

A Challenge to American Sportsmanship

By Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt



The Toyama family divide their allegiance. Aging Noriyuki and his wife have returned to Japan. Sons Yat, Saburo and Leo prefer America. At the parting, the Toyamas posed for this photo. Yat is a U. S. Army sergeant

For loyal Japanese-Americans, the freedom that is their right.

For disloyal ones, concentration camp and, later, deportation.

America's solution of the problem will work if all of us are willing to be fair about it, says the First Lady

I CAN well understand the bitterness of people who have lost loved ones at the hands of the Japanese military authorities, and we know that the totalitarian philosophy, whether it is in Nazi Germany or in Japan, is one of cruelty and brutality. It is not hard to understand why people living here in hourly anxiety for those they love have difficulty in viewing our Japanese problem objectively, but for the honor of our country, the rest of us must do so.

A decision has been reached to divide the disloyal and disturbing Japanese from the others in the War Relocation centers. One center will be established for the disloyal and will be more heavily guarded and more restricted than those in which these Japanese have been in the past. This separation is taking place now.

All the Japanese in the War Relocation centers have been carefully checked by the personnel in charge of the camps, not only on the basis of their own information but also on the basis of the information supplied by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, by G-2 for the Army, and by the Office of Naval Intelligence for the Navy. We can be assured, therefore, that they are now moving into this segregation center in northern California the people who are loyal to Japan.

Japanese-Americans who are proved completely loyal to the United States will, of course, gradually be absorbed. The others will be sent to Japan after the war.

At present, things are very peaceful in most of the Japanese Relocation centers.

The strike that received so much attention in the newspapers last November in Poston, Arizona, and the riot at Manzanar, California, in December were settled effectively, and nothing resembling them has occurred since. It is not difficult to understand that uprooting thousands of people brought on emotional upsets that take time and adjustment to overcome.

Neither all of the government people naturally, nor all of the Japanese were perfect, and many changes in personnel had to be made. It was an entirely new undertaking for us, it had to be done in a hurry, and, considering the number of people involved, I think the whole job of handling our Japanese has, on the whole, been done well.

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Influx from the Orient

A good deal has already been written about the problem. One phase of it, however, I do not think has as yet been adequately stressed. To cover it, we must get our whole background straight.

We have in all 127,000 Japanese or Japanese-Americans in the United States. Of these, 112,000 lived on the West Coast. Originally, they were much needed on ranches and on large truck and fruit farms, but, as they came in greater numbers, people began to discover that they were competitors in the labor field.

The people of California began to be afraid of Japanese importation, so the Exclusion Act was passed in 1924. No people of the Oriental race could become citizens of the United States by naturalization, and no quota was given to the Oriental nations in the Pacific.

This happened because, in one part of our country, they were feared as competitors, and the rest of our country knew them so little and cared so little about them that they did not even think about the principle that we in this country believe in: that of equal rights for all human beings.

We granted no citizenship to Orientals, so now we have a group of people (some of whom have been here as long as fifty years) who have not been able to become citizens under our laws. Long before the war, an old Japanese man told me that he had great-grandchildren born in this country and that he had never been back to Japan; all that he cared about was here on the soil of the United States, and yet he could not become a citizen.

The children of these Japanese, born in this country, are citizens, however, and now we have about 47,000 aliens, born in Japan, who are known as Issei, and about 80,000 American-born citizens, known as Nisei. Most of these Japanese-Americans have gone to our American schools and colleges, and have never known any other country or any other life than the life here in the United States.

The large group of Japanese on the West Coast preserved their national traditions, in part because they were discriminated against. Japanese were not always welcome buyers of real estate. They were not always welcome neighbors or participators in community undertakings. As always happens with groups that are discriminated against, they gather together and live as racial groups. The younger ones made friends in school and college, and became part of the community life, and prejudices lessened against them. Their elders were not always sympathetic to the changes thus brought about in manners and customs.

There is a group among the American-born Japanese called the Kibei. These are American citizens who have gone to Japan and returned to the United States. Figures compiled by the War Relocation Authority show that 72 per cent of the American citizens have never been to Japan. Technically, the remainder, approximately 28 per cent, are Kibei, but they include many young people who made only short visits, perhaps as children with their parents. Usually the term Kibei is used to refer to those who have received

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a considerable portion of their education in Japan.

