

Speech, One Thousandth of the Nation, by Dillon S. Myer to a joint meeting of the civic organizations in Salt Lake City, Utah, March 23, 1944. Papers of Dillon S. Myer.

ONE THOUSANDTH OF THE NATION

An address by Dillon S. Myer, Director of the War Relocation Authority, to be presented March 23, 1944 before a joint meeting of civic organizations in Salt Lake City.

In a nation composed of people who have sprung from all the other lands of the earth, it would be rather surprising if the great bulk of the population had a well founded understanding of any of the minorities who make up the group as a whole. But I doubt if any minority group is more widely misunderstood these days than the people of Japanese descent who make up about one-tenth of one per cent of the nation's population. One in a thousand. This one person, with his Japanese face, his yellow skin, his characteristic name, looks different from the other 999. Because he is different outwardly, many are willing to believe he must be different inwardly, in his beliefs and loyalties.

Over the past two years the greater portion of this minority group have been treated in such a way that they are made to appear even more different from the majority of Americans than they appeared before the outbreak of war. Some 115,000 of them were required to move from their homes in the Pacific Coast states, something no other group was asked to do. Since then, most of them have lived in segregated communities, called relocation centers, a situation which has further heightened the differences. For two years, emphasis has been placed on the ways in which the people of Japanese descent are different rather than on the many ways in which they are like the rest of the people of America. The result has been a vicious circle; the evacuated people are outside regular communities because they are different; and because they are different it is difficult to get them re-established in normal communities. The relations between the one---and the other 999---constitute a problem worthy of attention by the entire nation. It is the major concern of the War Relocation Authority, and one of the newly **acquired** problems of the Department of the Interior.

The major event which caused relocation centers to be established was a conference which took place here in Salt Lake City, almost two years ago, when WRA was only about three weeks old, and when orderly evacuation from the West Coast was only one week old. The background of that conference is highly significant. During March, 1942, the people of Japanese descent, most of them American citizens, some of them aliens, were making their plans to move from their West Coast homes. Some of them actually did move. Several hundred came into the inter-mountain area, including Utah, with Salt Lake City attracting large numbers of the so-called voluntary evacuees. The others stayed where they were, principally because they had no place to go. The Commanding General of the Western Defense Command announced about the end of March that no further movement on a voluntary basis would be permitted; the evacuation henceforth was to be carried out in systematic fashion under governmental orders.

The western states seemed to offer the greatest possibilities for caring for the people to be evacuated, principally because there was more available land, much of it under public ownership. There was also a demand for labor in this area, which the evacuated people might help to meet. One of the ideas given most serious consideration was to establish the people in the many CCC camps which recently had been abandoned; permit them to live in the camps and work on farms and ranches nearby, or engage in public works in the forests and parks where the camps were located. To consider this suggestion and other possibilities, the War Relocation Authority and the Western Defense Command asked the governors and attorneys general of the ten western states to meet here in Salt Lake City the first week of April, 1942. The attitude of the state officials was unmistakable. They did not want the evacuated people in their states at all, if that could be avoided. If it could not be avoided, then they would not agree to be responsible for law and order unless the people were put in colonies under military guard. Since the Army could not provide enough manpower to guard a large number of small colonies, plans were made for establishing communities that would accommodate at least 5,000 persons. So the CCC camp idea was discarded; new and larger camps---small cities in themselves---had to be established. Gradually ten relocation centers came into being, built under Army supervision but operated by the War Relocation Authority. One of them was established in the State of Utah, about 150 miles southwest of Salt Lake City, near the town of Delta. Another is in Idaho near Twin Falls; two were established in California, two others in Arizona, two more in Arkansas; one in Colorado and one in Wyoming.

The War Relocation Authority has been operating these ten centers since early 1942. Beyond the maintenance of the evacuated people in the centers, we have been engaged in three other major tasks; providing assistance to the evacuees in handling their property problems on the West Coast; segregating the evacuee population on the basis of national sympathies and loyalties; and fourth---and most important---carrying on a program of relocation which we hope ultimately will move most of the evacuated people outside the centers and place them in normal communities.

Let me discuss each of these four major jobs briefly.

