

JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE

National Headquarters

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Salt Lake City, ♦ ♦ Utah

DEMOCRACY

and

JAPANESE AMERICANS



By

NORMAN THOMAS

"Remember the Nazi technique: 'Pit race against race, religion against religion, prejudice against prejudice. Divide and conquer.' We must not let that happen here. We must remember what we are defending: liberty, decency, justice."

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FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT.

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WE who sign the introduction to DEMOCRACY AND JAPANESE AMERICANS do so because we believe the method of handling Japanese Americans has been neither constitutional nor democratic.

This pamphlet naturally expresses the point of view of its author, Mr. Thomas, but we hope that it will have wide distribution because we believe the American people as a whole are unaware of the serious threat to our democratic way of life which is exemplified in the reception centers and concentration camps in the West for the Japanese. We support wholeheartedly all necessary measures for counter-espionage for the detection and punishment of spies and traitors but we do not believe that the one hundred and ten thousand Japanese who have been evacuated are spies and traitors.

We commend this pamphlet to the serious consideration of all who read it. It is not yet too late to change the policy our government is pursuing in its treatment of Japanese Americans.

Helen Marston Beardsley, *Los Angeles*

Ernest Besig, *San Francisco*

John Dos Passos, *Provincetown*

Harry Emerson Fosdick, *New York City*

Esther Fiske Hammond, *Santa Barbara*

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Ernest Fremont Tittle, *Evanston*

July 20, 1942

DEMOCRACY and JAPANESE AMERICANS

By NORMAN THOMAS

THIS is the story of an act unprecedented in American history both in itself and in its implications: the evacuation of more than 70,000 citizens, charged with no crime, into concentration camps, by Presidential fiat. The validity and significance of the plea in extenuation or justification of this act we shall examine.

I

THE FACTS

On the day of the perfidious surprise attack by the Japanese on the unready American forces at Pearl Harbor there were about 130,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans living within the 48 states. By far the greater number of them lived and worked on the west coast. They tended to form communities of their own and to concentrate in certain trades and types of agriculture. Despite the agitation against them culminating in the exclusion act of 1924 and discriminatory legislation in the matter of land ownership, they had made a remarkable record of self support, literacy, freedom from juvenile delinquency, and generosity to all community causes. They were the virtual creators of the valuable business of raising and marketing fresh vegetables.

Many of the original Japanese settlers (who like all Asiatics were denied the right to become American citizens) had sent their children over to Japan for longer or shorter visits, but by general consent most of the Nisei or American born Japanese were well Americanized. Many of them achieved very high honors in our colleges and universities. Even after Pearl Harbor some of them were elected to important positions in student organizations. One of them was the highest honor student of the graduating class of

the University of California. This spring his degree and prizes were sent to him in a concentration camp. But that is getting ahead of our story.

Even after December 7th there was no general outbreak of resentment against the Japanese. Their papers and organizations hastened to express loyalty to the United States. Except for some attacks by Filipinos in certain districts in California, there was no mob violence. It has been alleged that these Filipinos were motivated by economic rivalry as well as by nationalistic feelings and were stirred up by unscrupulous white Americans. The F.B.I. rounded up a considerable number of Japanese aliens whom they regarded as suspicious, and they were confined in Missoula, Montana. Otherwise life went on much as usual and a good many complacent editorials on the situation as a credit to our American democracy appeared in the press.

Six Weeks After Pearl Harbor

It was only some six weeks after Pearl Harbor that the public temper began to change. The occasion for the change, according to the Tolan Committee of the House of Representatives (which is investigating national defense migrations) was the appearance of circumstantial stories in the newspapers of elaborate sabotage by Japanese residents in Hawaii on December 7th. The official Roberts report, made public on January 25th, dealt with espionage, but made no mention of any sabotage in Hawaii. Later on, all stories of sabotage by Japanese residents in Hawaii were vigorously and categorically denied in affidavits from responsible Hawaiian officials and citizens published by the Tolan Committee. To this day there have been no charges of any sort of Japanese sabotage on the west coast. But the truth about Hawaii never caught up with the sensational falsehoods. It cannot be said that the press or radio did much to help circulate the truth.