While many of the Kibei are loyal to Japan, some of them were revolted by what they learned of Japanese militarism and are loyal to the land of their birth, America.

Enough for the background. Now we come to Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. There was no time to investigate families or to adhere strictly to the American rule that a man is innocent until he is proved guilty. These people were not convicted of any crime, but emotions ran too high. Too many people wanted to wreak vengeance on Oriental-looking people. Even the Chinese, our allies, were not always safe from insult on the streets. The Japanese had long been watched by the F.B.I., as were other aliens, and several hundred were apprehended at once on the outbreak of war and sent to detention camps.

Approximately three months after Pearl Harbor, the Western Defense Command ordered all persons of Japanese ancestry excluded from the coastal area, including approximately half of Washington, Oregon and California, and the southern portion of Arizona. Later, the entire state of California was added to the zone from which Japanese were barred.

Problems in Relocation

At first, the evacuation was placed on a voluntary basis; the people were free to go wherever they liked in the interior of the country. But the evacuation on this basis moved very slowly, and furthermore, those who did leave encountered a great deal of difficulty in finding new places to settle. In order to avoid serious incidents, on March 29, 1942, the evacuation was placed on an orderly basis, and was carried out by the Army.

A civilian agency, the War Relocation Authority, was set up to work with the military in the relocation of the people. Because there was so much indication of danger to the Japanese unless they were protected, relocation centers were established where they might live until those whose loyalty could be established could be gradually reabsorbed into the normal life of the nation.

To many young people this must have seemed strange treatment of American citizens, and one cannot be surprised at the reaction that manifested itself not only in young Japanese-Americans, but in others who had known them well and had been educated with them, and who asked bitterly, "What price American citizenship?"

Nevertheless, most of them realized that this was a safety measure. The Army carried out its evacuation, on the whole, with remarkable skill and kindness. The early situation in the centers was difficult. Many of them were not ready for occupation. The setting up of large communities meant an amount of organization which takes time, but the Japanese, for the most part, proved to be patient, adaptable and courageous.

There were unexpected problems and, one by one, these were discovered and an effort was made to deal with them fairly. For instance, these people had property and they had to dispose of it, often at a loss. Sometimes they could not dispose of it, and it remained unpro-

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tected, deteriorating in value as the months went by. Business had to be handled through agents, since the Japanese could not leave the camps.

An Emotional Situation

Understandable bitterness against the Japanese is aggravated by the old-time economic fear on the West Coast and the unreasoning racial feeling which certain people, through ignorance, have always had wherever they came in contact with people who were different from themselves.

This is one reason why many people believe that we should have directed our original immigration more intelligently. We needed people to develop our country, but we should never have allowed any groups to settle as groups where they created little German or Japanese or Scandinavian "islands" and did not melt into our general community pattern. Some of the South American countries have learned from our mistakes and are now planning to scatter their needed immigration.

Gradually, as the opportunities for outside jobs are offered to them, loyal citizens and law-abiding aliens are going out of the relocation centers to start independent and productive lives again. Those not considered reliable, of course, are not permitted to leave. As a taxpayer, regardless of where you live, it is to your advantage, if you find one or two Japanese-American families settled in your neighborhood, to try to regard them as individuals and not to condemn them before they are given a fair chance to prove themselves in the community.

"A Japanese is always a Japanese" is an easily accepted phrase and it has taken hold quite naturally on the West Coast because of some reasonable or unreasonable fear back of it, but it leads nowhere and solves nothing. Japanese-Americans may be no more Japanese than a German-American is German, or an Italian-American is Italian. All of these people, including the Japanese-Americans, have men who are fighting today for the preservation of the democratic way of life and the ideas around which our nation was built.

We have no common race in this country, but we have an ideal to which all of us are loyal. It is our ideal which we want to have live. It is an ideal which can grow with our people, but we cannot progress if we look down upon any group of people among us because of race or religion. Every citizen in this country has a right to our basic freedoms, to justice and to equality of opportunity, and we retain the right to lead our individual lives as we please, but we can only do so if we grant to others the freedoms that we wish for ourselves.