

DEMOCRACY BEGINS AT HOME-II

RELOCATING A PEOPLE

In the most extreme manpower shortage in our history, the government is confronted with the paradox of maintaining 110,000 people of Japanese descent, evacuated a year ago from Pacific Coast military areas, in camps operated at considerable expense to the government, where their full productive possibilities cannot be utilized. More than 40,000 of them are employable; the majority are American citizens. Their resettlement for residence and employment in other section of the country, rather than the operation of relocation centers as ends in themselves, has therefore become the major objective of the federal government. In this policy the War Relocation Authority has the approval of the War Department, the Department of Justice, and the War Manpower Commission.

Nearly two-thirds of these people are American citizens. Nearly two-thirds were born in America and most have attended American schools. Only a few thousand of this citizen group have ever been outside the boundaries of the United States. The draft-age men not already in uniform were made eligible to volunteer for military service by an official announcement of the War Department on January 28, 1943, which recognized "the inherent right of every faithful citizen, regardless of ancestry, to bear arms in the Nation's battle."

The aliens, who comprise the remaining third, are barred from citizenship by our immigration laws which do not permit Orientals to acquire citizenship by naturalization. Almost without exception, however, they have lived in the United States for at least two decades, and the majority of them have been here for three decades, or longer.

When these people were evacuated, there was no intent to remove from them any of their rights or to deprive them of the opportunity of earning a livelihood and contributing to the Nation's economy. The relocation of these people now--of both citizens and aliens whose records indicate they would not endanger the security of the country--in normal communities where they may enjoy the full benefits of American justice is a national problem deserving the thoughtful consideration of every person who believes in American principles. Altogether, the Japanese American population evacuated from the West Coast comprises less than one-tenth of one per cent of our total population. Dispersed throughout the interior of the country, only a few families to any one community, they should be able, with their wide diversity of skills, to contribute notably to the civilian and wartime needs of the Nation.

II

A factual account of the brief history of relocation may throw some light on this developing government policy of individual resettlement dispersal.

When the evacuation of all persons of Japanese ancestry from Military Area No. 1 along the Pacific Coast and the southern part of Arizona was first announced by the Commanding General of the Western Defense Command in February 1942, it was apparently assumed that the process would be largely, if not entirely, voluntary in nature. During most of March 1942, persons of Japanese ancestry, aliens as well as citizens, were encouraged to move out of Military Area No. 1 and go wherever they pleased in other parts of the United States. By the middle of March, however, it became apparent that 112,000 people of all ages and occupations could not, within the short space of a few weeks, close out their economic affairs and find new homes and new methods of making a living in other parts of the country without considerable assistance and direction from the government. An agency to provide such assistance was established by Executive Order 9102 creating the War Relocation Authority on March 18, 1942.

This Executive Order was broad and flexible. It directed the Authority to formulate and effectuate a program for the "relocation, maintenance, and supervision" of persons excluded from military areas. It authorized the Authority to provide "in so far as feasible and desirable for the employment of such persons at useful work in industry, commerce, agriculture, or public projects, prescribe the terms and conditions of such public employment, and safeguard the public interest in the private employment

of such persons." Executive Order 9102 by no means crystallized policy with respect to the form of government assistance to be given these evacuated people, but it did reflect the view that voluntary dispersal was not the complete answer to the problems created by the decision to evacuate.

On March 27, two weeks after the establishment of the War Relocation Authority, the Commanding General of the Western Defense Command issued a "freeze order" which voluntary evacuation from Military Area No. 1 at midnight, two days later. Thereafter, persons of Japanese ancestry were not to leave this area except as permitted in further proclamations or order of the Commanding General. Prior to March 29, 1942 only some 8,000 persons of Japanese ancestry had voluntarily left Military Area No. 1. They settled for the most part in that part of California not in Military Area No. 1 and in other western states, particularly in Utah, Idaho, and Colorado where many had formerly worked or had relatives or friends. One of the principle reasons for the "freeze order" was undoubtedly the excitement and opposition which developed in some localities in the intermountain states toward the resettlement of the evacuated people in their areas. In a statement made at a press conference in Salt Lake City on April 7, 1942, Colonel Karl E. Bendetsen of the Western Defense Command stated that "the voluntary evacuation program had broken down because only small group left; state officials had said 'We won't take them'; and there was a great possibility of some untoward incident".

Thus voluntary evacuation foundered in part on the rocks of adverse "community sentiment." This question of community sentiment, or the reaction of the public, has continued to be the most important single influence on the whole effort toward the relocation of Japanese Americans.

