

Our treatment of the Japanese is surely a test case of whether we can help to direct alien communities when this war is over.

## The Japanese In Our Midst

by George E. Taylor

### 1

The future of the Japanese minority in the United States is no longer a domestic issue for three states of the Pacific Coast: it is the responsibility of the entire Union. Most of the West Coast Japanese are now settled in permanent relocation centers where they remain as wards of the nation. The American people have thus assumed the power to plan the lives of these 112,000 persons, more than half of whom are American citizens.

The distinction between citizen and non-citizen among the Japanese evacuees arises from our refusal to permit the Issei, the first generation of Japanese immigrants, to take out naturalization papers. The law, however, made the children of the first generation American citizens by virtue of their birth in this country. These are the Nisei. Some of these were sent back to Japan for their education and are often considered as a separate group, the Kibei--a group upon whom more suspicion has fallen, perhaps, than on either of the other two.

These distinctions among the various groups within the Japanese minority are no sure guide to their degree of loyalty to America. For most people it is more difficult to accept even the Nisei as loyal citizens than the corresponding second generation from German or Italian stock. While there is no doubt that the Japanese in America had an excellent espionage system before Pearl Harbor and that Japanese consuls made efforts to win over the Nisei by forcing them to attend Japanese language schools, there is little evidence to show that the Nisei were deflected from their loyalty to the United States.

The reactions of the Nisei to America and to the war seem to be roughly parallel to those of second-generation Germans and Italians. The reasons are clear. These American citizens of Japanese ancestry have lived their lives in this country, have gone through our high schools, taken honors in our universities, and tried to share in our life. They responded with alacrity when the Army recently opened its ranks to them. From the experiment in relocation which they are now undergoing may well emerge the techniques for dealing with the numerous relocations which will accompany and follow the winning of the war. In our relocation centers important international policies are taking shape.

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Once evacuation was decided upon, it followed logically that that these people should become at least temporary wards of the Federal government. The charge against Washington would have been severe indeed if the evacuees had been let loose outside the Western Defense



zone and told to fend for themselves. For the majority of the Japanese this would have meant victimization, exploitation, and possible starvation. As it is, the appropriation of \$70,000,000 to the War Relocation Authority is about equal to the estimated capital losses of the evacuees. Although feeding and housing involve detention, this was the only civilized way of handling a mass migration.

It was a gigantic problem and I must say it was carried out with reasonable credit to the American people. A Japanese-American colleague wrote me that he considered the evacuation from Seattle and excellent example of American democracy at work. Nor must one overlook the cooperation of the evacuees themselves, their disciplined acceptance of a hard decision. But now that we have the Japanese evacuated, what are we going to do about them?

## II

The Tolan Commission pointed out that incarceration, if continued for the duration of the war, could end only in wholesale deportation; we could hardly expect years of detention to encourage loyalty to American institutions. "If nation believes as the Committee does, that we must live with these people after they enter reception centers?"

The question uppermost in the minds of the evacuees is naturally: What is our attitude towards them? What are our intentions for their future?

At first sight, the position of the Japanese minority seems full of anomalies. Immediately after Pearl Harbor about three thousand persons of Japanese ancestry, suspected of fifth-column activity by the FBI, were rounded up and incarcerated at Bismark, North Dakota, with persons of other nationalities. At the same time, forty thousand aliens and twenty thousand Japanese-American citizens have been excluded from the West Coast and located in ten main centers situated in the states of California, Arizona, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, and Arkansas. But those Japanese who evacuated the West Coast before the freezing order of March 19, as well as those who were already domiciled in the eastern part of the United States, are free to come and go as they please, and even if they are aliens, do not suffer the same restrictions as citizens of the West Coast.

