

Letter, Dillon S. Myer to the Secretary of War, March 11, 1943; with attachment, Secretary of War to Dillon S. Myer, May 10, 1943. Papers of Dillon S. Myer.

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WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY

MAR 11 1943

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

The Honorable
The Secretary of War
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Now that the War Relocation Authority program is approximately one year old, it seems appropriate that we sum up the progress that has so far been achieved, take stock of the outstanding problems we currently face, and suggest some of the lines that the program might take in the immediate future.

As you know, the first steps leading to mass evacuation of persons of Japanese descent from certain areas in the Western Defense Command were taken in late February and early March of 1942-- almost exactly one year ago. Throughout most of March, the people of Japanese ancestry were permitted to leave the prohibited and restricted zones prescribed by the Western Defense Command and were allowed to resettle inland on their own initiative. In fact, it seems to have been the hope of the Western Defense Command in early March that a considerable portion of the people of Japanese ancestry might eventually be evacuated in this way. Assembly centers, I understand, were planned originally only for those people of Japanese descent who might be unable or unwilling to move out voluntarily.

Complications, however, soon developed. By the middle of March, the inland communities were protesting strongly against the influx of voluntary evacuees from coastal areas; and in some places violence appeared imminent. By the latter part of the month, it had become clear that voluntary evacuation would not be a feasible solution and that provisions would have to be made for quartering the entire evacuee population until orderly plans for their relocation could be developed.



Accordingly, the "freeze" order affecting persons of Japanese ancestry in the restricted areas was issued by the Commanding General on March 27 to take effect on March 29. At about the same time, plans for moving the evacuees into assembly centers were expanded and selection of sites for the ten relocation centers to be administered by the War Relocation Authority was begun. The movement of approximately 110,000 persons of Japanese descent, first to assembly centers and then to relocation centers, was completed about eight months later in November of 1942.

During the period while this mass movement was going forward, beginning in May of 1942, an intensive demand for labor developed in the agricultural areas of the West. In an effort to alleviate this problem, a program permitting the employment of groups of evacuees on western farms was developed jointly by the Western Defense Command and the War Relocation Authority in the latter part of May. Recruitment was started both in the assembly centers and in the few relocation centers which were operating at that time. Throughout the summer, as the fall harvest season approached and the demand for labor on western farms became increasingly acute, the recruitment procedure was speeded up and the whole movement intensified. By October nearly 10,000 evacuees had been recruited from assembly and relocation centers for work on western farms.

On the whole, this movement into the harvest fields was carried out with surprisingly little difficulty. Although we had anticipated the possibility of serious trouble in some areas, there were no incidents of major proportions and in most communities the Japanese-Americans were well received and well treated. Despite a few minor incidents in some localities, it seems safe to say that the influx produced no more--and perhaps even less-- social tension than the normal seasonal movement of migrant farm workers. And it is certainly significant that more than 2,000 evacuees who left the centers on temporary group leave during 1942 are still out working in agricultural areas of the West and have requested indefinite leave under the procedures developed last summer and fall.

These procedures were first announced by the War Relocation Authority on July 20 and later broadened (to include aliens as well as citizens) on October 1. As finally developed, they provide that any resident of a relocation center may apply for a permit of indefinite leave to take a job or establish normal residence outside the center and away from the evacuated area. Indefinite leave permits are being granted in all cases provided: (1) the applicant has an offer of a job or some other means of support; (2) there is reasonable evidence that the applicant will be accepted without difficulty in the community of destination; (3) there is no available evidence indicating that the applicant might endanger the internal security of the Nation; and (4) the applicant agrees to keep the War Relocation Authority informed of any change of job or change of address.

Already approximately 2,500 people have taken advantage of these procedures and have re-established themselves outside the centers, mainly in communities throughout the mid-western sections of the country. Like the seasonal movement to the harvest fields last spring and summer, this exodus of people going out on indefinite leave has been accepted in the main with tolerance and understanding. Opposition has been expressed by some individuals and groups who do not have accurate information about the status of the evacuees and by some who have deep-rooted prejudices against all people of Japanese descent. The great majority of people with whom we have dealt directly on the leave program, however, have been wholly favorable and many have expressed a positive desire to assist American citizens of Japanese ancestry and law-abiding aliens in re-establishing themselves in normal American communities. We have had excellent cooperation in nearly all quarters once the facts are understood.