By the end of January many influential newspapers were demanding the evacuation of enemy aliens, and especially all Japanese, from the west coast. Early in February the west coast Congressmen and Senators took up the demand that something drastic be done by military authority for the evacuation of "strategic areas". The demand was echoed in ever increasing volume. The seeds of fear found fertile soil in the latent racial prejudice of the white population, and the scarcely concealed greed of certain men and interests for the farms and produce businesses made prosperous by the Japanese. Indeed some of these men actually proposed dispossessing the Japanese from the lands they owned or leased with the understanding that afterwards, under military or police supervision, the dispossessed were to be returned to work the fields for the new owners.

During this period of increasing agitation rumors came from Washington that inside the Administration there was considerable conflict between the military and the Department of Justice concerning what should be done and who should do it. As early as January 29th Attorney General Biddle had tried to deal with the matter by ordering the evacuation of all enemy aliens within a specified period from certain limited strategic areas. But the order affected in all less than 10,000 persons on the entire coast, and satisfied neither the army, the politicians, the press, nor any of the agitators. Finally on February 19th the President ended whatever internal controversy may have existed, and satisfied the advocates of drastic action. In the name of the "successful prosecution of the war" which requires "every possible protection against espionage and sabotage" he asserted the power to turn over to the army such authority as it had never had over American citizens. The most significant section of this executive order reads:

"Now, therefore, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States and Commander in

Chief of the Army and Navy, I hereby authorize and direct the Secretary of War and the military commanders who (sic) he may from time to time designate, whenever he or any designated commander deems such action necessary or desirable, to prescribe military areas, in such places and of such extent as he or the appropriate military commander may determine, from which any or all persons may be excluded, and with respect to which the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Secretary of War or the appropriate military commander may impose in his discretion."

Evacuation

Then followed an angry flurry of discussion concerning a great many problems connected with the impending evacuations which it was understood would include not only aliens but American citizens wholly or partially of Japanese origin. Especially sharp was the discussion of the destination of the evacuees. As time went on it became clearer and clearer that almost all localities took the logical view that if American citizens could not be trusted in their own homes in California they could scarcely be trusted as emigrants under compulsion in new homes in Idaho, Arizona and elsewhere. Governors of all the neighboring states except Colorado protested; so did many labor unions and other organizations.

Lieut. General De Witt, commander of the Western Defense area I, ended speculation in a series of proclamations beginning March 2nd. These proclamations set up zones and immediately imposed within them curfew and other restrictions. Progressively, zone by zone, all Japanese were evacuated from Area Number 1 which covered, roughly speaking, a district a hundred miles in width, extending from the Canadian to the Mexican border. At first voluntary migration had been encouraged but owing to the difficulties

to which we have already referred, on March 27th all further voluntary migration from Area Number 1 was forbidden. After that, in rapid crescendo, zone after zone from Area Number I was evacuated into assembly centers; Area Number II lying to the east of Number I, was not immediately affected.

Meanwhile on March 18th the President had established a civilian War Relocation Authority with Milton S. Eisenhower as director. To this body was committed the problem of the relocation of the Japanese out of the assembly centers into more permanent camps. This authority soon decided that it would be necessary to locate the camps on federally owned land in regions where agricultural and other work could be done. But the preparation of these permanent camps proceeded far more slowly than the process of evacuation. By the first part of July the evacuation of Area Number I had been completed, but only three permanent camps were occupied and nine tenths of the evacuees had to look forward to a whole summer herded together in the assembly centers.