In Hawaii, where the Japanese outnumber the white population, only a few hundred Japanese have been imprisoned and a few thousand deported. Defense plans count on the loyalty of the general population. There was plenty of espionage among the Japanese aliens before Pearl Harbor, but we have the authority of the Chief of Police at Honolulu that "there were no acts of sabotage committed in the city and county of Honolulu December 7, nor have there been any acts of sabotage reported to the Police Department since that date." His statement was published three months after Pearl Harbor. Nor has sabotage been reported on the West Coast.

The chief reason for evacuation was fear of mob violence against persons of Japanese ancestry in case of attack on the West Coast. Fear of espionage and sabotage came next in order of importance. As far as Japanese aliens and the Kibei are concerned, fear of espionage were probably well grounded. But there is less reason to doubt the loyalty of the Japanese-Americans, the Nisei, who form the majority in the relocation centers. Their average age is twenty-two years, their knowledge of Japan and Japanese is negligible, their ambition to be Americans is genuine and compelling. No charges are brought against them or, for that matter, against anyone not sent to Bismark, North Dakota.



In spite of the extracurricular Japanese schools which they have always attended reluctantly, a very effective job of Americanization has been done on the Nisei--one wishes sometimes that it were not so complete. As a group they think like the middle class, they aspire to a mastery of business, jazz, and dancing; they are essentially conservative in social life and politics. Private enterprise could have no firmer supporters. They were not politically-minded; they worried much less about international affairs than about getting the family car for Saturday night. They wonder what we hold against them.

Mainly we hold against them the charge that they were not assimilated and were therefore a danger to the public peace in time of war with Japan. We were emotionally unprepared for the war, passions could easily be aroused, Japanese were too easily suspected. Part of our suspicion arises from our ignorance of the Japanese minority. Had the war come ten years later the problem would not have arisen in the same form because succeeding generations would have lost their economic dependence on the first, non-citizen generation. The influence of the Japanese consulates and banks might well have been broken. As it was, the danger of mob violence against anyone of Japanese ancestry was very real.

Most of the Nisei, therefore, see that they have to suffer with the rest, not because they are not charged with disloyalty but because they are not assimilated. One of them called the evacuation policy a "necessary injustice." But what of our responsibility? Having carried out the surgical operation, having removed so many persons from the living tissue of American life and isolated them from the main currents of world conflict, it would be an even greater tragedy if full advantage were not taken of this to bring about a just and lasting solution of the Japanese minority problem.

### III

When the Army finished moving them, the evacuees were turned over to the War Relocation Authority.

The WRA established permanent relocation centers, two of which are on Indian land. In one of these, Poston, Arizona, administration had been delegated by the WRA to the Indian Service. Much of the small "Caucasian" staff at this camp comes from the Indian Service, one of the few branches of the government to which we could turn for a group of men who had had long experience in dealing with a minority group. Under the progressively enlightened policies which John Collier has done so much to encourage during the last decade, the treatment of our Indian population is one of which we have good reason to be proud. To this Indian Service nucleus has been added a group of extremely able persons, many of whom have had successful experience with the Japanese.

Poston is essentially an experiment in planned relocation. The long-term program can be roughly summarized as aiming at two things: the building up of a temporary community, and preparation for ultimate assimilation. A community must be built up along self-government lines and in conformity with the wishes of the inhabitants, not only in order to help reestablish morale but also because there are some, perhaps, who will not wish to leave the camps even if allowed to do so. If the Colorado Indian Tribe to whom the land and all its improvements will always belong should extend the lease, many evacuees would be glad to remain and farm this rich soil. It is possible to imagine Japanese communities growing up in these relocation centers in which the centripetal forces would be stronger than the centrifugal--communities which would be a free but distinct part of the American scene. To be a free part of the American scene,



however, there must be, for many of the evacuees, a new birth of confidence, knowledge, and capacity for the American way of doing things.

Poston today has the framework within which a new society can grow. Formerly disgruntled evacuees say that it "will work"; there machinery through which hundreds are leaving for temporary positions in areas outside the Western Defense Zone; there is a bridge between the evacuees and the outside world.

