

Japanese Relocation

Milton S. Eisenhower: When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, our west coast became a potential combat zone. Living in that zone were more than one hundred thousand persons of Japanese ancestry, two-thirds of them American citizens, one-third aliens. We knew that some among them were potentially dangerous.

Most were loyal, but no one knew what would happen among this concentrated population if Japanese forces should try to invade our shores. Military authorities therefore determined that all of them, citizens and aliens alike, would have to move. This picture tells how the mass migration was accomplished.

Neither the Army, nor the War Relocation Authority relished the idea of taking men, women, and children from their homes, their shops and their farms, so the military and civilian agencies alike determined to do the job as a democracy should: with consideration for the people involved.

First, attention was given to the problems of sabotage and espionage. Now here at San Francisco, for example, convoys were being made up within sight of possible Axis agents.

There were more Japanese in Los Angeles than in any other area. In nearby San Pedro, houses and hotels occupied almost exclusively by Japanese were within a stone's throw of a naval air base, shipyards, oil wells. Japanese fishermen had every opportunity to watch the movement of our ships. Japanese farmers were living close to vital aircraft plants. So as a first step, all Japanese were required to move from critical areas such as these. But of course, this limited evacuation was a solution to only part of the problem. The larger problem, the uncertainty of what would happen among these people in case of a Japanese invasion, still remained. That is why the Commanding General of the Western Defense Command determined that all Japanese within the coastal areas should move inland.

Immediately the army began mapping evacuation areas and for a time encouraged the Japanese to leave voluntarily. The trouble for the voluntary evacuees soon threatened in their new location, so the program was quickly put on a planned and protected basis. Thereafter the American citizen Japanese and Japanese aliens made their plans in accordance with Army orders.

Notices were posted. All persons of Japanese descent were required to register. They gathered in their own churches and schools and the Japanese themselves cheerfully handled the enormous paperwork involved in the migration.

Civilian physicians made preliminary medical examinations. Government agencies helped in a hundred ways. They helped the evacuees find tenants for their farms. They helped businessmen lease, sell, or store their property. This aid was financed by the government. The quick disposal of property often involved financial sacrifice for the evacuees.

Now the actual migration got underway. The Army provided fleets of vans to transport household belongings. Buses moved the people to Assembly Centers. The evacuees cooperated wholeheartedly. The many loyal among them felt that this was a sacrifice they could make on behalf of America's war effort.

In small towns as well as large, up and down the coast, the moving continued. Behind them, they left shops and homes they had occupied for many years. Their fishing fleets were impounded and left under guard.

Now they were taken to racetracks and fairgrounds where the Army almost overnight built Assembly Centers. They lived here until new pioneer communities could be completed on federally owned lands in the interior.

Santa Anita racetrack, for example, suddenly became a community of about seventeen thousand persons. The Army provided housing and plenty of healthful, nourishing food for all. The residents of the new community set about developing a way of life as nearly normal as possible. They held church services: Protestant, Catholic, and Buddhist. They issued their own newspaper, organized nursery schools, and some made camouflage nets for the United States Army.

Meanwhile in Arizona, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, and elsewhere, quarters were being built where they would have an opportunity to work and more space in which to live. When word came that these new homes were ready, the final movement began.

At each relocation center, evacuees were met by an advance contingent of Japanese who had arrived some days earlier and who now acted as guides. Naturally, the newcomers looked about with some curiosity. They were in a new area, on land that was raw, untamed, but full of opportunity. Here they would build schools, educate their children, reclaim the desert. Their own physicians took precautions to guard against epidemics.

They opened advanced Americanization classes for college students who in turn would instruct other groups.

They made a rough beginning of self-government, for while the Army would guard the outer limits of each area, community life and security were largely up to the Japanese themselves.

They immediately saw the need for developing civic leaders. At weekly community meetings, citations were given to the block leaders that worked most diligently. Special emphasis was put on the health and care of these American children of Japanese descent. Their parents, most of whom are American citizens, and their grandparents, who are alien, immediately wanted to go to work. At Manzanar, they built a glass house and began rooting guayule cuttings. The plants when mature will add to our rubber supply. At Parker, they undertook the irrigation of fertile desert land.

Meanwhile, in areas away from the coast and under appropriate safeguards, many were permitted to work in sugar-beet fields where labor was badly needed.

Now this brief picture is actually the prologue to a story that is yet to be told. The full story will begin to unfold when the raw lands of the desert turn green and all adult hands are at productive work on public lands or in private employment. It will be fully told only when circumstances permit the loyal American citizens once again to enjoy the freedom we in this country cherish and when the disloyal we hope have left this country for good.

In the meantime, we're setting a standard for the rest of the world in the treatment of people who may have loyalties to an enemy nation. We are protecting ourselves without violating the principles of

Christian decency. We won't change this fundamental decency no matter what our enemies do, but of course we hope most earnestly that our example will influence the Axis powers in their treatment of Americans who fall into their hands.