On February 1, there were approximately 107,000 American Japanese still in relocation centers, another 20,000 or so outside the centers within the limits of the continental United States, and still another 160,000 in the Territory of Hawaii. With the exception of the few thousand evacuees who have left the relocation centers on indefinite leave, all

the people in the latter two groups have lived continuously in normal American communities and have been free (except for the Department of Justice restrictions applying to the aliens) to conduct their affairs on the same basis as other residents of the United States.

From the beginning, the War Relocation Authority has been carrying out its responsibilities under Executive Order No. 9102 with three basic assumptions in mind. The first of these is that all evacuees of Japanese ancestry, except those who request repatriation and those who may be deported for illegal activities, will continue to live in the United States after the close of the war. The second is that the United States has no intention of conducting the war on a racial basis and that the relocation program should be carried out at all times in harmony with this principle. The third assumption is that all American citizens and law-abiding alien residents of the United States should be treated by the government, insofar as possible under wartime conditions, without racial discrimination.

With these basic assumptions--and especially the first one-- in mind, many of the problems which have arisen in connection with the administration of relocation centers take on added significance. Some of the problems were anticipated in the early days of the program. Most of them, however, have become far more acute and widespread than we originally expected and a few have developed which were not foreseen at all.

One of the most serious arises from the fact that we have thrown together in closely-packed, somewhat rudimentary communities thousands of people who have a common racial ancestry but who are highly heterogeneous in almost every other respect. Citizens are mixed in with aliens; the well-to-do with the poor; farmers with city-dwellers; the highly educated with the near illiterates; those whose cultural background is primarily Japanese with those who have never visited Japan and have no desire to go there. This mingling of people with widely varying economic status and cultural backgrounds under the conditions of relocation center life has created many conflicts and has intensified others which existed prior

to evacuation. It has produced a widespread feeling of individual and collective insecurity and has led to frustrations, fears, and bitterness. It is, I feel, one of the fundamental causes lying behind nearly all the demonstrations that have occurred in assembly centers and relocation centers to date.

In the atmosphere of tension that prevails almost constantly at most of the centers, a few active agitators have been able to produce results out of all proportion to their numbers. They have been able to suggest, with considerable plausibility, that all alien evacuees will be deported to Japan at the close of the war and have hinted that any show of cooperation with the United States government now will be considered evidence of disloyalty in Japan after deportation. This kind of reasoning has gained considerable acceptance among many of the older people and has led them to bring counter-pressure on the younger citizen group whenever cooperation in the war effort becomes an issue. The recent experience with registration and enlistment is a specific case in point.

Another problem of serious proportions at the relocation centers is the gradual breakdown in the pre-war structure of Japanese-American family life. Older women who have spent virtually all their lives in hard physical labor are now reduced to idleness and find time hanging heavy on their hands. Youngsters who were formerly kept busy on the farm or around the household have virtually no required duties except attendance at school. Families eating in community mess halls and living in crowded barracks with thin partitions (sometimes two small families in a single barracks apartment) find privacy a virtual impossibility. In short, practically all the social and economic factors which tend to hold families together in a normal community have been thrown out of gear. As a result, many of the older people have found their parental control over their children seriously weakened and the whole problem of family discipline has increased. The Japanese-American youngsters who established an admirably low record of juvenile delinquency on the Pacific Coast prior to evacuation have already begun to form gangs at some of the relocation centers

and have displayed definite rowdy characteristics at nearly all of them. Part of this, perhaps, can be explained in terms of wartime neuroses and anxieties which have recently produced a sharp increase in the juvenile delinquency problem in many of our larger cities. But much of it, I feel, is directly traceable to the extraordinary conditions of life at the relocation centers.