Looked at with this framework in mind, it is possible to put the many apparent clashes of personalities and policies at Poston into their proper relation. Among the Caucasian administrators, those who daily job it is to build up a community, the camp officials, the adult education leaders, the engineers, and the teachers can hardly avoid giving the impression that they look on this as a permanent project. Those whose function it is to move men out of the camps to satisfy the demand for agricultural labor in the Midwest, or those who are trying to relocate students in Eastern universities, naturally have less sympathy with the more permanent aspect of camp life. These differences illustrate the difficulty of reconciling the two things which the plan demands: freedom to leave Poston and freedom to build a community at Poston.

#### IV

The first crisis is definitely over. Administration and evacuees have lived through months during which evacuees were bitter, bewildered, upset by broken ties, torn by conflicting rumors, doubtful of the good faith of the government. The issei taunted the nisei--"I told you so, you are impounded with the rest of us." Farmers feared for the future, for even the land belonged to the Indians--this was to be another Arab-Jew situation. The first announcement, for example--created, in this tense atmosphere, a wave of optimism which turned to despair when self-government did not come overnight.

This period of uncertainty is over and a mood of acceptance and cooperation is taking its place. There are no outward signs among the evacuees of any lowering of morale. Everyone dresses well and the women somehow manage to look clean, cool, and beautiful in heat and dust. The nisei are taking this experience as well as any other Americans but they are still living on their moral credit, like the girl who said, "We have unpacked our luggage but not our minds." They are not divorced from their old environment. When this spirit runs low, what inner resources can they draw upon?

The order in this community is the more amazing when one considers the physical conditions under which the 18,000 people are forced to live. Dust, fine and all-pervasive, is a constant factor; there is no escape from it. The evacuees at Poston's three camps are housed in barracks constructed by the Army on land which the Colorado River used to overflow before the construction of the Parker Dam. The heat is ten degrees hotter than in the Libyan Desert. The evacuees call the camps Roastem, Toastem, and Postem.

The third largest community in Arizona, Poston takes its name from the first delegate to Congress from the Territory of Arizona, the man who secured \$50,000 of the public funds for the construction of irrigation ditches in what is still Indian territory. The water for the project is diverted from the Colorado River by the recently constructed Headway Dam of the Parker Irrigation Project, but reaches the first of the camps through Poston's old ditches. Irrigation water will soon reach the second and third camps.



Last summer, in a temperature which goes above 120 degree every day, the evacuees had to get along with very little water and under very crowded conditions. Army barracks divided into rooms twenty feet by twenty-five feet afford little protection from the heat. Sometimes as many as three families shared one room. In September a survey of the housing situation showed that in one area fourteen families occupied seven rooms. Under these conditions privacy could not exist, for there are no partitions.

The Japanese consider the housing problem the most urgent and acute of all the questions facing the administration at Poston. They point out how hard it is to create a home out of a floor space eight feet square per person, which is the allotment where a family of seven occupies one apartment. They feel that conditions may defeat them in the fight to maintain individual and family integrity. A highly respected Japanese Christian said that if this condition continues much longer, there will be a collapse of morale. "Unrelieved tension continued over a period of months will have serious consequences." Friendships of long standing come to an end, the moral condition of the young people deteriorates, children are driven outside their home for their social life. Nobody stays at home in Poston, and that is an unhealthy and dangerous sign. Many of the older people, too feeble to take care of themselves, are separated from their families.