But we are getting a little ahead of our story. In carrying out the evacuation policy the War Department felt the desirability of some sort of legislative authorization for the acts of the commanders whom it might designate. Hence Secretary Stimson requested Congress to impose penalties for violating orders issued by military commanders pursuant to the Presidential order of February 19th. Congress complied, and thus evaded responsibility for itself decreeing the evacuation of citizens. The law as passed was criticized by Senator Taft as "the 'sloppiest' criminal law I have ever seen or read anywhere". He doubted its constitutionality. Nevertheless the law went through and applies anywhere in the United States that the War Department may choose to set up military areas within the meaning of the President's order of February 19th.

Japanese and American Attitudes

During the time when this policy of evacuation was being worked out, the attitude of the overwhelming majority of the Japanese, both aliens and American citizens, was one of acquiescence and even, to a certain degree, of active cooperation. For that the reasons were various. Some of the Nisei saw in their sacrifice a real contribution to the victory of democracy. Some accepted their fate as a desirable alternative to mob violence of which there were many threats and some sporadic examples. Others, probably the majority, would have been willing to run the risk of mob violence, but were cool headed enough to realize that they were in no position to defy the Federal Government and could probably gain more in the long run by uncomplaining obedience. The Japanese American Citizens League which had been organized about 1930 and which numbers more than twenty thousand members played a dignified and useful role in negotiating with various public authorities and in presenting as well as possible such protests as it found legitimate.

This action of the Japanese has been exaggerated by the American press into an enthusiasm for evacuation such as some sentimentalists allege that foxes feel for the hunt. Actually there is an increasing volume of discontent and profound disappointment in American democracy among the Japanese which has found pathetic and even eloquent expression in private letters and statements. But even sharp criticism from the Japanese has been discriminate and they have been quick to acknowledge the personal kindness of many of the army officers and the generally sympathetic view of many officials of the War Relocation Authority.

When the Japanese were evacuated many of their neighbors had the grace to regret the situation and publicly to extol the high character of the evacuees. An especially

strong tribute to the Japanese of Santa Barbara was signed by all, or almost all, of the clergy of the neighborhood, and was given front page space in the newspapers which had led in the fight for evacuation.

One immediate effect of the policy which was followed was to raise the price of vegetables and to threaten very considerable loss in the quantity which could be marketed during the summer and fall. This at a time when food is sorely needed.

Property Loss

While the Federal Government took various commendable steps to try to aid the evacuees in caring for or disposing of their property, these steps were belated and inadequate. Perhaps there was no way in which property which must be stored or disposed of at once could be handled except at great loss to the owners. That loss has been estimated by officials of the Japanese American Citizens League, conservatively, at 60 percent. Very few indeed were the Japanese who went to camp with any considerable cash at their disposal.

The Star Produce Company, run by certain Japanese in Los Angeles, did a gross annual business of five million dollars, but its tangible assets aside from good will were small. It was sold for fifteen thousand dollars. Store keepers and farmers doing business on a smaller scale suffered proportionately in disposing of lands they leased or owned, of tools, buildings, and personal property.

Concentration Camps

Under the best imaginable circumstances the compulsory migration of thousands of people is a pitiful business. Generations of Americans reading Longfellow have mourned the fate of Evangeline and three thousand Acadians. We are discussing the fate of a hundred and ten thousand

Japanese, seventy thousand of them American citizens, who had achieved a fairly comfortable standard of living and to whom their own family life was peculiarly dear. Such were the people who were herded on short notice, not into paradisaical new communities in lovely valleys, as much propaganda, official and unofficial, has made the American people believe, but into assembly centers which are in the starkest sense of the term concentration camps, surrounded by barbed wire and patrolled by soldiers fully armed. Two or three times children playing about near the fences have been shot at. Once a child who had crawled into some bushes was wounded.

None of the assembly centers is fit for the use to which it has been put though some are worse than others. The prevalent type of construction at best was of the army barracks order, quite unsuitable for the proper housing of families. At worst in Seattle and in California, race tracks were used. In Portland, Oregon, the center is in a live stock pavillion. Stalls for horses were often turned over to human beings before they had been properly cleaned.

