Uprooted Americans in Your Community

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY
WASHINGTON, D. C.
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FOREWORD

To Public and Private Agencies
Serving Evacuee Resettlers:

In coming months public and private agencies in many States will be working with clients of a new type. The new clients are Americans of Japanese ancestry who were evacuated in 1942 from their home communities in the West Coast States. For insight into their problems and for success in dealing with them, a knowledge of what has happened to them since 1942 and of how they lived before that is essential.

In most cases, background facts about individuals or families who are relocating are contained in family relocation summaries prepared at the centers before the evacuees' departure and forwarded to the relocation officer serving your community. It is the purpose of this booklet, however, to supply some background facts and to give brief answers to three questions: How does it happen that persons of Japanese ancestry have come to your community? What kind of people are they? How does one deal with them?

It is hoped that these facts will provide a basis for understanding which will aid in the satisfactory solution of an important national problem, namely, the re-integration of this uprooted group into normal, productive American life.

D. S. Myer

Director

UPROOTED AMERICANS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

The persons of Japanese ancestry who have relocated or who are now relocating from War Relocation Authority centers into communities throughout the country have had an unprecedented experience extending through the past three years: evacuation and continued exclusion. If these people had not been uprooted from their homes and placed in relocation centers, the chances are very slight that they would require help from any public agency. However, many of them have emerged from that experience with varied problems. Some are financial; some are of a less material and more intangible nature. In either case, you will find, as the War Relocation Authority has found, that persons of Japanese parentage are very much like other people. They are men, women and children who want economic security, family affection and freedom to work and plan their own lives.

If the displacement of America's Japanese population were of a simple nature, it might be plausible to believe that they could just go back to the homes they evacuated and resume their pre-Pearl Harbor mode of life. Unfortunately, it is not so simple as that. Many, through no fault of their own, have lost their homes, their farms, property or businesses. Others are simply exercising a normal desire to explore a new section of the United States. Many, of course, are returning to their former homes.

During 1942, when the blow of evacuation hit the 110,000 West Coast Japanese Americans, some of them rallied after a short period and made plans to leave what they felt was the questionable security of the relocation centers to which they had been sent. From the fall of 1942 until January 2, 1945, when the lifting of the West Coast Exclusion Order officially reopened that area to most evacuees, about 35,000 had resettled successfully in other parts of the country.

January 2, 1945, has a double meaning for all evacuees. One, as just noted, marked the end of the ban, and the other, a beginning of the liquidation of the centers. With elimination of the cause for their operation, the War Relocation Authority has determined that by January 2, 1946, all centers shall be closed.

To those who have long since left the centers and to those who are now making plans for either westward or eastward resettlement, the centers' closing date holds little or no fear. But among the nearly 60,000 evacuees whom the Army has declared free to leave and who are still not settled at the time this is being written, there are some who will need your help—the help of welfare and other community agencies and of public-spirited citizens.

At present the War Relocation Authority is able to give initial assistance where it is needed and to refer the more difficult cases to appropriate agencies. But shortly after the centers close, WRA's participation in this kind of readjustment will also stop as the agency itself goes out of existence.

Like all segments of our population, the Japanese have the aged, the sick, and dependent children among them. However, they are traditionally self-supporting. In the past they have tended to solve the problems of such persons within their own communities, as many national groups in this country have been doing. Japanese American mutual assistance associations are a familiar institution. But now with some evacuees going into strange communities, and others returning to a new pattern of living on the West Coast, they may have neither the financial security nor the courage to get started again without at least temporary assistance.

Where evacuees are returning to their former homes, they may apply for assistance under State programs.

For evacuees going into new communities the initial WRA relocation grant may be supplement under procedures agreed upon, where needed by funds available through the Resettlement Assistance Program of the Social

Security Board.

WRA staff members and those evacuees who have studied the problem objectively believe that the longer evacuees put off the reality of having to resume normal community life among non-Japanese, the more formidable that readjustment will become. The Army's decision to reopen the Pacific Coast, the Supreme Courts' December (1944) definition of the status of evacuees, and the consistently splendid record of Nisei soldiers on every battlefront have provided their parents and families with legal and moral reasons for living wherever they want to and enjoying the freedom for which the United Nations are fighting.