The following was written by a young Japanese last September:--

Tonight as I sit here and type at my portable placed on a table that is used for almost everything under the sun, the thought comes to me that I ought to portray an actual evening at home in an overcrowded apartment. I consider mine an overcrowded apartment, for in it there are seven of us. At the present moment my wife is trying in vain to put our four-months-old baby girl to sleep. She is pacing the length of the 20'x25' room with the baby in her arms, but the baby continues to cry. My elderly male cousin is lying prone on his bed in one corner of the apartment and trying hard to concentrate on the front page of a three-days-old newspaper, but I am certain that it is only with difficulty that he is reading the paper, for he is constantly casting glances toward my wife and the wailing baby. My middle-aged female cousin is also lying prone on her bed, which is located in the center of the room alongside the bed of her ten-year-old daughter who is still very much full of pep and energy despite a strenuous day of play outdoors. The young daughter is keeping herself busy between making a necklace of melon seeds and calling everyone's attention to the little minnows that some of her little boy friends caught for her during the day in the near-by creek. My mother-in-law was puttering around for a while with her sewing, but she must have tired of it, for I now note that she has gone outside and is carrying on a conversation with one of the neighbors on our front porch.

The thing that strikes me just at this particular moment is this: How long can we keep up this strain that is brought about by the lack of privacy?

No wonder an evacuee lawyer who formerly had an excellent practice said that he thought of almost nothing but his physical condition.



What kind of society can the evacuees create in these conditions? A beginning has already been made towards the establishment of self-government. Under provisions of the WRA, the project directors were authorized to set up a Community Council, elected by everyone above the age of eighteen. Only United States citizens over twenty-one years of age could hold office. At the same time, all residents, citizen or non-citizen, were eligible for appointive offices in the administration. The powers of the Community Council are limited mainly to the maintenance of internal peace and order. The Council has no authority to regulate the management, operation, or conduct of business enterprises within the center.

The form of government gives the administration considerable latitude in the handling of one of the ticklish problems of relocation life: the relation between the younger and the older generation. The American citizens in Poston, who number 60 per cent of the total population, are for the most part under thirty years of age; the other 40 per cent, mainly aliens, are well over forty. There is a very noticeable falling off in the age group between thirty and fifty years. The younger generation has not had time to achieve economic independence from the older, non-citizen generation or to produce a large number of experienced leaders.

Under these conditions full authority could not be given to the Japanese-Americans; it could only be placed gradually in their hands. By a double system of administration, the elective and the appointive, the younger generation is being trained for full responsibility, and the older generation takes part in practical administration. The experience and prestige of the one group balance the youth and ambitions of the other. In this way it is hoped that something of a brake can be put on the tendency towards the disintegration of that powerful Japanese institution, the family.

The forces which are undermining family loyalties arise from the nature of the relocation camps. Where food, shelter, and clothes are provided by the government, the father of the family ceases to have any economic hold upon his children; where the mother ceases to be the cook, she loses one of her main functions in the eyes of children. All meals are taken in the common dining room, all cooking is done by professional cooks. Where housing conditions are so crowded, the discipline of children ceases to be a family matter and becomes the affair of the group. Under these conditions it would be disastrous to increase by constitutional arrangement the gap between the two generations. It was the strength of the family which accounted in large measure for the magnificent discipline which the evacuees have shown during months of intense heat and discomfort.

There are few groups in the United States which could have come through this experience so well as the Japanese-Americans. There are many scars--those who formerly wanted to volunteer for the Army are not now so keen, those whose faith in American democracy was high are now discouraged--but on the whole there is a willingness among the issei to accept their position fatalistically, and among the nisei to insist, by actions, that they are American citizens.

The inner spirit of a community is hard to judge. But whatever freedom the evacuees may be given politically to develop in their own way, much of the framework is already decided for them by the economic policies of the WRA. From an economic point of view Poston is an version of a collective farm. Irrigation and farming are a community affair directed by an evacuee and Caucasian bureaucracy. Most of the Caucasians are in the irrigation work, bringing water from the Parker Dam to irrigate an area which, when completed, will cover 80,000 acres but is now limited to one quarter of this amount.



There is a great deal to be done yet in the way of clearing land of the fast-growing mesquite, making roads, and general construction. Irrigation ditches, drainage canals, and levees are the condition of agriculture, and work on these still monopolizes most of the heavy equipment.

