

I Visit Manzanar*

U. S. Citizens Behind Barbed Wire

Florence Cornell Bingham, *Chi*

↓ Education means much to our Japanese-American citizens. In addition to housing, food, and medical care, the Government had promised that the children would receive an education in the Centers through the high school level. About a quarter of the evacuee population is under fifteen years of age. As the Relocation Centers are designed for temporary occupancy only, few centers include special school houses in their plans. Regular barrack-buildings are being used as schools, although these buildings are not adequate in arrangements for lighting, heating, ventilation, and sanitation according to prevailing standards. The equipment was primitive, inadequate and, because of priorities and shortages, was slow in reaching the centers. When the time came to open the schools in September, 1942, many of the schools lacked seats, desks, window shades, and other essential equipment. The children sat on the floor or on crudely-constructed benches, and the teacher used a packing case as a desk. Some of the younger children found it easier to sit or kneel on the floor and use the bench as a desk rather than to sit on the bench without any support for back or work. A large number of the children had been drawn from the fine city schools of Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, and other large cities on the Pacific coast, which made the contrast in school facilities particularly evident. The children adapted fairly well to the situation, but the parents were greatly distressed and felt that the Government had not lived up to the promises that had been made to them before evacuation. The situation is much improved now, however, and the education of the children is progressing

in satisfactory manner—or as satisfactory as is possible under the circumstances. The teachers, most of whom are Caucasian, are a splendid group. Service of this type appeals to lovers of humanity. The Caucasian