The economic situation at the centers is abnormal in two major respects. On the one hand, there is no necessity to work; the minimum essentials of life (food, lodging, and medical care) are and, under conditions of detention, must be provided by the government. On the other hand, there are no real opportunities for economic gain; the great majority of those who do work at the centers are paid \$16 a month plus small clothing allowances. The result has been a kind of levelling-off process. Hundreds of families who enjoyed comparatively high incomes before evacuation are now seriously depleting their reserves in relocation centers while some of the poorer families are perhaps realizing a better standard of living and more economic security than ever before. Under these conditions, large numbers of the evacuees, both old and young, are becoming apathetic and are losing nearly all incentive for achievement. Despite all our efforts to provide work for everyone, the use of manpower at the centers remains highly inefficient and probably always will. The full potentialities of this labor force can be realized, I am convinced, only in normal pursuits outside the relocation centers.

The problem of evacuee properties has been a vexing one since the early days of the program. From the beginning, we anticipated difficulties in connection with the management and disposal of these properties, but only recently have we come to appreciate the full scope and significance of the problem. Altogether there are about \$200,000,000 worth of properties belonging to the evacuees, ranging from household furnishings and purely personal effects to real estate such as farm lands and hotels in the coastal cities. A considerable portion of the real property, particularly in the fruit and vegetable areas of the West Coast, is of such a nature that it can probably be handled with full effectiveness only by

Japanese-American families who have had long experience in this highly specialized type of farming. As long as the owners and operators remain in relocation centers, many of these farms, I am afraid, will never make their maximum contribution to the war effort.

Another problem is the growing drive against the citizenship of American-born persons of Japanese descent. This drive, spearheaded by certain small groups who seem to have interests other than the immediate problems of coastal defense, has continued over the past several months. If it gathers additional momentum, it may lead in these times of emotional stress to actions that would be out of keeping with our democratic principles--actions that might perhaps have serious international implications. Moreover, I cannot escape the feeling that the arguments of these groups will continue to have a superficial air of plausibility just as long as an official stigma remains attached, in the public mind, to all the evacuated people.

These are the outstanding problems which we now face. I have sketched them only rather briefly and have purposely omitted mention of some of our lesser difficulties. As we look ahead to the future, it seems to me we should analyze these problems and attempt to work out solutions for them in the light of several highly pertinent considerations. The first of these is that the danger of invasion has undoubtedly receded. Another is the increasing seriousness of the manpower problem. A third is the need for pushing food production and other production activities to the utmost. And a fourth consideration is the high desirability of eliminating, insofar as possible, all discriminatory actions against American citizens and law-abiding alien residents of the United States at a time when we are fighting abroad for the principles of freedom and democracy.

Keeping these things in mind, three possible plans of action suggest themselves for the immediate future.

Plan A would be simply to continue on our present course. Under this plan, we would push forward with our indefinite leave

program and try to relocate as many qualified individuals as possible in agriculture or industry outside the evacuated area. We would also continue to provide seasonal leave for those who preferred to remain at the centers but who might wish to work temporarily in agriculture or other lines of activity in areas reasonably close to the centers. We would provide for army enlistment in special units such as the combat team and the intelligence school. And we would continue our efforts under special procedures to clear citizen evacuees for work in war plants outside the evacuated area.

If this course is maintained, I anticipate that over the next four to six months we may be able to relocate between 10 and 25 per cent of the evacuees now in relocation centers. If we can gain the proper degree of public acceptance and if a sufficient number of evacuees are willing to face the public in unfamiliar areas, the volume may be somewhat larger. But in any case under Plan A, I feel certain we shall have to maintain ten relocation centers for some time to come.

Plan B would involve the removal of all those regulations and restrictions which now apply only to Japanese-Americans and not to the American population at large. It would mean elimination of the evacuated area as such, immediate reinstatement of selective service for all male citizens of Japanese descent, and release from relocation centers of all evacuees except those who would be designated by a joint board representing the War Department, the Department of Justice, and the Office of Naval Intelligence. This board would examine the dockets of all questionable individuals and would recommend some for internment, others for exclusion from specific areas. This latter group would be treated much as we now treat individual excludées. The War Relocation Authority, in other words, would assist them in finding work opportunities and in re-establishing themselves outside the excluded area.