WHO ARE THEY?

An Immigrant Group

The Japanese Americans consist of two contrasting generations -- about 47,000 immigrant parents and about 80,000 citizen children. Some 91 per cent of the total population lived in the West Coast States before the war. Like all immigrant groups in the United States the parents have had problems of fitting into life in this country, and the Americanized children have had problems of adjusting to their less Americanized parents. The parents for the most part speak only Japanese and broken English, while the children speak English and know very little Japanese. The young people are often ashamed of and antagonistic to the Oriental ways of their parents. The parents have tried various means to keep their children closer to them, thus creating cultural and psychological conflicts. In these respects they are like most immigrant groups in the United States. But among them the conflict between generations has a special character, partly as a result of the great age gap between the older and the younger people.

Japanese immigrants began to enter this country in considerable numbers about 1900. Most of them were young men, eager to study or work and hoping for better opportunities to make a living. By 1910 there were more than 50,000 of these young men, scattered widely in the

three West Coast States. Some had been unsuccessful; others had done well or were getting good starts. The latter began to think of establishing families in this country. Some returned to Japan and brought wives back with them; others, with less money, selected wives by mail in the old country, the so-called "picture brides." From 1910-1920 most of the early immigrants, thirty to forty years old, secured wives and began to have families. During the same period immigration decreased, as a result of the "Gentlemen's Agreement" between the United States and Japan under the terms of which Japan agreed not to issue passports to laborers. Passage in 1924 of the Immigration Act ended Japanese immigration. This early male migration, the coming of women ten to fifteen years later, and the subsequent general exclusion has resulted in a peculiar age distribution.

By 1940, two years before the evacuation, there were very few persons of Japanese ancestry in the United States between the ages of 30 and 40. The original male immigrants have a median age of about 60, while their wives average some ten years younger. Their older children were in their teens or early twenties. The cultural differences that always exist between first and second generations immigrant people were, as a consequence, intensified. The Japanese Americans are, themselves, conscious of this distinctness and use two words contrasting the generations. They speak of the parents or first generation as Issei, and the children or second generation as Nisei.

The Issei Background.

Both in Japan and the United States the Issei have been largely country people. Most of the first immigrants came from the crowded rural regions of southern Japan. They settled in largest numbers in the rapidly developing rural areas of California, Washington, and Oregon. At first they worked as laborers, but by 1940 all but a few thousand who had not married were no longer in that class. They had become farm owners, managers, or at least renters, usually concentrating on special crops such as celery, strawberries, and truck

produce which required intensive farming methods. At the time that this transition was taking place many were also moving into the cities. By 1940 about one-fourth of the immigrants were proprietors of small restaurants, dry cleaning establishments, dye works, or retail stores in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle and other West Coast cities.

The fair success of the Issei in achieving some economic independence despite many odds against them has rested in part on their relatively high educational level. The immigration restrictions against Japanese laborers decreased, to a great extent, the number of illiterates among them. The majority of the Issei have the equivalent of a grammar or high school education. There are only a handful of illiterates, and several thousand have had college training either in Japan or the United States or both.

As the Issei settled on farms or moved into the West Coast cities, they tended like other immigrants to concentrate in the same neighborhoods. In these rural areas and "Little Tokyos" of the larger cities many of the customs and institutions that they had known in Japan reasserted themselves. The first and perhaps most important was the family. The Japanese stand in marked contrast with other Oriental immigrants in the extent to which they have developed family life in this country. The parents have tried desperately to preserve the Japanese ideals of the dominance of the father, the careful arrangement of marriages by the parents, and the subordination of the individual to the family interests. Like the children of other immigrants whose family patterns are different from the American, the Nisei have often rebelled. But every Nisei whether he has conformed or not in his own personal life, has been made acutely conscious of his parents' views of family duties.