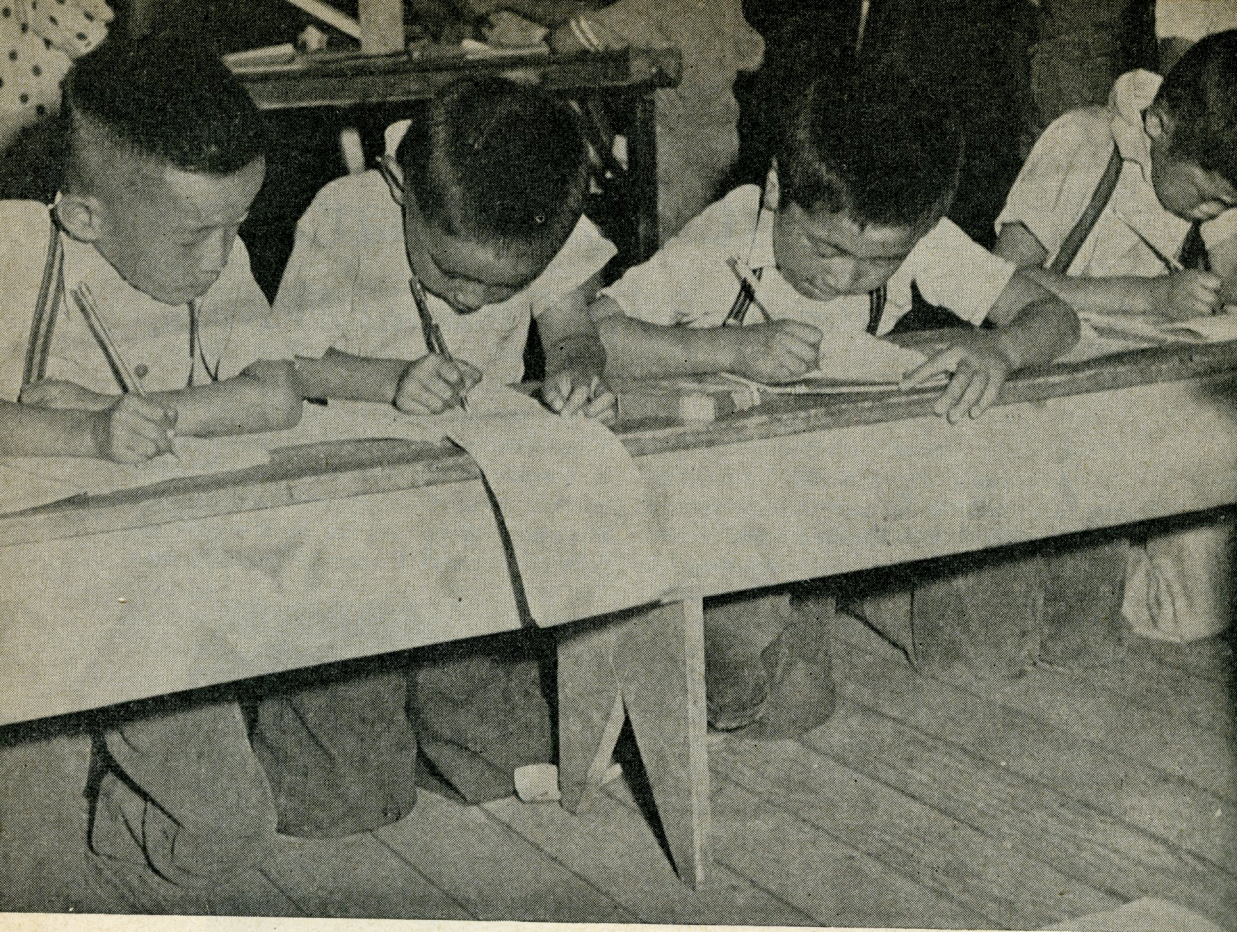


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teachers are assisted by the evacuees who have had training in special skills. Many are working in the nursery schools, and some of the teacher training institutions are arranging for evacuees to have their practice-teaching experience in the centers while carrying on their college work by extension.

Provision has been made to permit college students to leave the centers to attend a college outside of the prohibited area, provided there is no question of the student's loyalty to the United States, and satisfactory arrangements have been made for enrollment in a college. A National Student Relocation Council, composed of a number of college presidents and prominent educators, under the chairmanship of President Nason

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MANZANAR RELOCATION CENTER, MANZANAR, CALIFORNIA. *An elementary school with voluntary attendance has been established with volunteer evacuee teachers, most of whom are college graduates. No school equipment is as yet obtainable and available tables and benches are used.*

of Swarthmore College, has been active in investigating the financial status and academic fitness of the students wishing to attend college and in determining which colleges outside of the evacuated area would accept evacuee students. The American Friends Service Committee has been particularly helpful in this matter. However, a college education is expensive, and by the process of evacuation many parents have been deprived of their earning power and source of income. Scholarships assist some of the students; others must be self supporting while attending college. Many of these students of Japanese ancestry have achieved unusual distinction, and, on the whole, the student bodies have welcomed and included them without question into the life of the college. The following individual cases have come to my attention:

Kenji Okuda, a native of Seattle, went to

Oberlin College from the Granada Relocation Center. He was elected student body president during the last scholastic year.

Lillian Ota went to Wellesley after three years at the University of California, where she had had a straight A record. She graduated from Wellesley with an A record last June and was offered five fellowships to five different institutions including Yale and the University of Michigan.

Harvey Itano was the highest ranking student at the University of California before his evacuation to the Tule Lake Relocation Center. Last fall, he entered the Medical College at St. Louis, Missouri, and although he entered three weeks late, he was the head of his class by the end of the first semester and finished up the scholastic year leading his class.

These are citizens of which our country may well be proud.

Americanization is stressed in all of the centers in local government; community activity and education, and on the whole Americanism prevails. The schools from the nursery school on up emphasize American culture. There are also adult education classes and discussion forums. American organizations such as the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Y.M.C.A., Y.W.C.A., American Red Cross, and various Christian Church organizations have branches in the centers. The evacuees are making substantial purchases of War Bonds and stamps and are contributing generously to various war drives. Several of the centers have USO centers or similar arrangements for the entertainment of soldiers of Japanese ancestry who come back to the Relocation Centers to visit families or friends while on furlough. There are about five thousand people of Japanese ancestry already serving in the United States armed forces. The great majority of the people of Japanese ancestry living in this country will

and must remain here after the war, and it is important to conserve their loyalty to America and plan for a satisfactory assimilation after the end of hostilities. However it is difficult to demonstrate the values of American citizenship to people under enforced detention, especially while the press, radio, and certain American organizations brand them as dangerous aliens or criminals who should be imprisoned now and deported after the war. This in spite of the fact that not one case of sabotage on the part of any person of Japanese ancestry has been reported from any reliable sources. Most people make no distinction in their thinking between the Japanese agents and people of known disloyalties who have already been apprehended and placed in prisons or internment camps, and the loyal Japanese-Americans against whom there is no suspicion of disloyalty, and who have been placed in the Relocation Centers only temporarily as a matter of expediency and only until such time as

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arrangements can be made for their settlement in non-military areas. Indeed, under the Constitution of the United States, there are no legal grounds on which these people can be detained for a time any longer than is necessary to carry out this program.