Plan C represents a middle-ground approach. It would not involve elimination of the evacuated area but would in all other respects resemble Plan B.

Under this plan, all American-citizen evacuees cleared by the joint board mentioned above would be permitted to return to the evacuated area and would be recommended for work in war plants throughout the country. Parents of men in the armed forces and other members of their immediate families would be released from relocation centers and allowed to return to the evacuated area provided their record was otherwise good. Provision would also be made for release of veterans of the last war and perhaps others whose record was in no way open to question. The remainder of the evacuees (except those who might be designated by the joint board for internment or some other special type of treatment) would be handled much as we are now handling the entire group. Those who wished to return to private life outside the relocation centers and outside the evacuated area would be processed under the regular leave procedures. Those who wished to remain at the centers would be permitted to remain. Selective service would be reinstated immediately for all American citizens of Japanese descent. Evacuees cleared by the joint board for work in war plants and for return to the evacuated area would no longer be subject to discriminatory restrictions and regulations.

Plan A has the following advantages:

1. This program is now under way and, despite some criticism, is accepted in many quarters as sound procedure.
2. If the indefinite leave program works, it may lead to a more widespread dispersal of evacuees throughout the country. Such dispersal might well simplify the problem of assimilation for the Japanese-Americans both now and in the post-war period.

The disadvantages of Plan A are:

1. Since it involves the maintenance--for the time being at least--of all ten relocation centers, it is the most costly of the three plans suggested.
2. As compared with the other two plans, it will mean a slower and less effective contribution to the manpower problem.



3. It will mean a continuation of the psychologically unhealthy conditions of relocation center life for many of the younger citizen evacuees who should be re-exposed as soon as possible to the Americanizing influences that operate in normal American communities.
4. Continued exclusion of the evacuees from the entire evacuated area will lead to serious property losses and an ineffective use of many farm properties at a time when food production is badly needed.
5. To a large degree, Plan A involves continued discrimination against American citizens and law-abiding aliens on the grounds of race.

The advantages of Plan B are:

1. It would permit full use of the available manpower in the most effective manner possible.
2. It would drastically reduce government costs.
3. It would alleviate property losses and eliminate most of the difficulties that now exist in connection with the management of evacuee properties.
4. It would restore all loyal and law-abiding evacuees to normal home life and normal economic opportunities and thus greatly simplify their problems of post-war adjustment.
5. It would go a long way toward eliminating racial discriminations and disproving the thesis of the Japanese militarists that the United States is conducting a racial war.

The disadvantages of Plan B are:

1. Because of the economic and racial emotions that exist, this plan would probably arouse considerable conflict and criticism particularly in the evacuated area and to some extent throughout the rest of the country.

2. By permitting most evacuees to return to their former homes immediately, it might work against a dispersal of Japanese-Americans throughout the country.
3. It might evoke some criticism in the intermountain region and other parts of the West from farm operators who have been hoping to use evacuee manpower during the crucial periods of the coming summer and fall.

The advantages of Plan C are:

1. It would provide for a reasonably effective use of evacuee manpower.
2. It would go a long way toward alleviating property losses and would provide for more effective use of many farm properties.
3. It would restore a considerable group of evacuees to normal social and economic life and would simplify the problem of evacuee adjustment in the post-war period.
4. It would reduce governmental costs.
5. It would largely eliminate the charges of racial discrimination.
6. It would provide definite rewards for loyalty and sacrifice.

The disadvantages of Plan C are:

1. It would probably arouse some conflict and criticism.
2. To some extent, it would probably work against a dispersal of evacuees throughout the country.

My recommendation is that we adopt Plan C or something similar to it immediately and that we move toward the adoption of Plan B as soon as all real danger of West Coast invasion seems to be eliminated. I should greatly appreciate receiving your comments and recommendations.