Almost every community had at least two churches, one Buddhist and one Christian. The majority of the Issei were Buddhist and this has resulted in considerable isolation for them. The Christians among the Issei

were able to establish contacts through their church interests with non-Japanese. There are practically no Buddhists in the United States except for the Japanese and consequently religious interests could not provide for them an avenue of contact with non-Japanese. The Buddhist sects, however, showed a remarkable degree of tolerance, altering their ritual and organization to conform to Christian patterns and permitting a great deal of freedom to Nisei in joining in activities with other church groups.

In the Japanese neighborhoods people from the same perfecture in Japan often joined together to form mutual assistance associations, called Kenjinkai. In addition, every community had its Japanese type association which was often a social club, business association, and welfare agency combined. The Japanese Association and the Kenjinkai usually cared for dependent members of the community. As a result very few Japanese Americans came into contact with the county or other welfare agencies.

Within these institutions traditional Japanese ways of behavior were preserved. For an outsider attempting to understand the Issei and deal with them successfully, knowledge of the custom of the go-between is important. An essential feature of personal relations among Japanese is that no one should ever cause embarassment to anyone else of equal or superior social position as a result of rejecting a request or suggestion. This has created a custom through which direct refusals may be avoided. Negotiations of almost any kind are carried out by means of go-betweens, and refusals are made to the go-between rather than to the person directly concerned. Marriages, for example, are transacted through a go-between who has no personal interest whatever in the arrangement. This "indirection" in personal relations is not easy for an American accustomed to direct negotiation to understand. Nevertheless, it should always be remembered that an Issei, even though he actually disagrees strongly with you, usually avoids saying no.

A Minority People

Even more important for understanding the Issei than a knowledge of their Japanese cultural heritage is an awareness that during their thirty to forty years in the United States they have encountered prejudice and discrimination. Every Issei has had some unpleasant experience affecting his property, his children, his personal relations, or all three as a result of prejudice on the part of some Americans. More serious was the fact that all Issei are by law ineligible to become citizens of the United States.

Ever since the arrival of the first Japanese on the mainland in the 1890's there have been recurrent waves of antagonism against them on the West Coast. The Issei have learned to live with the situation, but they still expect to find prejudice in every American until he demonstrates that he does not have it.

Ineligibility to United States citizenship has established a basic feeling of insecurity in almost every Issei. The law has forced them to think of Japan rather than the United States as their legal protector. Nevertheless, as a result of having established themselves in business or on a farm in this country and having brought up children and educated them here, they have become inevitably committed to living in the United States. There is thus a contradition between their enforced legal status as Japanese citizens and their family and economic stake in this country.

The feeling of insecurity takes the concrete form (and this is especially true since evacuation) of fear of deportation. Evacuation intensified their feelings of uncertainty about the intentions of the U. S. Government towards them. However much an Issei may have identified himself with the United States in his day-to-day living, he is constantly aware that the Government may decide to deal with him at any time as a Japanese citizen.

The fear of deportation has always been an important factor in the refusal of Issei to make use of county or other welfare facilities. Many Issei believe that application for public assistance would make them liable to deportation as indigent aliens or make them ineligible to return to the United States if they should go to Japan for a visit. That is one reason why they developed their own group aids for taking care of dependency problems. Although they have learned to use War Relocation Authority facilities while at the centers, it is likely that the old attitudes and fears will tend to reassert themselves as Issei leave the centers and are faced with learning the use of outside welfare agencies. Constant reassurances on this point will be necessary.

THE NISEI

The outstanding characteristic of the Nisei is the great extent to which they are assimilated to American ways. Their degree of assimilation depends in individual cases on whether their contacts were extensive with other Americans through Christian Church organizations, high school and university or other groups or whether contacts were more limited as a result of relative isolation in rural communities and Buddhist churches. But even among the less obviously Americanized Nisei, it is a matter of degree.

