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at the request of the Writers' War Board.

November 5, 1945

### JAPANESE AMERICANS: A TEST OF OUR DEMOCRACY

One result of the war and the Allied victory over Japan has been to direct increased attention to the discrimination practiced in the United States against the people of Japanese parentage. The fact that this minority constitutes only about one-tenth of one per cent of the nation's population underlines the need for understanding them and granting them the rights due all Americans. Fair treatment of this small minority is bound to result in a better break for other minorities as well. Though numerically larger, they face essentially the same kind of prejudice.

Japanese Americans are pretty much like other people. They want economic security, wholesome family life, and freedom to work and plan their own lives. Like all immigrant groups in the United States, the parents have had problems of fitting into life in our country, and the Americanized children have had problems of adjusting to their less Americanized parents.

Most of the Japanese immigrants to the United States arrived between 1900 and 1910. They settled principally in California, Washington, and Oregon. By 1940 the total population of Japanese Americans was 126,947, of whom 112,353 were living in the three Pacific Coast states. Almost 80 per cent were in California.

Roughly two thirds of the Japanese Americans are Nisei -- American



citizens by birth. Their alien parents -- Issei -- had been denied the right of naturalization along with all other Orientals. Yet the great majority of them have shown by their daily lives that they prefer the American way.

Japanese Americans are often thought to be mainly stoop laborers and domestic workers. That is not so. It is true that the Japanese immigrants, until they became adjusted to life in America, were employed almost exclusively as low-grade laborers and servants. As they became acquainted with American ways and standards, however, they tried to improve their economic position. Probably no other group of American immigrants which was confronted with so many obstacles at the start has equaled the progress of the Japanese Americans, particularly of the second generation, in adapting themselves to the wide scope of American industry and commerce.

According to the 1940 census, Japanese Americans were employed not only as domestics, farm laborers, and farm operators, but in numerous other occupations. Among them were clerical workers and salesmen, business owners and executives, industrial workers, and professional men and women. Others were employed in food stores, laundries, cleaning and dyeing plants, hotels and lodging houses, and many other places. Today Japanese Americans make up practically a cross-section of the many types of workers and professional persons to be found in almost any good-sized American town. In addition, about 3,000 young Nisei are attending some 500 colleges and universities throughout the country.

The outbreak of war and events since then at home and abroad increased the antagonism which has been deliberately stirred up against Japanese Americans for years before, principally on the Pacific Coast.



There the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West, the American Legion, various farm and business groups, the race-baiting press, politicians, and other organizations and individuals had long agitated against the people of Japanese ancestry.

On the other hand, events since Pearl Harbor have also helped bring about a better understanding and fairer treatment of Japanese Americans throughout the country as a whole. That has been due principally to two things: (1) the evacuation of all Japanese Americans from the West Coast early in the war and the subsequent dispersal of thousands of them among many Eastern and mid-Western communities; and (2) the remarkable record of the thousands of Japanese American soldiers who fought for their country from Anzio to Okinawa.

The evacuation of the Japanese Americans from the West Coast took place during the first half of 1942. It was ordered and conducted by the Army for what then seemed to be urgent reasons of military security. The evacuated zone consisted of the western half of Washington and Oregon, all of California, and the southern third of Arizona. From this area some 110,000 Japanese Americans were transferred to 10 wartime communities known as relocation centers which had been newly constructed in seven inland states west of the Mississippi River.

This mass movement of the only racial or national group to be uprooted in the United States during the war was without precedent in American history. Its justification will be debated for many years to come, for no charge of mass disloyalty was made against the Japanese Americans. Those individuals considered dangerous to our national safety had previously been taken into custody by our intelligence agencies.



Operation of the relocation centers has been the responsibility of the War Relocation Authority. This Federal agency was established by executive order of President Roosevelt on March 18, 1942, and is now part of the Department of the Interior. The WRA is presently completing the job of relocating the evacuees and will be liquidated by June 1, 1946.

The relocation centers should not be confused with internment camps for dangerous aliens of enemy nationality. The centers, actually barrack towns with the minimum of comforts, were established principally as temporary wartime residences for the evacuees until they could return to private employment and normal American communities.

Within a few months after the centers were opened, the War Relocation Authority initiated the relocation program and evacuees started leaving to resettle in communities outside the evacuated area. To help them find jobs and housing and otherwise adjust themselves to their new life in strange surroundings, WRA opened field offices in about 60 cities. In these and hundreds of other communities, the relocation program has had the active support of the citizens' committees, church and civic groups, welfare agencies, unions, and many public-spirited individuals who saw in the Japanese-American problem a test of our democracy.

