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WHAT HAPPENED IN AN AMERICAN CONCENTRATION CAMP

Early in 1942, a group of social scientists in the University of California undertook to make a factual, on-the-ground study of the wartime evacuation, detention, and resettlement of the Japanese minority in the United States. The first public report of their findings is being issued from the University of California Press this month - a book which bears the title, JAPANESE AMERICAN EVACUATION AND RESETTLEMENT: THE SPOILAGE. The authors are Dorothy Swaine Thomas and Richard S. Nishimoto.

Dr. Thomas, who is professor of rural sociology at the University, was in charge of the study. Mr. Nishimoto was one of the evacuees. During his years of detention he served the research project as an observer (with the knowledge and consent of the camp authorities, of course) and kept daily records of observations, personal experiences, and conversations which he communicated periodically to project headquarters in Berkeley. He was one of twelve Japanese Americans who served at one time or another in this capacity, and in addition there were three Caucasian observers. On his release at the end of the war, Nishimoto returned to the California campus and for more than a year has been assisting Dr. Thomas in writing the summarizing reports of the study, of which THE SPOILAGE is Volume I. Other volumes will follow.

This project in social science research was financed by grants of \$32,500 from the Foundation, supplemented by larger funds from the University. There were ten camps in all, but for the purposes of this study the observers

were concentrated in three of them, Tule Lake in northern California, Poston in Arizona, and Minidoka in Idaho. Spot observations were made from time to time in five of the other camps. The observers, both those of Japanese and those of Caucasian stock, were all university trained in the social sciences, and eleven spoke both English and Japanese. The reports they turned in include diaries, records of interviews, detailed accounts of camp episodes, minutes of group meetings, manifestos, bills of complaint, petitions, and personal letters. These original data fill fifteen large filing cabinets. They will be kept in the sociological archives of the University and doubtless will furnish basic material for many future books and papers on racial discrimination, wartime hysteria, forced migration, and the attitudes, actions, adjustments, and other behavior patterns which these social forces are wont to evoke.

I

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, there were in the continental United States about 127,000 persons of Japanese ancestry. Most of them were residents of California, and most of the rest lived in the neighboring states of Washington, Oregon, and Arizona. What happened to these 127,000 human beings was the question which Dr. Thomas and her associates undertook to answer.

Only 47,000 were aliens, and the remaining 80,000 were, by virtue of birth in the United States, citizens. But all were herded alike into detention camps and treated as dangerous enemies. The fact that citizens of German and Italian ancestry were treated differently from citizens of Japanese ancestry lay at the root of the fierce resentment that flared up in the camps. Even then, with a wise and humane administration of the business of detention,

registration, and sifting of the disloyal from the loyal, the situation might have been directed to a finally satisfactory outcome. But, according to the record set forth in this book, affairs were stupidly handled. There were promises that were not kept; there were repeated discriminations and injustices; wages for those who volunteered to work were rated on a slave basis; payments were chronically in arrears; living quarters were overcrowded and ill-furnished. Above all there was the constant jibe: "A Jap is a Jap - once a Jap always a Jap." It isn't to be wondered at, therefore, that many who at the beginning of the detention were willing and even eager to volunteer for American military service, a year later were so embittered that they ignored or answered No to an official questionnaire which was drawn up by the authorities to appraise their loyalty to the United States.]

In every one of the ten camps there were some who thus branded themselves as "disloyal," but the number varied from one camp to the next. Thus, at Camp Granada in Colorado only seven per cent of the males ignored or answered No to the crucial question: "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power, or organization?" At Camp Minidoka in Idaho the "disloyal" numbered only nine per cent. But at the two California camps, Tule Lake and Mansanar, the number rose to 50 per cent of the males.

It is indicated in the book that the government authorities were surprised. They had assumed that almost all Japanese Americans, particularly those who held citizenship, would accept the questionnaire in good faith and answer its questions satisfactorily. Tule Lake appeared to be the

most pronounced and outspoken in its rejection of the loyalty test, and so, inasmuch as it was already a hotbed of dissent, the government decided to move the "loyals" out of Tule Lake to other relocation centers, and to bring to it the "disloyals" from the other nine camps.