A striking characteristic of most Nisei is the extent to which they have drifted apart from their parents largely as a result of their lack of knowledge of the Japanese language. Another trait is their strong desire for conformity with American ways of talking and acting. The parents have long recognized the rapid growth of their children away from them and adopted means, such as Japanese language schools, in an effort to stem the tide. It is apparent that despite such measures the Nisei are at least as thoroughly Americanized as any other second generation group in the country.

There has persisted among them, however, a high degree of respect for their parents' ideals in regard to family obligations, even though they have rejected

their parents' views concerning courtship and arrangement of marriages. Most Nisei show an unusual degree of obedience to their parents and often exhibit feelings of guilt when they are unable to adjust their lives to the parents' wishes.

As part of the process of their Americanization, Nisei have been attracted to various youth organizations, like the Boy Scouts, the YMCA and YWCA. Even the Buddhist youth group, the Young Buddhist Association, has assumed some of the characteristcs of the YMCA. Nisei have also been active in high school youth groups. All these activities have been continued and stimulated in the relocation centers, so that a basis exists among students for further integration into American life through national organizations.

Least assimilated of the Nisei are the majority of those who were sent to school in Japan by their parents. About 9,000, or thirteen per cent of the Nisei originally evacuated to the centers, had received some education in Japan. They are called Kibei by other Japanese Americans. Some of them spent many years in Japan and took on Japanese ways quite fully; others spent only a year or two there. Some reacted violently against Japan and its politics and culture, others accepted it. The majority of the latter group, along with some non-Kibei who reacted bitterly against the evacuation, are now in the Tule Lake Center or have renounced their American citizenship and are in Department of Justice internment camps.

One feature of the relation between Nisei and Issei has been the unusual dependence which many Issei have had to place on their elder children in business matters. Because they did not know the English language and because of alien land laws, the Issei have leaned heavily on their oldest sons in legal and commercial matters. Thus many a youth, while regarded by his father as dependent upon him, actually had a certain amount of responsibility for the economic life of the family.

Evacuation and Center Life.

The three years since the spring of 1942 have been a period of anxiety and painful readjustment for Issei and Nisei alike. At first neither group knew what to plan for the future. Nisei were resentful of the evacuation and the denial of opportunities to prove their loyalty. Many Issei gave up hope of a future in this country and even expected deportation after the war.

In the centers, despite all that could be provided by a government agency to meet the basic physical needs and to help in organizing education, religious, and recreational facilities, a real economic base was lacking and consequently there was no meaningful framework for living. Normal attitudes towards work and normal community life had in large measure to be suspended.

As the relocation policy went into effect the older Nisei increasingly accepted the opportunity to escape from the institutional life of the centers. The Issei, on the other hand, were inclined to accept the physical security despite the threat to family life and individual initiative. Many felt themselves too old to begin again. Many in the isolation of center life feared the outside world. This lack of confidence in themselves and fear of the outside continues, but concern for their children and realization that they must take their chances for the children's sake are gaining ground.

WHAT DO THEY WANT?

Nisei, Wanting Both Feet in America.

About 75 per cent of the approximately 35,000 evacuees who had relocated from WRA centers before the West Coast ban was officially lifted were Nisei. Why was that so? Because they had the education and training to qualify for war industry, office, hospital and other jobs. In 1942, some 19 per cent of 39,000 Nisei 18 years or over, who were at the centers, had completed one year or more of college. For groups with immigrant parents, that proportion is high.

Many Nisei say that although they feel that evacuation temporarily swept aside some of their rights as citizens, the relocation process has produced many opportunities for their integration into American life. For the first time, they say, they have been released from the "inhibiting influences of West Coast prejudice." How many of the Nisei and their families will return to the Pacific area is a moot question, but, wherever they decide to go or stay, they will have a different attitude toward American life.