The "freeze order" of March 27, 1942 was a large step in the direction of establishing government camps where the evacuated people might live during the war and be protected from incidents arising out of public hostility toward them. But before a definite decision to develop the program in this direction was made, Director Eisenhower of the WRA and Colonel Bendetsen of the Western Defense Command met on April 7, 1942 with the Governors and Attorneys General of 17 western states to discuss the possibility of the resettlement of evacuees in the western half of the country. The state officials at this meeting indicated strongly that the evacuated people would meet with a very unfriendly reception and that outbreaks of violence would result. Following the meetings, the WRA redoubled its efforts to locate sites where camps (relocation centers) might be built to house the evacuated people and where they might be employed and support themselves at least in part by growing food. The selection of two of these sites was announced before the end of April, and construction of the buildings was begun shortly afterwards by the Army engineers.

For the next month, little thought was given by the WRA to the relocation of evacuees as individuals or in family units in private employment outside the proposed relocation centers. About the first of May, however, other voices began to be heard in the western states. There was a growing scarcity of agricultural labor, particularly for the hand operations involved in thinning and cultivating sugar beets. Agricultural interests here and there began to request permission to employ the evacuated people in this type of work.

Both the WRA and the Western Defense Command--which by now had concentrated a large proportion of the evacuees into temporary camps in Military Area No. 1 designated as assembly centers-- were still very much concerned about the possibilities of violence against the evacuees in private employment. However, on May 13, the military authorities and the WRA announced certain conditions under which evacuees might be employed by private persons. Among the conditions imposed was that the governor of the state and the county officials at the proposed place of employment should make a written pledge that law and order would be maintained and the evacuees protected. These conditions were first met for Malheur County, Oregon, and late in May 1942 the first group of evacuees left the Portland, Oregon, assembly center to work for sugar beet farmers in that county.

It soon developed that the evacuees themselves were as much concerned about community sentiment as were the military authorities and the civilian officials of the WRA. They were very reluctant at first to accept the employment offered by the sugar beet farmers; but, as the first groups arrived at the place of employment and wrote back favorable

letters, increasing numbers decided to give it a trial. By the end of early summer seasonal labor demand in mid-July, some 1,800 evacuees had gone out into farm work in eastern Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and Utah. The military authorities, under whose jurisdiction they then were, imposed no restrictions on who might go out to work in this way. As in the period of voluntary evacuation, anyone could go. The only restrictions imposed by the federal government were orders of the Commanding General of the Western Defense Command restricting travel to a single county.

To the relief of the WRA, the adverse public reaction which had been anticipated if the evacuees were to accept private employment outside protected government camps did not develop to any considerable degree. There were only a few isolated incidents-such as the attempt of a farmer, with a sailor son in the Pacific, to pitchfork an evacuee in a small town store, which was averted by bystanders. There was also no evidence of any subversive activity or sabotage on the part of any of the 1,800 persons working in these four states. On the other hand, there were a good many communities where the evacuees were welcomed for their labor only, and were discriminated against in stores and eating places and in other ways.

It was quite evident by mid-summer in 1942 that public sentiment was not so adverse as to make hazardous the employment of the evacuated people in agricultural work in the western states. On the basis of this experience, the WRA began to consider assisting and encouraging evacuees to leave relocation centers for other types of employment in other areas of the country. The first tentative step in this direction was taken on July 20, 1942, with the issuance of an administrative instruction setting up procedures under which American citizens of Japanese ancestry might leave the relocation centers if (1) the applicant had never been to Japan even for a brief visit, (2) an investigation at the relocation center and a check with the records of the FBI had been made, (3) he had secured employment outside the Western Defense Command, (4) the sentiment in the locality in which he was to be employed was not as adverse as to lead to a disturbance of the peace. A favorable determination on community sentiment was a definite requirement. In addition, the investigation and the record check with the FBI were designed to allay the fears of communities to which the evacuees might go.

Less than ten evacuees, however, had left the relocation centers under the temporary instruction of July 20, by the time formal and definitive leave regulations of the WRA were issued on October 1, 1942. The principle change embodied in these regulations was to extend eligibility for leave from the relocation centers to all persons, aliens as well as citizens; and the removal of any restrictions on the area to which the applicants might go (except for the military areas on the Pacific Coast which required special permits from the Western Defense Command). In practice, however, there was a very considerable delay in approving applications for employment or residence in the Eastern Defense Command, which by informal agreement were checked with the War Department. The provisions regarding investigation, FBI record check, and determinations on community sentiment were retained.

Under these regulations some 800 persons had left relocation centers by January 1, 1943, about 550 of them college students. This was in contrast with the 10,000 persons working outside relocation centers on seasonal leave at the height of the harvest season in November 1942. The rate of departures on indefinite leave was gradually increasing, but the process was slow and cumbersome. Application for leave was ordinarily not made until the individual had secured employment, and frequently, by the time that leave was authorized, the job had evaporated. This delay could only be avoided by securing applications in advance. This procedure was instituted on a wholesale basis in February 1943 when a registration for leave clearance of all evacuees 17 years of age and over was begun. But a more fundamental reason for the slowness of relocation during the last three months of 1942 was the fact that evacuees were left to their own devices in trying to find employment opportunities and had no effective way of getting in touch with prospective employers often thousands of miles away.