Most of our Japanese-Americans have taken the evacuation in good spirit, but as the time drags on, and there is no change in their situation, they lose heart. They are cut off from all economic opportunities, all normal relations with the outside world, and they are deprived of all the customary habits of family life and social living. Family life and parental control are important in their scheme of life. The crowded housing and mass-feeding, with the lack of facilities for cooking to the family taste and eating together as a family unit, tend to disrupt family unity and break down parental control. There are already indications that some of the young people are getting out of hand, and there are some evidences of juvenile delinquency, an unusual state of affairs for these people. The Japanese are industrious, and these descendants are restless under enforced idleness. They see the savings of a lifetime melting away with no immediate prospect of improvement, and they face a future of insecurity and hostility with dread.

From the standpoint of American citizenship, the segregation is creating difficulties. Those of the younger generation, born and educated in this country, are entirely American in their ways of life. Many of them know no other language than English. However, isolated in a community with a strong Japanese background, they are absorbing Japanese culture, learning the Japanese language for the first time, and are taking to Japanese games and sports. One well-educated parent complains that his children, who have always spoken perfect English, are now using broken English learned from older Japanese living in the same barracks. Perhaps the general sentiment is well expressed in the words of a little six year old girl who said "This is all right for now, Mama, but when can we go back to America?"

Plans are already under way to move these

people "back to America." The War Relocation Authority through information supplied by the FBI, the Military Intelligence, and other investigation agencies has a record of every evacuee seventeen years of age or older, telling the evacuee's education, affiliations, foreign travel, employment, religion, and other pertinent facts, in addition to his own statement of allegiance to the United States. On this record, it is possible to determine, with some degree of accuracy, which are the loyal evacuees eligible for indefinite leave. The others, those who have unfavorable records or who wish to return to Japan after the war, will be segregated and sent to the Tule Lake center to remain there until after the close of the war.

The leave procedures have been approved by the Department of Justice and the War Department.

Permission to leave is granted only if the following conditions are met: a. There is nothing in the record of the person to indicate that he would be dangerous to society or to the national security. b. He has a place to go and a means of supporting himself. c. There is evidence that his presence in the community to which he wishes to go will not cause a disturbance. d. The evacuee agrees to keep the War Relocation Authority informed of his address at all times.

The success of this program depends in large measure on the attitudes of the people on the "outside." The road of the evacuee leaving the seclusion and safety of the Relocation Center and facing a future of uncertainty and hostility in a new location will not be an easy one. It should be the duty of all good American citizens to prove to these people that American Citizenship has a real meaning and that bigotry, persecution, and race prejudice are not consistent with the ways of American Democracy.

There is probably no person in the United States who understands the Japanese people better and has more reason to detest and hate the philosophy of our Japanese enemy than does the Honorable Joseph C. Grew, former U. S. Ambassador to Japan. His attitude

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towards our American citizens of Japanese ancestry, therefore, might well be accepted as the pattern we might all follow with justice and safety. I quote from an address delivered by him at Union College, Schenectady, New York, April 26, 1943.

"These Americans of Japanese origin are to Japan what you and I are to England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, France, and other European countries. They are Americans, but they are also 'the cousins in the New World'. I am proud of my trans-Atlantic cousins, and do not feel myself to be any the less American for that; and I would respect any American of Japanese descent who tried to contribute to our common American life those especially good qualities which he may have inherited from his Trans-Pacific origin.

"We in America are in a real sense the apostles of the future; we show the rest of mankind what men of diverse races and cultures can accomplish with a common good will. We Americans of all races and creeds, fight the evils of despotic and selfish militarism. There can be no compromise between ourselves and the arrogant exclusiveness of self-styled men-gods of Japan—no more than between ourselves and the self-styled Aryans of Germany. In our war—against caste and privilege, wherever they may exist or occur—the contribution of Americans who are of Japanese descent is of real value; first, because they are a living proof of our non-racial free unity; secondly, because they make a valuable and wholesome contribution to the sum total of our American civilization."