

EFFECTS OF EVACUATION ON JAPANESE-AMERICAN
YOUTH

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Reprinted from

The School Review

Published monthly (except July and August) by

The University of Chicago at the University of Chicago Press

Under the Direction of the Editorial Committee of the Department of Education

Subscription price, \$2.50 a year

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

EFFECTS OF EVACUATION ON JAPANESE-AMERICAN YOUTH

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TODAY America is facing many youth problems which are the result of emergency measures created during the war era. Our American youth of Japanese ancestry represent, en masse, a group that was exposed to the most unexpected and disheartening experiences of any juvenile group in this country during the war years. The impression of these experiences has been stamped upon their personalities and may influence their thinking and their behavior in future years.

In their interest, and for the further development of sympathetic understanding and the promotion of good will among all groups, especially the youth of America, the following interpretation of the effects of evacuation on Japanese-American youth is presented, with the hope that the American public may better understand these young people and continue to offer sympathetic guidance as they endeavor to adjust to the American way.

A recent publication deals with the experiences of so-called "disloyal" Japanese adults at Tule Lake.¹ To

¹ Dorothy Swaine Thomas, with contributions by Rosalie A. Hankey and Others, *Spoilage: Japanese American Education and Resettlement*. Berkeley, California: University of California, 1946.

date, however, so far as this writer knows, nothing has been published on the adolescent Japanese-Americans of the "loyal" group. It is the writer's hope that this article will help to bring about an understanding of this group of young people.

The evacuation of seventy thousand persons of Japanese ancestry from the Pacific coast area, as a precautionary war measure, meant the uprooting of thousands of peaceful homes, the loss and damage of thousands of dollars of valuable property, and the despondency of many innocent and loyal citizens of the United States. The young people of this group, many of whom felt as totally American as any white youth in this country, had grown up with love and respect for the ideals of American democracy which were somewhat shattered by these sweeping changes brought about by international problems. Disruption of home life and security destroyed overnight the future hopes and desires of the group, leaving them baffled by the sudden estrangement of their lifelong friends.

Life in the relocation centers was decidedly different from life in their homes. Isolation, congested living-quarters, and many other factors played major roles in affecting the cul-

ture, attitudes, personality traits, and achievements of this group.

Near the closing of school in May, 1945, an inventory was taken by students of the Miles Carey High School at the Colorado River Relocation Center in Poston, Arizona to discover some of the general effects of the three-year residence at the center. The inventory was taken by pupils from Grades VIII, IX, X, and XI, ranging in age from twelve to nineteen years, of whom 66 per cent were rather evenly distributed between the ages of fourteen and seventeen. This inventory, it was believed, would be helpful to the boys and girls by focusing their attention on trends of their development during their three years of residency at the center, thereby aiding them in finding out shortcomings that would need special attention in the future. For the benefit of other persons interested in the future development of this group, tabulations were made of the responses, and interpretations of the findings were made in the light of personal observation and close contact with the students.

The inventory was divided into four sections, each consisting of a series of statements. The student was expected to check the one alternative in each series that applied most accurately to his experience. For example:

1. (X)a. Since I have been at Poston, home means more to me than it did before.
- ()b. Since I have been at Poston, home means less to me than it did before.

- ()c. Since I have been at Poston, home means the same to me as it did before.
2. ()a. Since I have been at Poston, I am more industrious than I was before.
- ()b. Since I have been at Poston, I am less industrious than I was before.
- (X)c. Since I have been at Poston, I am not at all industrious.

A total of 122 responses was expected from each pupil: 25 responses pertaining to cultural development; 39, regarding attitudes; 27, regarding personality development; and 31, pertaining to achievements. Although the inventory was taken at school under the supervision of the classroom teachers, it had no semblance of a test, and many of the pupils assisted in the stenciling and mimeographing of the work. There was no time allotment assigned for its completion, and names were to be omitted from the paper. The only request made was that each pupil give a response to each section of the inventory and that, as nearly as possible, he give unbiased opinions.

Tables 1 through 4 indicate some of the impressions which residence at the relocation center made on these boys and girls and should not be reviewed for the purpose of seeking accurate factual information. An overall review of findings shows a general consistency of thought in some respects, which may reveal significant changes in the behavior patterns of these young people. The following interpretations may be of assistance in an endeavor to understand some of the basic causes for these responses.

Findings in responses under "Cultural development" indicate that a large percentage of the pupils declined in common courtesies, increased in their use of slang, discontinued attendance at churches, and decreased interest in school life. A view of the general camp atmosphere may help one to understand the cultural disadvantages.