Sincerely,

D. J. Myer

Director



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WAR DEPARTMENT
Washington

May 10, 1943

Dear Mr. Myer:

I have given careful consideration to your letter of March 11, 1943, in which you review the history of the evacuation of persons of Japanese ancestry from certain areas on the West Coast, and subsequent developments. Your letter also analyzes certain problems which the War Relocation Authority is presently encountering, and you outline three alternate plans in solution thereof on which you solicit my comments and recommendations.

While under Executive Order 9102 promulgated March 18, 1942, the War Relocation Authority has been charged with exclusive responsibility for the care and resettlement of persons of Japanese ancestry evacuated from the West Coast, the Army has been in contact with several aspects of the program at first hand. For instance, the Army ran the assembly centers to which the evacuees were initially transferred, pending construction of the relocation projects by Army engineers. The Army supervised the movement of the evacuees from their homes to the assembly centers and from the assembly centers to the relocation projects. Recently the Army teams visited the relocation centers to procure, in cooperation with the War Relocation Authority, the accomplishment of loyalty questionnaires. In addition, there have been from time to time numerous consultations between the War Relocation Authority and the War Department on such miscellaneous matters as attendance of Japanese evacuees at educational institutions, entry of evacuees into critical defense areas, and the maintenance of order in the relocation centers themselves. I am glad to give you the views of the War Department based on this accumulated experience.

A serious deterioration in evacuee morale has been noted in recent months. This unsatisfactory development appears to be the result in large measure of the activities of a vicious, well-organized, pro-Japanese minority group to be found at each relocation project. Through agitation and by violence, these groups gained control of many aspects of internal project administration, so much so that it became disadvantageous, and sometimes dangerous, to express loyalty to the United States. The fact that



these groups were permitted to remain in power not only shook the confidence of the loyal ones in their Government, but also effectively stifled the expression of pro-American sentiment. I has been, and remains, the opinion of the War Department, already frequently expressed to you, that much trouble could have been avoided if these trouble makers had been removed from the relocation centers and placed in rigorous confinement.

To be sure, there were other reasons for the decline in evacuee morale, some of which you have touched upon in your letter. There is little incentive at the projects to work. Relations between parent and child are difficult, with the child no longer dependent upon his parents for shelter, for food, or for clothing. Absence of the normal outlets for youthful enthusiasm brings an increase in juvenile delinquency.

I am compelled, however, to the conclusion that failure to take aggressive action against those individuals who were actively working against the interests of this Government is a primary cause for the marked deterioration in evacuee loyalty. You will understand, of course, that my purpose is not to criticize, but to lay the basis for intelligent future action.

It is the War Department's considered opinion that the War Relocation Authority should take immediate steps to screen out from the centers and segregate in close confinement all individuals appearing to have pro-Japanese sympathies. This would include the already substantial number of individuals who have applied for repatriation, as well as the trouble makers. It is significant that the evacuees themselves propose segregation as a necessary step too long delayed, and volunteer the opinion that the situation will grow worse at an accelerated rate if action is not taken immediately. It seems clear to me that the problem of resettlement of persons of Japanese ancestry loyal to this country would be measurably simplified through segregation, as it would constitute an assurance to the American public that the bad actors had been effectively dealt with.

The importance which the War Department attaches to segregation renders premature any consideration of relaxing the restrictions in force in the Western Defense Command against persons of Japanese ancestry, as suggested in your Plans B and C. The War Department, however, is not necessarily committed to a policy of maintaining these restrictions for the duration of the war. The question can easily be reconsidered after the results of segregation have been observed.



In the meantime, the War Department will continue to do all it can to assist the War Relocation Authority in the permanent resettlement of all persons of Japanese ancestry loyal to the United States, so that their services may be profitably utilized in the war effort. In this connection, the reinstatement of general Selective Service procedures is being actively considered. The recent establishment by the War Department of the Japanese American combat team should prove helpful in procuring general public acceptance for loyal Japanese Americans. Similarly, the operations of the Japanese American Joint Board initiated by the War Department, will clear the way to the employment of many loyal Japanese Americans in war industry.

Sincerely yours,

/s/

Secretary of War.



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