On January 2, 1945, the War Department lifted the mass exclusion orders barring all Japanese Americans from the West Coast, and in September it removed the orders specifically excluding certain persons of Japanese ancestry who were thereafter granted permission to return to the evacuated area. Approximately 6,700 individuals of Japanese ancestry are still interned by order of the Attorney General either at Justice Department camps or at the WRA Segregation Center at Tule Lake,



California, pending final review of their cases by the Attorney General and approval by the military authorities of the removal of hostile Japanese nationals to Japan. The Department of Justice also has in custody some 2,000 voluntary internees. All other Japanese Americans are free to return to their former West Coast homes or to resettle in any other place of their own choice without further investigation or hindrance of any kind.

By the end of 1945, the task of relocating the displaced Japanese Americans was almost completed. All the centers were to be closed by December 15 with the exception of Tule Lake, ~~in California~~, which was to be shut down by February 1, 1946. By that time, approximately half of the evacuees will have returned to their former West Coast homes. The other half will have distributed themselves in towns and cities and on farms in many other parts of the country, principally in friendly communities of the mid-West and East.

Regardless of the reasons which made mass evacuation appear to be a military necessity in early 1942, the rescinding of the exclusion orders is indisputable evidence that the War Department, after careful study, decided that only a small number of the evacuees were questionable from the standpoint of national security.

The lifting of the exclusion orders was forecast in September 1943 by President Roosevelt. At that time, in a message to the Senate, he said: "We shall restore to the loyal evacuees the right to return to the evacuated areas as soon as the military situation will make such restoration feasible. Americans of Japanese ancestry, like those of many other ancestries, have shown that they can, and want to, accept our insti<sup>o</sup>



tutions and work loyally with the rest of us, making their own valuable contribution to the national wealth and well-being. In vindication of the very ideals for which we are fighting this war it is important for us to maintain a high standard for fair, considerate, and equal treatment for the people of this minority as of all other minorities." Earlier, President Roosevelt had said: "The principle on which our country was founded, and by which it has always been governed, is that Americanism is a matter of mind and heart, Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry."

Relocation has been no easy thing for the evacuees. Before evacuation many of them had sold their homes, businesses, or farms. Since they were allowed to earn a maximum of \$19 monthly at the relocation centers, the savings of numerous evacuees were badly depleted before they left the relative security of a center to relocate. The small grant given them on leaving by the government was hardly enough to assure their security, especially since they had to find work and housing in new communities where few if any Japanese Americans had previously lived. The older people, particularly, were afraid and uncertain about the reception they and their school-age children would receive "on the outside." As members of a minority group whom many persons erroneously identified with our Japanese enemy, they had an understandable fear about facing the discrimination and distrust which they as individuals had done nothing to stir up.

For the most part, nevertheless, the relocation of the Japanese Americans has proceeded with little open opposition except during the past year on the West Coast. Dozens of incidents of violence or open intimidation have been directed against Japanese Americans returning to their former homes, particularly in California. These incidents have



included shooting attacks, an attempted dynamiting, several arson cases, and threatening visits. Some of the acts were committed against families of Nisei servicemen. On September 19, near Loomis, Calif., the ranch house of Mr. and Mrs. K. Sakamoto, an elderly Japanese-American couple with four sons in service, was burned to the ground a few hours before they and three daughters returned to their home after three years in a relocation center. For more than 20 years Mr. and Mrs. Sakamoto had been residents of the district and highly respected members of the community. One of their sons was killed in Italy, another was attached to Army Intelligence in Okinawa, and the other two were serving in the European theater, one of whom had been decorated for bravery in France. Soon after the fire, Californians began raising a fund for a new home for the Sakamotos.

Another incident occurred in Seattle, Wash., on September 24. There vandals shattered with stone a window displaying a service flag in the home of Isako and Pauline Takahashi, Nisei sisters. The flag was for their brother, Mitsuru, a member of the 442nd Combat Regiment and Purple Heart veteran of two major battles in Italy who was then awaiting shipment home.

The injustice of these incidents, and of others that could be cited, is highlighted by the war record of the 20,000 Nisei from the mainland and Hawaii who have been inducted into the U. S. Army, not one of whom proved to be a traitor. Ironically, many of the Nisei troops who were killed or wounded in Europe and the Pacific had parents and other relatives who were living in relocation centers behind barbed wire and under armed guard.