It had been expected that much of the work of constructing both the assembly and the more permanent camps would be done by Japanese themselves, who would be paid for it. Against this the buildings trade unions protested, and as a result competent Japanese workers in many camps have had to sit by in idleness, without any pay at all, while Caucasian workers, having better living conditions and a separate and much better commissary, receive full union wages.

Red Tape and Priorities Bottleneck

From the considerable number of statements and letters of evacuees and observers which have been made available to me I am selecting certain paragraphs from Galen Fisher's *The Drama of Japanese Evacuation* published by the Council

for Social Action of the Congregational Christian Churches. Concerning the assembly centers Mr. Fisher writes:

"Eighteen Assembly Centers have been set up, practically all of them in race tracks or fair grounds, and all but three of them in California. The accommodations are simple to the point of crudity. If the Army had realized from the first that evacuees, children and delicate mothers, would have to be detained in these crude Centers for several months, it would doubtless have provided more adequate facilities. Observers who have visited several of the Centers say that the managerial Caucasian staff on the whole is kindly and well-intentioned. But good intentions are not always matched by competence, and in some cases they have lamentably failed to butter the parsnips. Governmental red tape and the priorities bottleneck can be blamed for some of the failures, but not for all. To be specific, in one of the better Centers there are practically no medicines or medical and dental equipment, even after a month of pleading by evacuee doctors and excuses by the management. In justification of these deficiencies, it should be said that all serious medical cases are supposed to be treated at the regular county hospitals, which have been most cooperative. Scarcity of plumbing supplies has led to the building of old style latrines with no partitions, and to absence of handwashing water in the 'lavatories,' and of sinks for washing the table ware which the evacuees carry to the messhalls. Such deficiencies inevitably undermine morale and they can not be counterbalanced by the appointment of Advisory Councils of evacuees, who too often find their recommendations are pigeonholed.

"One of the best features of the Centers is the policy of using as many as possible of the evacuees in the various service departments. Those who get such a job count themselves lucky, for the rest suffer acutely from nothing to occupy hand or mind during their unwanted leisure.

Wages of Evacuees

"The compensation paid to evacuees working in the Assembly Centers, in addition to food and shelter, is \$8.00 a month for unskilled workers, \$12.00 for skilled, and \$16.00 for technical workers. [More recently wages have been raised to \$12.00, \$16.00 and \$19.00 per month respectively.] The original proposal to pay evacuees approximately what privates and non-coms receive in the Army appears to have been dropped. That might have made the evacuees feel they were a sort of civilian army, and thereby have nurtured their self-respect.

"Extracts from two of the many letters written to me or my friends by evacuees will give a clearer picture of the good and bad points of the Centers than pages of description. The first letter is from a cultivated woman, born and bred in California, who feels keenly the deprivations and the humiliation of her exile. She is in one of the better Centers. The English is her own. The stables she speaks of are the race horse stalls, whitewashed and enlarged by the addition of a small sitting room in front.

Eloquent Letters

"Our camp is getting better in every way. At first it was hard, harder than we ever imagined, but when I think of those ill-smelling, windowless stables, I think I could stand most anything. I'd die if I had to live there. So many of our friends are housed in those awful stables, and I can't help crying every time I pass there. You have no idea how awful.

"I spent three days nailing papers on floor cracks to keep the cold out. Some cracks were so wide I could put my finger through. We froze from cold drafts the first few days. It's a little warmer now.

"We Japanese love privacy, so our greatest ordeal is taking showers and going to the rest rooms. The

lavatories are just wide enough to pass; two seats to a section, and no doors. Showers are single, but also doorless. Volunteer women clean the place every day, so it's kept very clean—but one feels awful. So I take my shower at 5:30 a.m., but others get the same idea, so it is embarrassing.