Everyone works for the project--there is no other employer. Labor is paid a basic wage of \$16 a month, but managerial and professional labor receives \$19 a month. The only way to acquire money is to work for one of the project departments. There is an allowance of \$4 for clothing. A family of four children would therefore receive \$16 for the worker and \$24 for clothes; with the estimated equivalent of \$120 for maintenance, the total income would be \$160 a month. It costs the government forty-five cents per head to feed the evacuees, compared with the current cost of sixty-two cents for the Army. The 18,000 inhabitants of Poston receive 6000 quarts of milk a day. The food is tolerable. For one third of the evacuees these conditions, apart from housing, represent an improvement, for another third they spell a sharp lowering of the standard of living.

The immediate economic objectives of the project have been laid down by WRA. The evacuees are to raise only enough food to be self-sufficient and to help other camps. At the same time many other things are going on--experiments with rubber-producing plants, the introduction of beef and dairy herds. The growing season is 270 days a year, the rainfall three to five inches, the soils rich and varied. With sufficient water a rich agricultural community can develop.

Health, like other things, is a government service. A well-run hospital takes care of public health, professional services (doctors and dentists receive \$19 a month), nursing and sanitation. Recreation is a community service--some 60,000 people attend baseball games every month for nothing. The stores, which do a roaring trade and are the real centers of social life, are community enterprises.

The WRA permits the establishment of co-operatives, and the Rochdale Institute, by invitation, sent representatives to teach for a month at Poston. The possibilities for the growth of a cooperative society are intoxicating--cooperatives could take care of everything from the repair of shoes to the manufacture of agricultural implements. As no other form of evacuee enterprise is permitted, the evacuees will have to choose between organizing cooperatives for the production of their consumer goods and services or purchasing them with their \$16 a month wages.

But it is not easy to develop cooperation among the evacuees. Those who want to develop it see their problem as one of education, particularly among the younger nisei. They find that there is little incentive to work, because of the continuing sense of injustice, and many of the formerly well-to-do laugh at \$16 a month. The development of cooperatives also raises the problem of wages. Must the government rates be adhered to? Can profits be used to raise the real wages of the employees? How do cooperatives fit into the economic future of the project? Will they fit into the same picture with government factories--for example, the one just finished for making camouflage nets? Having permitted the development of cooperatives, the Poston opened the way, if the evacuees wish to follow it, to the handing over of a great deal of economic control from the government to the evacuees.



## VI

It is one thing for men to leave a concentration camp with a burning sense of injustice; it is another thing, and a matter of some importance to America, if they leave a community in which they have pride, feel free to grow, and through which they have faith in American institutions.

Of the evacuees who have already left Poston, some have gone on a temporary and others on a permanent basis. The temporary labor has already performed signal service to the war effort. It is estimated that the 1600 who went out last year to harvest the sugar-beet crop saved the government \$5,000,000, not counting the cost of the materials. Only 400 had returned in September; half the others had made arrangements for semi-permanent employment, and the rest, if they could not make a similar arrangements, intended to return. Under the present WRA ruling an evacuee is allowed to stay outside, except for the Western Defense zone, if he has obtained employment. Most of the demand, which is persistent and growing in proportion, is for agricultural work, but the Federal Employment Service is also handling requests for jujitsu experts, nurses, and domestic servants.

Many evacuees families go out on a permanent basis from the beginning. The sugar-beet companies, acting for individual farmers and underwriting the deal, have asked for as many as 1700 workers at a time, with their families, to settle in Nebraska and Colorado. Many of the farmers are shorthanded because their sons have gone into the Army, or for the reasons, and they are willing to provide permanent homes for families, not single men, on a share-cropping basis. In this way a beginning is being made in the process of spreading the evacuee population over the face of the country--a process which many think is the first condition of assimilation.