No unit in the American Army has won higher praise than the 100th



Infantry Battalion, composed almost entirely of Americans of Japanese descent. The most decorated unit in U. S. military history in relation to time spent in combat is the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. This unit consists of the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Combat Regiment of Japanese Americans which were combined on the battlefield in Italy in June 1944. Up to September, 1945, the 10,000 Nisei GI's who passed through the ranks of the 442nd had received more than 1,500 decorations and 4,500 Purple Hearts during 225 days in combat. The Nisei troops had been awarded five Distinguished Unit Citations, 65 Distinguished Service Crosses, 290 Silver Stars, 782 Bronze Stars, and numerous other decorations. One of their outstanding achievements was the rescue of the "Lost Battalion" of the 141st Regiment of the 34th Division near Bruyeres, France, in November 1944.

The War Department just recently began to reveal the record of the Nisei soldiers who fought against Japan. Thousands of specially trained Japanese-American intelligence troops worked with American combat teams at Guadalcanal, Attu, New Georgia, the Philippines, and Okinawa; in Burma, India, and China; and now in Tokyo itself. They tapped lines, listened in on radios, translated documents and papers, persuaded enemy troops to surrender, made spot translations of messages and field orders, and in many other ways helped win battles and save countless American lives.

Japanese-American civilians proved their loyalty by buying war bonds, giving blood to the Red Cross, salvaging scrap iron and paper, working in war plants and Federal emergency agencies, and helping to raise



vital wartime crops.

Many relocation center residents made camouflage nets for the U. S. Army and airplane models for Navy training courses. When the R. J. Ederer Company plant in Chicago won the Army-Navy "E" for excellence in production for the armed forces, its employees included 33 Japanese Americans, mostly women. At the Electronics Mechanics Corporation, Clifton, N.J., seven Japanese Americans worked alongside other technicians on secret Navy work. Shiro Ebihara and his son Hank, both aliens, worked on parts for tanks, planes, and guns at the Johnston and Jennings Company plant in Cleveland, Ohio. Brownie Furutani, a Nisei carpenter, worked on the final experimental buildings at Los Alamos, New Mexico, where the atomic bombs were assembled. Hundreds of Japanese Americans did vital war work for the Office of Strategic Services, Federal Communications Commission, Office of War Information, and other Federal agencies.

Now that the war is over, what does the continued hounding of Japanese Americans and persons of other minority groups back in the United States mean to the Nisei GI? Technical Sergeant Ben Kuroki, Nebraska-born Nisei veteran tail-gunner of 58 heavy-bomber missions over Europe and Japan and holder of three Distinguished Flying Crosses, put it this way when he recently addressed the annual New York Herald Tribune Forum on Current Problems:

"Not only did I go to war to fight the fascist ideas of Germany and Japan, but also to fight against a very few Americans who fail to understand the principles of freedom and equality upon which this country was founded.

"I'm no authority. I'm not an expert or a big wheel. I don't know anything that any boy from Nebraska couldn't tell you. But I know this:



I fought with a lot of men in this war -- all kinds -- a Polish gunner, a Jewish engineer, a German bombardier, and even a full-blooded Dakota Indian. I saw men wounded, and whatever land their grandfathers came from, their blood <sup>was</sup> ~~of~~ always the same color. And whatever church they went to, the screams of pain sounded just about the same....

"I'd like to go home to Nebraska and forget the war, and just lie under a tree somewhere and take it easy. It's hard to realize that the war is not over for me. Not for a lot of us, Jewish-Americans, Italian-Americans, Japanese-Americans. While there is still hatred and prejudice, our fight goes on. Back in Nebraska on our farm, when I planted a seed, I knew after while I'd get a crop. That's the way it was with a lot of us in this war -- we want to plant the seeds to bring in a crop of decency and peace for our families and our children.

"Back in high school in Nebraska, one of the things they taught me was that America is a land where it isn't race or religion that makes free men. That's why I went to Tokyo. I went to fight for my country, where freedom isn't color but a way of life, and all men are created equal until they prove otherwise....."

GI's who fought and lived together have learned -- perhaps the hard way -- that the color of an American's skin, the slant of his eyes, or the shape of his nose doesn't matter so long as he is in "mind and heart," to use Roosevelt's words, an American. By continuing to fight together on the home-front in the battle against prejudice and intolerance, GI's can do a great deal to lick the race-baiters, the bigots, and America's own brand of home-grown fascists.