“I find so many things I brought are useless, and what I need most, I haven't. So will you ask your friends to send me old clothes—especially sportswear—sunhats, for standing in line in scorching sun for a long time at mealtime is an ordeal—I never dreamt a time would come when I'd have to ask for old clothes. I've got no pride left, for these necessities. Please send some old shower curtains. I could put nails up and hook them across when I take a shower. Also old garment bags. Dust here is terrific. The walls are so thin that when I put a screw in, it went through. So when it gets hot, it's like an oven, and during the nights, it's like an ice-box.

“We've all lost weight noticeably. But food is better. . . . Pregnant women and mothers with small children, old people and invalids are pitiful. Mothers and old people walking, groping in the dark to the rest rooms are a sight. Gosh! War is hell, even behind the lines. I think it's worse.

“Did you ever feel an indescribable longing for something you've loved? That is the way I felt when I left dear old *.....*, the only city I knew and loved. Part of my life went out when I left it. My childhood, girlhood and womanhood, with all its accompanying sorrows and joys, all were left behind. I can't express the yearning for the place I called my home, and all my dear friends. My only wish is that God will let us return once more to all I hold dear.

“Our Sunday services are very simple and impressive. We feel nearer to God here. The very simplicity and earnestness of our hearts make the whole service more touching. In contrast, the young people are a great problem.”

The last sentence concerning the young people has been emphasized and illustrated in many reports. Inevitably idleness, overcrowding, lack of privacy — rooms 20 by 20 for a family which often includes cousins as well as brothers and sisters — do not make for content or wholesome living. In at least one camp dissatisfaction with the work program led to a sit-down strike.

The immediate occasion was said to have been dissatisfaction with food but the underlying protest was against general conditions including work arrangements.

War Relocation Authority

Mr. Fisher praises the military and civil authorities for working out plans for Relocation areas. He thus summarizes these plans:

“Great credit is due both the Army and the various civil federal departments for the resourcefulness they have shown in devising solutions for the baffling problems set them by the whole evacuation business. And among all the schemes adopted, that of the Relocation areas is perhaps the most satisfactory; at least it will be if the paper plans are carried out.

“It was on March 18th that the President created the War Relocation Authority, to take over full responsibility for the evacuees after they had been evacuated by the Army. Among the essential features of the plans adopted by the Authority are these:

“1. Five large tracts of government land east of Military Area Number I have already been selected, and as

many more are in process of being found, capable of providing homes for the duration for all of the 100,000 evacuees. Each area will have a Relocation Center.

"2. Efforts will be made to give productive work to every able-bodied person above 16 years of age; mainly agricultural, but also manufacturing of things that require hand labor. Teaching, engineering, and other professional skills will also be utilized as far as possible.

"3. Evacuees will be allowed to leave the Areas only for specific and properly guarded work projects. Like the Assembly Centers, the Relocation Areas will be surrounded by barbed wire and under guard, not only to keep the evacuees inside, but to prevent outsiders from intruding and possibly making trouble. Inside, however, largely self-sustaining, autonomous communities will be created, and life will be made as normal and satisfying as practicable.

"4. Elementary schools and high schools will be maintained, in cooperation with the respective states and the U. S. Office of Education. Arrangements for higher education also are likely to be made, either by releasing students to attend outside institutions, or by inviting the establishment of extension courses by colleges.

"5. As in the Assembly Centers, religious worship and related activities will be freely permitted.

"The quality of the staffs now being assembled is so excellent that there is good ground to hope that this program will be executed in accordance with the best American standards. If so, it should go far toward restoring to the evacuees the self-respect which has been so sorely wounded. One thing which might well be done to that end is to arrange for the gradual multiplication of opportunities for intercourse between residents of the Centers and the people of the neighborhood."