II

Thus, in the fall and winter of 1943, all the Japanese Americans who had refused to answer Yes to the loyalty questions in the questionnaire, were crowded into Tule Lake. A double fence of barbed wire, eight feet high, was constructed around the area. The military guard was increased to full battalion strength, and new barracks were built to house the guard. In the military area half a dozen tanks, obsolete but impressive, were lined up in full view of the camp residents.

At that stage, Dr. Thomas relates, "there followed numerous resignations among the Caucasian personnel in protest against the transformation of Tule Lake into what had the aspect of a concentration camp. Notable among these were some socially-minded personalities who had been in close and co-operative relations with the evacuees and had promoted their efforts to develop a democratic organization within the center."

From this point on the book focusses on Tule Lake, and what happened there and leaves the events of the nine other camps and their results for a future volume. Indeed, work on this second book is already under way and Dr. Thomas has decided to entitle it *THE SALVAGE*, for it will report beneficial effects of the evacuation, telling of Japanese Americans whose status was improved by their dispersal. There are instances of professional men who because of racial prejudice on the West Coast had been restricted,

and in many cases had accepted menial occupations or gone into trade in order to make a living, who when relocated in the interior found their professional services in demand. The wartime shortages of doctors, dentists, veterinarians, and others were a factor in their improvement, of course. Also, the young evacuees in the camps who answered the loyalty questions affirmatively, enlisted in the Army, and have come back with records of faithful and effective military service to their credit, are part of the salvage.

But *THE SPOILAGE* concentrates on Tule Lake. It portrays the smoldering resentments, mounting suspicions, threats, and eventual strikes, beatings, and murder. It tells of the ineptitude of the authorities, the tactless, often inhumane handling of grievances, the reign of martial law, the stockade, the bull pen, the pressure tactics of the "disloyal," rising finally to the melancholy climax in which thousands in 1944 and 1945 renounced their American citizenship.

The sequence which had built up to this ultimate act of protest is eloquently summarized in the final paragraphs of the book:

"With mass renunciation of citizenship by Nisei (first generation Americans of Japanese ancestry) and Kibei (second generation), the cycle which began with evacuation was complete. Their parents had lost their hard-won foothold in the economic structure of America. They, themselves, had been deprived of rights which indoctrination in American schools had led them to believe inviolable. Charged with no offense, but victims of a military misconception, they had suffered confinement behind barbed wire. They had been stigmatized as disloyal on grounds often far removed from any criterion of political allegiance. They had been at the mercy of administrative agencies working at cross-purposes. They had yielded to parental compulsion in

order to hold the family intact. They had been intimidated by the ruthless tactics of pressure groups in camp. They had become terrified by reports of the continuing hostility of the American public, and they had finally renounced their irreparably depreciated American citizenship.

"Many of them have since left the country, voluntarily, to take up life in defeated Japan. Others will remain in America, in the unprecedented and ambiguous status of citizens who became aliens ineligible for citizenship in the land of their birth."

III

Reading this book one is presented with the eternal antithesis between expediency and principle; between national security and moral integrity. It is possible that some of those whose civil rights were violated were fundamentally disloyal. Very likely there were those who from the beginning were looking forward to a Japanese victory, and valued their civil rights primarily as a means of serving Japan. But it is true that others who were fundamentally loyal, who were ardent espousers of democracy, who were fellow Baptists, fellow Methodists, and fellow Catholics of the American majority, came at last to such a state of mind that the only course left by which they could preserve their integrity was to reject this thing which to them was monstrous hypocrisy. And so they renounced their American citizenship. "I find Joe Kurihara very bitter about the entire situation," said a government administrator after interviewing one of the renunciants, "but he was bitter and sore in quite an American way," added the officer.