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Japanese Americans are pretty much like other people. They want economic security, wholesome family life, and freedom to work and plan their own lives. Like all immigrant groups in the United States, the parents have had problems of fitting into life in our country, and the Americanized children have had problems of adjusting to their less Americanized parents.

Roughly two thirds of the 130,000 Japanese Americans are Nisei -- American citizens by birth. Their alien parents -- Issei -- had been denied the right of naturalization along with all other Orientals. Yet the great majority of them have shown by their daily lives that they prefer the American way.



The outbreak of war and events since then at home and abroad increased the antagonism which has been deliberately stirred up against Japanese Americans for years before, principally on the Pacific Coast. There the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West, the American Legion, various farm and business groups, the race-baiting press, politicians, and other organizations and individuals had long agitated against the people of Japanese ancestry.

On the other hand, events since Pearl Harbor have also helped bring about a better understanding and fairer treatment of Japanese Americans throughout the country as a whole. That has been due principally to two things: (1) the evacuation of all Japanese Americans from the West Coast early in the war and the subsequent dispersal of thousands of them among many Eastern and mid-Western communities; and (2) the remarkable record of the thousands of Japanese American soldiers who fought for their country from Anzio to Okinawa.

The evacuation of the Japanese Americans from the West Coast took place during the first half of 1942. It was ordered and conducted by the Army for what then seemed to be urgent reasons of military security. The evacuated zone consisted of the western half of Washington and Oregon, all of California, and the southern third of Arizona. From this area some 110,000 Japanese Americans were transferred to 10 wartime communities known as relocation centers which had been newly constructed in seven inland states west of the Mississippi River.

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Within a few months after the centers were opened, the War Relocation Authority initiated the relocation program and evacuees started leaving to resettle in communities outside the evacuated area. To help them find jobs and housing and otherwise adjust themselves to their new life in strange surroundings, WRA opened field offices in about 60 cities. In these and hundreds of other communities, the relocation program has had the active support of citizens' committees, church and civic groups, welfare agencies, unions, and many public-spirited individuals who saw in the Japanese-American problem a test of our democracy.

On January 2, 1945, the War Department lifted the mass exclusion orders barring all Japanese Americans from the West Coast, and in September it removed the orders specifically excluding certain persons



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Relocation has been no easy thing for the evacuees. Before evacuation many of them had sold their homes, businesses, or farms. Since they were allowed to earn a maximum of \$19 monthly at the relocation centers, the savings of numerous evacuees were badly depleted before they left the relative security of a center to relocate. The small grant given them on leaving by the government was hardly enough to assure their security, especially since they had to find work and housing in new communities where few if any Japanese Americans had previously lived. The older people, particularly, were afraid and uncertain about the reception they and their school-age children would receive "on the outside." As members of a minority group whom many persons erroneously identified with our Japanese enemy, they had an understandable fear about facing the discrimination and distrust which they as individuals had done nothing to stir up.



For the most part, nevertheless, the relocation of the Japanese Americans has proceeded with little open opposition except during the past year on the West Coast. Dozens of incidents of violence or open intimidation have been directed against Japanese Americans returning to their former homes, particularly in California. These incidents have included shooting attacks, an attempted dynamiting, several arson cases, and threatening visits. Some of the acts were committed against families of Nisei servicemen. On September 19, near Loomis, Calif., the ranch house of Mr. and Mrs. K. Sakamoto, an elderly Japanese-American couple with four sons in service, was burned to the ground a short time before they and three daughters returned to their home after three years in a relocation center. For more than 20 years Mr. and Mrs. Sakamoto had been residents of the district and highly respected members of the community. One of their sons was killed in Italy, another was attached to Army Intelligence in Okinawa, and the other two were serving in the European theater, one of whom had been decorated for bravery in France. Soon after the fire, Californians began raising a fund for a new home for the Sakamotos.

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The injustice of these incidents, and of others that could be cited, is highlighted by the war record of the 23,000 Nisei from the Mainland and Hawaii who have been inducted into the U. S. Army, not one



of whom proved to be a traitor. Ironically, many of the Nisei troops who were killed or wounded in Europe and the Pacific had parents and *other* relatives who were living in relocation centers behind barbed wire and under armed guard.