The conditions under which evacuees leave the camps are carefully controlled. The workers must be paid the prevailing wages in the district according to the surveys made by the Federal Employment Service. There must be satisfactory housing, the employer must transport the employee to a metropolitan center at least once a week and provide for a doctor. WRA has field workers in each district to watch developments. Areas are chosen in which the local sheriff promises protection and the local schools take in the children. Each evacuee carries with him two postcards addressed to the field representative, to whom he can send complaints. The evacuees are permitted to get other positions if they wish to do so. As the labor shortage becomes more and more acute the pressure to secure labor from the relocation camps will increase and the question of the conditions under which this is permitted will assume even more importance. If freedom is still linked to employment, the evacuees feel, the danger of pressure group wanting to use the relocation centers as government-run "oakie-reservations" is very real. This future of destitution is the nightmare of Poston.

## VII

The experiment at Poston is being carefully studied by observers responsible to a branch of the armed forces. Our future tasks in relocating displaced peoples in many parts of the world, and in providing temporary administration and public services for peoples released from long-endured bondage, are being prepared for in many ways. But here at Poston is both an experiment and a test case; it is well worth the watching.



Poston's chief difficulty, that of maintaining a modified position, goes to the heart of the problem. It is difficult to avoid building up a permanent labor camp of embittered citizens, on the one hand, and to avoid the danger which would attend a too rapid dispersal of the evacuees at this stage. There is unfortunately no practical way of testing loyalty short of putting people in a position where they could be disloyal and taking the risks. The evacuees must be permanently relocated as soon as public opinion and the fortunes of war allow, but as this will be at best a slow process, those who have to live in camps must be giving giving the moral fortitude and proper incentives to do so. As this problem relates mainly to the young, the suggestion has been made that we give full freedom to American citizens among the evacuees to leave Poston if they so desire. Few would be able to leave, and those who remained would feel and act like free men. Such a measure would guarantee the loyalty of a group whose faith has been sorely tested. In this connection the Army's new rulings deserve the highest praise.

Complete detention and complete dispersal are clearly not the practical alternatives; the picture must include something of both. Poston must be considered as an organism growing in and into the American scene. What happens to those who leave Poston cannot fail to affect those who remain; what happens to those who remain will affect those who leave. Men who have built something of which they have reason to be proud will not feel ashamed to walk abroad and will be freer to make their own conditions if they decide not to come back. Men who are wage earners in government-managed bureaucratic enterprise run by Caucasians assisted by some evacuees will meet the same faith outside. They will not have the knowledge, the experience, the leadership, or the will to fight for the freedoms which all of us, whether members of minorities or majorities, must constantly struggle for if we are to keep them.

The position of the evacuees must be clarified. Officials at Poston realize that if the evacuees leaving the camp are suspected, because of lack of definition of their status, the whole policy of the WRA will fail; it is no use getting evacuees out on a permanent basis unless they are going to be accepted as loyal citizens. If we prefer not to let them come out, or want them only for cheap labor which can be returned when not needed, then it would be best to understand the connection between this attitude and the urgency of securing the political allegiance of the peoples of Asia in our struggle with Japan.

The consequences of not dealing with this issue intelligently and justly are serious. First, the Japanese of Japan would be provided with valuable fuel for the flames of race hatred which they are trying to whip up all over Eastern Asia. Secondly, the Chinese, our one great ally in Eastern Asia, our one bulwark against the threat of a race war against the white man, would be very much discouraged if the Japanese-Americans were badly treated. Chinese in Salt Lake City are reported to have given \$250 to the Japanese-American Citizens' League because they sympathized with the position of an Oriental minority in the United States. The Chinese in China, who have suffered much more at the hands of the Japanese than we, have on occasion lectured their Japanese prisoners on the origins of the war and set them free to return to their own lines. They have encouraged a Free Japanese Movement--to use against Japan the Japanese who want to liberate their country from the grip of the militarists.

The Chinese do not wish to see every Japanese in concentration camp: they want to defeat the Japanese in order to create a world in which there will be a greater measure of equality between men of different colors.



Our experiment at Poston will be watched by our allies and our enemies, for it is a test case of our intentions in this world at war. More important still, it is a demonstration of our ability to handle one of the earliest problems of the peace.

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