Families were required to live in one-room barracks and to use community latrines. Among the larger

families there was little available space for furniture, except the pieces used for sleeping and dressing equipment, much of which was made by the parents and the children. Small children were crowded into these rooms with their parents and older sisters and brothers. Many quarters were too small to accommodate entire families, and in some instances it was necessary to house the older boys in other barracks apart from their parents. As a result the family unit tended to dis-

TABLE 1
EFFECTS OF THREE YEARS AT A RELOCATION CENTER ON CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT
OF JAPANESE-AMERICAN YOUTH

AREAS COVERED BY QUESTIONS	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES		AREAS COVERED BY QUESTIONS	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES	
	Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls
Habits of common courtesies:			Exposure to patriotic movies:		
Better	11	28	Increased	68	67
Worse	44	38	Decreased	10	7
No change	44	34	No change	16	26
No response	1		No response	6	
American table manners:			Letter-writing habit:		
Better	40	36	Increased	81	95
Worse	12	22	Decreased	9	2
No change	46	42	No change	9	3
No response	2		No response	1	
Eating of American foods:			Meaning of home:		
Increased	26	31	More significant	40	57
Decreased	20	24	Less significant	34	10
No change	52	45	No change	22	32
No response	2		No response	2	1
Use of slang:			Taste for classical music:		
Increased	81	68	Increased	24	38
Decreased	3	6	Decreased	17	8
No change	14	23	No change	48	52
No response	2	3	No response	11	2
Personal appearance in regard to dress:			Attendance at Christian church:		
Better	42	49	More regular	9	9
Worse	9	5	Less regular	10	9
No change	47	46	Discontinued	35	39
No response	2		No response	46	43
Exposure to educational movies:			Attendance at Buddhist church:		
Increased	64	58	More regular	39	54
Decreased	18	16	Less regular	23	14
No change	16	27	Discontinued	16	9
No response	2		No response	22	23

TABLE 2
EFFECTS OF THREE YEARS AT A RELOCATION CENTER ON ATTITUDES
OF JAPANESE-AMERICAN YOUTH

AREAS COVERED BY QUESTIONS	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES		AREAS COVERED BY QUESTIONS	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES	
	Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls
Trust people:			My desire to work:		
More than before	29	5	Wish to work	71	77
Less than before	20	28	Do not wish to work	13	6
No change	49	66	Indifferent about work	15	16
No response	2	1	No response	1	1
My love for America:			Pride in appearance of my home and community:		
Increased	28	25	Increased	49	51
Decreased	14	15	Decreased	10	3
No change	55	58	No change	36	46
No response	3	2	No response	5
My wish to remain in U.S.A.:			My parents' interest in politics:		
Wish to remain permanently	79	87	Increased	24	58
Wish to remain a few years	9	6	Decreased	15	5
Do not wish to remain	7	4	No change	39	16
No response	5	3	No response	22	21
My attitude toward public sentiment on the outside:			My attitude toward other Americans:		
Fear	23	20	More democratic	24	36
Indifference	30	30	Less democratic	29	23
Satisfaction	40	40	Indifferent	37	37
No response	7	10	No response	10	4
My parents' attitude toward public sentiment on the outside:			My feeling about evacuation:		
Fear	23	37	Regret	56	56
Indifference	29	16	Satisfaction	18	21
Satisfaction	26	25	Indifference	21	23
No response	22	22	No response	5
Belief of treatment of Japanese-Americans in the future:			My feeling in regard to closing the center:		
Better	20	20	Insecurity	49	25
Worse	49	38	Hopefulness	20	51
Same as before	28	35	Indifference	25	21
No response	3	7	No response	6	3
Attitude in regard to living among Japanese-American exclusively:			School life:		
Prefer	25	10	Like school life more	15	9
Object	22	44	Like school life less	46	55
Indifferent	48	44	No change	32	36
No response	5	2	No response	7
My feeling toward other racial groups:			Interest in cleanliness of school grounds:		
Superiority	10	10	More particular	27	37
Inferiority	9	10	Less particular	33	35
Equality	76	72	Careless	32	21
No response	5	8	No response	8	7
Unnecessary noise and disturbance:			My parents' happiness here:		
Make more noise	52	45	More happy	13	13
Make less noise	11	19	Less happy	46	39
No change	30	29	No change	30	37
No response	7	7	No response	11	11
My happiness here:			My respect for other peoples' religion:		
More happy	23	28	Increased	43	30
Less happy	37	33	Decreased	9	5
No change	34	35	No change	40	56
No response	6	4	No response	8	9

integrate and parental control to weaken.

At mealtime all the families from the same block crowded into the mess hall. The crude service and general excitement which prevailed at mealtime did not promote a refinement of table etiquette.

them, one became aware of the more serious and stable person who felt keenly the pangs of this injustice. Many of the residents, with tears in their eyes, related their experiences to sympathetic workers who were employed at the center.