No unit in the American Army has won higher praise than the 100th Infantry Battalion, composed almost entirely of Americans of Japanese descent. The most decorated unit in U. S. military history in relation to time spent in combat is the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. This unit consists of the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Combat Regiment of Japanese Americans which were combined on the battlefield in Italy in June 1944. Up to September, 1945, the 10,000 Nisei GIs who passed through the ranks of the 442nd had received more than 1,500 decorations and 4,500 Purple Hearts during 225 days in combat. The Nisei troops had been awarded five Distinguished Unit Citations, 65 Distinguished Service Crosses, 290 Silver Stars, 782 Bronze Stars, and numerous other decorations. One of their outstanding achievements was the rescue of the "Lost Battalion" of the 141st Regiment of the 34th Division near Bruyeres, France, in November 1944.

The War Department just recently began to reveal the record of the Nisei soldiers who fought against Japan. Thousands of specially trained Japanese-American intelligence troops worked with American combat teams at Guadalcanal, Attu, New Georgia, the Philippines, and Okinawa; in Burma, India, and China; and now in Tokyo itself. They tapped lines, listened in on radios, translated documents, and papers, persuaded enemy troops to surrender, made spot translations of messages and field orders, and in many other ways helped win battles and save countless American lives.



Returning servicemen from all fronts have begun to make their influence felt in places where discrimination has been directed against Nisei soldiers or their families. For example, terroristic incidents against returning evacuees were condemned not long ago by members of the 4th Marines in a letter to various West Coast newspapers. These servicemen knew first-hand of the fighting record of Japanese American soldiers, for their outfit had borrowed Army Nisei combat intelligence troops for the battle of Iwo Jima. In their letter the marines said: "Whether the activity consists of threats of physical violence, or economic discrimination...it follows the pattern of intolerance so well established by the Nazis."

In Stockton, Calif., a group of 28 Pacific veterans recently restored a desecrated Japanese cemetery. Jack Vineyard, leader of the group, said: "I don't ~~know~~ see how anyone who calls himself an American could pull anything like this. I know how I'd feel if my parents were buried in another country and I came home and found their graves desecrated because they had foreign names."

Various posts of the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars <sup>HAVE</sup> been attacked by the public and servicemen alike for discriminating against Nisei soldiers. Even their own national commanders criticised the American Legion Post in Hood River, Ore., for removing the names of 16 Nisei soldiers from the county Honor Roll and VFW Post No. 51 in Spokane, Wash., for blackballing for membership ~~Nisei~~ Pfc. Richard Naito, a Nisei who was recuperating from battle wounds in nearby Baxter General Hospital.



The Hood River American Legion Post finally was forced by public protest to restore the Nisei names to the honor roll. The VFW Post's action against Naito led almost immediately to the drafting of a petition by 458 of his hospital mates from many parts of the country in which they requested the VFW Post to reverse its decision. Although the VFW Post stood by its decision, out of this protest has arisen a new organization, the Veterans' Committee for Equal Rights. The goal of the committee is "to promote the maintenance and extension of democracy under the Constitution of the United States of America, by insuring equal social, political, and economic rights for all present and former members of the armed forces and merchant marine, regardless of race, color, creed or extraction."

A few weeks ago, Bill Mauldin, whose widely syndicated cartoons recently included two attacking anti-Nisei terrorism, publicly laced into bigots at home who mock the sacrifices of soldiers by stirring up hate and intolerance. Addressing the New York Herald Tribune Forum on Current Problems, the former staff sergeant cartoonist with the Mediterranean edition of "Stars and Stripes" said in part:

"We beat Mussolini. Yet, when I came home, I found that a little people within our own borders was being trampled on as badly as Benito ever trampled on anybody. Several thousand American citizens of Japanese ancestry were being cheated and hounded and threatened and persecuted by their neighbors. Their homes were burned, their businesses were stolen, and their barns were dynamited. They made one of the greatest combat records, suffered some of the highest casualties of any of our forces, because the sons of those people were in the United States



infantry. The very type of criminal their sons were fighting overseas was operating in the country they left behind.

"If we were told the truth about the reasons why we went overseas and why some of our best friends were killed and crippled before our eyes, if it is true that we were put into soldier suits to wipe out the Hitlers and the Mussolinis and the Hirohites and the beliefs and the evils which they fostered, then we have not won the war -- we have won only the battles. . . ."

GI's who fought and lived together have learned -- perhaps the hard way -- that the color of <sup>a</sup> fellow-American's skin, the slant of his eyes, or the shape of his nose doesn't matter so long as he is in "mind and heart," to use Roosevelt's words, an American. By continuing to fight together on the home front in the war against prejudice and intolerance, GI's can do a great deal to lick the race-baiters, the bigots, and America's own brand of home-grown fascists.

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