Naturally, the possibility of enlisting the co-operation of the U.S. Employment Service as a means of getting evacuees in touch with the labor market was explored at an early date. The employment service was not, however, an automatic and complete solution to the problem. It was not equipped to check on community sentiment, for instance, and it was geared primarily to the placement of local people who could be seen and interviewed by prospective employers. The only practicable thing seemed to be for the WRA to establish a small field staff to explore community sentiment and channel employment opportunities back to the relocation centers.

Early in January 1943 this field staff was started with the opening of an office in Chicago. (226 West Jackson Boulevard, Elmer K. Shirrell, relocation supervisor.) There are now six additional offices and a small number of field men working out of these offices in the surrounding states:

Cleveland, 944 Union Commerce Building. Harold Fistere, relocation supervisor.
Denver, Midland Saving Building. Harold S. Choate, relocation supervisor.
Kansas City, 1509 Fidelity Building. E. H. Leker, relocation supervisor.
Salt Lake City, 318 Atlas Building. H. Rex Lee, relocation supervisor.
New York City, Room 1410, 50 Broadway. Robert Cullum, relocation supervisor.
Little Rock, Pyramid Building. E. B. Whitaker, relocation supervisor

Now that the feasibility of the enterprise has been demonstrated, arrangements have been made whereby the local offices of the U.S. Employment Service will begin to channel employment opportunities into the relocation centers as well. Another recent step designed to expedite relocation is the provision by the WRA of financial assistance for travel when evacuees do not have sufficient cash resources to get to the place of employment.

The procedural and administrative problems of relocation, which undoubtedly have been a drag on progress to date, have thus been pretty well liquidated. The fundamental problem of community sentiment still remains. This has two major aspects. There is the "real" community sentiment, which in extreme form may merely restrict to the less desirable jobs the types of employment offered them. The second aspect involves the "impressions" of community sentiment in the minds of those still in the centers. On the whole these impressions appear to be less favorable than the reality. Even now, with some 4,000 persons out of the centers on indefinite leaves and perhaps half that number on seasonal leave, largely in agricultural work, there may soon be more employment opportunities than takers, because of this fear of the "outside!" This particularly true among the first generation, whose average age is in the late fifties, and who have an understandable hesitation about leaving economic security and the companionship of their friends in relocation centers to make a new start in strange communities.

It is hoped that the young American citizens in the relocation centers will gradually lose their fears and doubts about the "outside" as more people leave, and that they will encourage their parents to follow them. Although offers of employment for domestic service and seasonal agricultural work continue to pour in, greatly in excess of the numbers of evacuees who have ever done types of work, other opportunities of a diversified nature are now developing. It will still be necessary, of course, for many evacuees to seek and take employment in occupations other than the ones in which they were engaged prior to the war; but the same necessity exist in some degree for millions of other Americans. Many occupations--such as selling--have almost disappeared under wartime conditions.

An indication of the variety of skill represented by the group is given in this table of occupations of Americans of Japanese ancestry, 14 years of age and over, in California, Oregon, and Washington, on the basis of the 1940 census.

Agriculture:	
Men	17,785
Women	4,242
Retail trade (clerks, salesmen, etc.)	
Men	6,592
Women	2,690
Wholesale trade (both sexes)	2,190
Domestic service (private homes):	
Men	2,421
Women	2,323
Hotels, laundries, cleaners, and dyers	3,592
Manufacturing (all kinds)	1,978
Professional services	1,326
Finance, insurance, real estate	656
Railroading, trucking, etc.	686
Auto storage, rental, repair	292
Other business and repair services	119

On the whole, a better public understanding of Japanese Americans appear to be developing; and as more people around the country become personally acquainted with relocated evacuees, this trend may be expected to continue. The recently announced unit in the United States Army to be composed solely of American citizens of Japanese ancestry has been the most important single event influencing the public at large to consider these people fellow Americans. The reinstitution of Selective Service would probably have an even greater effect in this direction.

If present developments continue, it can reasonably be expected that a very large proportion, perhaps even a large majority, of the young American citizens of employable age in the centers will relocate during the coming months. The resettlement of the older people, especially those with families of young children, will naturally take place much more slowly; and methods not now envisioned will need to be developed to make it possible.

With the example before us of a far large number of persons of Japanese ancestry in Hawaii and the rest of the continental United States going about their business in a normal way, like first or second-generation Italian or German Americans, it is hardly conceivable we cannot find some method to absorb a large majority of Japanese Americans back into productive effort and into American life. In large measure the program will be a test of American democracy, for its ultimate success will depend on the good-will and capacity and vision of Americans who happen to be of different descent and whose forebears also chose this land as theirs.

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