Drastic changes in religious beliefs

TABLE 3
EFFECTS OF THREE YEARS AT A RELOCATION CENTER ON PERSONALITY
DEVELOPMENT OF JAPANESE-AMERICAN YOUTH

AREAS COVERED BY QUESTIONS	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES		AREAS COVERED BY QUESTIONS	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES	
	Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls
Ambition to be successful in a worth-while vocation:			Melancholy (<i>continued</i>):		
More ambitious.....	57	71	Not at all melancholy.....	40	23
Less ambitious.....	14	8	No response.....	18	12
Indifferent.....	20	18	Cheerfulness		
No response.....	9	3	More cheerful.....	42	52
My determination to make my way in the world:			Less cheerful.....	30	31
More determined.....	64	83	Not at all cheerful.....	22	13
Less determined.....	8	9	No response.....	6	4
Discouraged.....	16	8	Optimism:		
No response.....	12	More optimistic.....	31	54
Tendency to get into trouble:			Less optimistic.....	20	10
Increased.....	37	37	Not at all optimistic.....	24	19
Decreased.....	20	22	No response.....	25	17
No change.....	34	35	Pessimism:		
No response.....	9	6	More pessimistic.....	16	23
Melancholy:			Less pessimistic.....	29	36
More melancholy.....	29	47	Not at all pessimistic.....	25	22
Less melancholy.....	13	18	No response.....	30	19

These conditions, among many other undesirable features of camp life, were challenged by the young people, who attempted to conceal their unhappiness and discontentment through numerous pranks, ridicule, and laughter. Seemingly carefree and jovial, they indulged excessively in the use of slang, which they termed "Postonian lingua." However, after living and working with

and church attendance resulted from a wavering of faith, especially the Christian faith, when many of their former Christian friends severed friendships on the eve of evacuation. Some of the residents returned to the Buddhist faith, and a considerable number lost faith in all religions.

Waning of interest in school life developed as a result of continued discouragements experienced through-

out the three years. For a while there were no schools. Then some of the empty barracks were used as schools, although they lacked the necessary equipment, such as chairs, tables, and stoves. The industrious parents of

this group finally built adobe schools and made school furniture, but some of these buildings were not ready for occupancy until the beginning of the third year. The rapid turnover of teacher personnel did not facilitate the

TABLE 4 •
EFFECTS OF THREE YEARS IN A RELOCATION CENTER ON ACHIEVEMENTS
OF JAPANESE-AMERICAN YOUTH

AREAS COVERED BY QUESTIONS	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES		AREAS COVERED BY QUESTIONS	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES	
	Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls
Individual help from teachers:			Family savings (<i>continued</i>):		
Received more help	15	11	Saved as much as before	10	21
Received less help	36	40	No response	17	16
Received same amount of help	44	46	Personal property of family:		
No response	5	3	Lost much personal property as		
Opportunities to participate in			result of evacuation	62	55
student activities:			Lost a little personal property	17	23
More opportunities	39	49	No loss of personal property	8	8
Less opportunity	14	18	No response	13	14
As many as before	38	26	Real estate of family:		
No response	9	7	Lost much real estate as result		
Participation in basketball games:			of evacuation	25	28
Increased	74	67	Lost little real estate as result of		
Decreased	16	18	evacuation	12	11
Same as before	8	9	No loss of real estate as result of		
No response	2	6	evacuation	39	34
Knowledge of handwork:			No response	24	27
Increased	70	70	My preparation to meet the Amer-		
Decreased	11	12	ican public:		
No change	10	17	More prepared	38	28
No response	9	1	Less prepared	21	31
Parents' attendance at adult-edu-			No change	31	34
cation classes:			No response	10	7
First time to attend classes in			Understanding the principles of		
U.S.A.	31	37	democracy:		
First time to attend classes any-			Understand more clearly	44	45
where	6	4	Understand less clearly	21	19
Did not attend classes	28	34	Understand as well as before	26	26
No response	34	25	No response	9	10
My residence at Poston:			Social affairs:		
Better than former home	17	15	Attended more	63	77
Worse than former home	43	51	Attended fewer	11	11
As good as former home	29	25	Attended as many as before	16	7
No response	11	9	No response	10	5
Food at Poston:			Happiness of parents together:		
More nourishing than before	14	11	Seem happier	6	4
Less nourishing than before	48	57	Seem less happy	19	10
As nourishing as before	30	30	No change	40	63
No response	8	2	No response	35	23
Family savings:					
Saved more	13	13			
Saved less	51	50			

problems of education nor contribute to favorable behavior situations.

Findings in regard to attitudes indicate that a high percentage of the pupils wish to remain in the United States permanently. However, a large percentage indicate fear of public sentiment and insecurity in returning to the American communities. The most alarming findings concerning attitudes are found in the large number of respondents who indicate indifference toward many items which influence character development. If this experience has instilled in the group a feeling of futility in regard to their rightful places in American society, a grave responsibility rests with the communities to which they return to help them restore their faith and security in the United States.

Reference to responses concerning personality development may throw light on the findings regarding atti-

tudes. Taking into consideration the large percentage of pupils who indicated increased ambition to become successful in worth-while vocations and a greater determination to make their way in the world, it may be assumed that, with favorable circumstances on the outside, these attitudes will develop satisfactorily. Closer observation of responses reveals greater changes detrimental to worth-while personality development among boys than among girls.

Findings regarding achievements are limited. A majority indicate increased knowledge of handiwork and sports. A large percentage of the pupils show a greater understanding of the principles of democracy. These responses may be attributed, to a great extent, to the school and to other community enterprises which endeavored to promote democratic procedures in many of their activities.