that they may make a decent sort of living as farmers. Very few of them have had any other training than farming. Many of them have several school-age children or even younger ones. This is the group of people that can neither mark time nor return to the Valley at once, nor find it very easy to relocate elsewhere.

3) To those who are now at Heart Mountain, advice has been repeatedly given to the effect that they should

1) let the WRA officially know of their intention and desire to return to the Valley.

II) let the WRA know as soon as possible of their family situation which is making it impossible to relocate elsewhere in the meantime, if such is the case.

4) The attitude of the present governor of the State of Washington and the mayor of Kent, insofar as it is reported through the press, is not encouraging to the evacuees.

VIII. Conclusion:

My personal feeling regarding the White River Valley situation is very hopeful.

1) There are enough number of intelligent, fair-minded and influential citizens who are willing to help us and on whom we can definitely count. In this connection a word of appreciation is in order for the stand which Mr. John Fournier of the Kent News Journal and Mr. Edmundsen, the Superintendent of Schools, have been taking, together with the clergymen who have not hesitated to make their congregation know of the Christian view concerning this matter.

2) Government agencies are on their toes.

3) The Japanese people have a long-established good reputation among the local people and that reputation has not been and will not be lost in spite of the distorted propaganda made by the agitators.

4) There are several Christian farmers among evacuee Japanese who will be readily accepted into any American community and who are ready to return to the Valley as soon as the minimum amount of reassurance will be given. To them the presence of a Japanese leader, religious or civic, will be sufficient to make up their minds to return there.

It is largely due to the hard work of the Japanese people that the White River Valley is today what it is. Even if the number of Japanese who will eventually return there might be rather small, the door back to the Valley must be kept open for them who have contributed so much to the wealth of that Valley. The spirit of Americanism demands it. In the cases of some families, it may be wiser for them to find their places somewhere else. As a matter of general principle, I am definitely in favor of the wider dispersion of Japanese Americans throughout the entire country. But I am equally firmly convinced that the door back to the Valley must be kept open because therein the fundamental American principle is at stake.

/s/ Daisuke Kitagawa
April 25, 1945