Cooperative Colony

Mr. Fisher's evident desire to be fair and even optimistic cannot blind him to the fact that "life within the Centers will not be normal." He stresses the necessity for reincorporating the evacuees into American life and cites examples of successful relocation of Japanese families in northeastern Colorado and western Nebraska. He describes enthusiastically the establishment of a cooperative colony on 4,000 acres of irrigable land at Keetley, Utah. The moving spirit in this successful venture was a local white American rancher named George A. Fisher and a Japanese American named Fred I. Wada, for many years a produce dealer in Oakland, California. At first the settlers were protected by a state patrolman but he was soon found to be superfluous. Today the army order prohibiting voluntary migration and public suspicion make repetitions of the Keetley experiment impossible unless and until they may have the power of the War Relocation Authority behind them.

Evacuation Challenged

Such in outline is the history of the great evacuation as it affected the overwhelming mass who submitted to it and even cooperated with it. But were there no citizens of Japanese-American ancestry to challenge this treatment? The answer is, very few. Some who contemplated it were dissuaded. The first case to reach the United States Courts was that of Mary Asaba Ventura. She was a Japanese; her husband a Filipino. They applied for a writ of habeas corpus from the curfew and other restraints which were imposed upon Japanese residents in Seattle in March. This was before the evacuation of that zone. The application was denied by Judge Black primarily because the restraint upon her did not constitute imprisonment; that had not yet occurred. In his opinion the Judge expressed the belief

that the Constitution of the United States was not "so unfitted for survival that it unyieldingly prevents the President and the Military, pursuant to law enacted by Congress, to restrict the movements of civilians such as the petitioner, regardless of how actually loyal they perhaps may be, in critical military areas definitely essential for national defense." He also suggested that if the petitioner was as loyal as she claimed to be, she ought to be glad to cooperate with the government.

There are at present (the beginning of July) four significant cases pending.

Mr. & Mrs. Wakayama

The first is a habeas corpus proceeding in Los Angeles to free Mr. and Mrs. Wakayama from the Santa Anita Camp. The petition in this case alleges discrimination in the treatment of Japanese and kindred abuses but does not attack the constitutionality of the Presidential proclamation nor the Congressional legislation making disobedience to military proclamations a crime. Mr. Wakayama and five others were later arrested on the charge of holding an unauthorized meeting in his assembly center, in the Japanese language. The meeting was held before the order, in itself another violation of civil liberties, was promulgated against unauthorized meetings.

Fred Korematsu

The second case is that of Fred Korematsu in San Francisco. He cannot read or write Japanese and speaks it poorly. He was engaged to a Caucasian girl and to be near her and keep his job as a welder he disobeyed the evacuation order and tried unsuccessfully to escape detection by changing his name and having his nose altered.

Minoru Yasui

In Portland, Oregon. Minoru Yasui, a lawyer who is a Second Lieutenant in the Military Reserve as a result

of his training at the University of Oregon, is testing the constitutionality of curfew restrictions on American citizens.

Gordon Hirabayashi

Perhaps the best case of all may be that of Gordon Hirabayashi, American citizen 24 years old, a Senior in the University of Washington who has a fine record. He deliberately chose to test the constitutionality of evacuation by submitting to arrest.

Lincoln S. Kanai

As this pamphlet was about to go to the printers, word came of the arrest in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, of a Y.M.C.A. secretary from San Francisco, named Lincoln S. Kanai. Mr. Kanai, American born and completely Americanized, was arrested for leaving San Francisco after the so-called freezing order forbidding voluntary migration was issued. Habeas corpus proceedings in his case will test especially the statutory right of the military to forbid voluntary migration of an American citizen.

There are also beginning to develop certain other habeas corpus proceedings in various assembly centers.

The Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle cases have the backing of local committees.

Originally the American Civil Liberties Union invited a test of the legality of evacuation under military proclamation. Later the A. C. L. U. by a two to one majority decided that the President had the Constitutional power to issue his original order of February 19th. Nevertheless the Union seems still willing to back tests of the military proclamations on the basis of racial discrimination and other examples of what it regards as abuses of discretion. It might also support an attack on the constitutionality of the Congressional legislation criticized by Senator Taft.

Probably not much of immediate advantage can be expected from any legal proceeding. During a war courts