A letter written by a young evacuee girl who recently returned to San Francisco from the Poston relocation center, says:

".....On the train, while we were sitting in the women's lounge because there were no seats, several girls came in, practically all of whom were coming to the Bay area to meet their husbands who had been overseas for two years, three years, etc. We talked for some time, and I told them about the relocation centers. They went back to their seats on the train and told several returned servicemen about us. The next thing I knew, as we were heading for the diner, a Marine stopped me and asked to stop by on the way back and talk to them. This I did. Both the Marine and the sailor had spent months on the South Pacific Islands and talked to me as if I had been their neighbor back home. We had a swell bull session, the sailor, Marine, paratrooper and I! We discussed politics, Irishmen, medicine, relocation centers, and the Marine made the remark, 'I wonder how those fellows feel, the Japanese boys who are fighting, with their parents locked up in relocation centers.' I did stress the fact that we are free to leave any time we please.

"Everything here is so new to me yet that everything I do or see seems to be a new adventure, and I like it. I get a definite thrill out of cantering down the sidewalks, jostled by the hurrying throngs. The beauty of it is that no one pays any attention to you. You're just one of a multitude of people who have jobs and a life to lead....."

Issei, Wanting to Salvage a Self-Sufficient Future.

Evacuation and West Coast exclusion have had a far more debilitating effect on Issei than on Nisei. Language barriers and a limited occupational experience - a large number of the Issei are farmers and fruit-growers--are perhaps the two chief explanations. Some went out to work on seasonal agricultural jobs, but few resettled permanently outside of the relocation centers. Most of that small number have ventured out under the protective wing of their Nisei children.

Issei still in the centers fall into these groups: elderly bachelors, who were primarily migratory laborers; farm tenants or share-croppers; farm owners and managers; widows, businessmen. Of those, the widows, bachelors, and former farm tenants, are most likely to need service or assistance. The rest can be counted upon to make a strong effort to re-establish themselves.

Because of the peculiar immigration pattern of the Japanese, Issei men generally are about ten years older than their wives. Even before evacuation the Issei men began to die off, leaving their widows to support their school children. At that time the number of dependency cases was too large to be handled within the Japanese communities, and so local welfare agencies were called upon to help. However, by now, the majority of the children have only a few more years of school, and then they will be able to support their mothers. Some widows, of course, have sons in the service, from whom they receive dependency benefits.

Among the center Issei there are some 5,000 bachelors, most of whom came here before the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907, which limited immigration of Japanese laborers to this country. Although before evacuation they were migratory laborers, they managed to maintain themselves quite consistently, and during off-seasons they were cared for by the Japanese communities. Now, however, the strain of many years of hard physical labor has begun to tell and they are much less self-reliant than formerly. They have no family ties, and even in the centers, have led quite an

isolated existence. They are realistic about the number of years they can expect to live, but during their last period of life they may require the help and services of community agencies.

About two-thirds of the Issei farmers had been tenants or share-croppers with marginal incomes. When they return to their former occupations, they will have to wait a year for an income-producing crop. In the meantime, some of these tenant farmers will need public assistance to equip their homes, feed their children, and re-establish themselves as productive members of your community.

FURTHER READING

Further information about Japanese Americans and the program of the War Relocation Authority will be found in the publications listed below. Copies may be obtained from area and district offices or the War Relocation Authority, Barr Building, Washington (25), D. C.

Issei, Nisei, Kibei

Reprint of an article published in Fortune magazine, April, 1944, (revised October, 1944), reviewing the program of the War Relocation Authority and the problems created by the evacuation from the West Coast of 110,000 people of Japanese descent.

Nisei in Uniform

An illustrated pamphlet depicting the service of Americans of Japanese ancestry in the Armed Forces of the United States. Limited free distribution; copies may be purchased from the Government Printing Office, Washington (25), D. C.

What We're Fighting For

United States servicemen look at the fighting record of Americans of Japanese ancestry and the treatment accorded their kindred in some communities in the U.S.A.

Myths and Facts

Answering 21 common misconceptions regarding Americans of Japanese ancestry. Objective facts on dual citizenship, Japanese language schools, loyalty, assimilability and other matters.

70,000 American Refugees

A summary of the problems created by the evacuation; published by the Citizens Committee for Resettlement of the Congregational Christian Committee for Work with Japanese Evacuees, 6501 Wydown Blvd., St. Louis 5, Missouri.