In considering the manner in which the relocation centers are operated, it is important to keep clearly in mind the status of the evacuees. They are not living in the relocation centers as punishment for any wrong-doing, or because they are suspected of being dangerous; they are not prisoners of war; they are not internees. They are a dislocated group of people removed from their homes and their means of livelihood as a wartime emergency measure. As such they are entitled to treatment according to American standards of decency. Ever since the summer of 1942, when most of the centers were still in the early stages of construction, all sorts of unfounded rumors and inaccurate stories have been circulated about the WRA management policies. Some of these stories have been obviously fantastic---like the one circulated in Idaho nearly two years ago that all evacuees lived in snug little bungalows with pink tile bathrooms. And the one that all evacuees are provided by the Government with five gallons of whiskey. Unfortunately, most of the stories have not been so plainly ridiculous. Although many were equally untrue, they have generally carried more of an appearance of plausibility and consequently have been widely accepted.



Perhaps the most widely criticized aspect of relocation center administration is the policy under which evacuees are being fed. Food is a delicate topic these days and it's not surprising that people should be aroused when they hear the evacuees enjoying a better diet than the average civilian family. If these stories were true, I will readily concede that there would be grounds for the most intense kind of public resentment. But the stories are not true and I believe that all of you sitting here today would be convinced of their falsity if you could eat just one meal in a relocation center. The food served at the centers is nourishing, but could not be called luxurious by any conceivable American standard. The cost of feeding from the start has been limited to 45 cents per person per day. All rationing restrictions applicable to the civilian population are strictly followed. Two meatless days are observed at each center every week. And in areas where local milk supplies are short, fresh milk is provided only to small children, nursing or expectant mothers, and special dietary cases.

From the time the relocation centers were first established, it has been the policy to produce as much of the food as possible, in order that the people in the centers might be nearly self supporting. This required clearing and leveling land, developing irrigation systems in some instances and drainage systems in others. Naturally the 1942 production was not large, at most of the centers, but in 1943 the centers produced practically all their own vegetables; they are producing most of their poultry and eggs; practically all their requirements for pork, some of their beef, and at one center, in an area where the outside milk supply is short, a dairy herd has been established. In dollars, the evacuees are producing about one-third of their total requirements.

The housing at relocation centers is certainly no more than adequate by any ordinary standards. Evacuee residents live in plain barracks of frame construction which are partitioned off into family-size apartments. A family of six or seven people will ordinarily occupy a room about 20 by 25 feet. In the barracks there is no running water, no cooking facilities, and no baths or toilets. However, each block of 12 or 14 barracks---accommodating between 250 and 300 people---is provided with a messhall and a bath and laundry building.

Education is provided for the evacuee children through the high school level. At all centers, we have developed our school curriculum and selected our teachers in conformity with the standards of the state where the center is located.

All evacuees at relocation centers have been provided with medical care and hospitalization when needed and these services are supplied by evacuee doctors and nurses, insofar as they are available.

In operating the centers, we have always made maximum use of evacuee manpower. Evacuees are employed in clerical and stenographic positions, on construction activities and land development work, in food production, and---to some extent---in manufacturing. Most of those who work are paid at the rate of \$16 per month; apprentices and others requiring close supervision receive \$12, while professional workers, such as doctors, are paid \$19. In addition, each evacuee working at the center receives small clothing allowances for himself and his dependents. These allowances range from \$2 a month for small children in the southerly centers to \$3.75 for adults in centers where the winters are severe.

The policy of the War Relocation Authority provides that evacuees at all centers are to have an active voice in the management of their own affairs but maintenance of law and order within the center is a responsibility of the WRA project director. To assist him in this function, the project director has a small staff of non-Japanese internal security officers and a sizeable crew of evacuee policemen. The exterior boundaries of each project area are guarded by a detachment of military police who are available for service within the center in cases of emergency.

I won't go into further detail on the conditions that prevail in the relocation centers. But I believe I have said enough to indicate that life in the centers is not exactly a bed of roses.

When the evacuated people were moved from their West Coast homes, they were permitted to take with them only a few personal belongings which they would need in the centers. Homes, farms, businesses, household goods all were left behind. The Federal government recognized an obligation to help keep evacuee farm properties in productive use, to assist the families in storing household goods and business equipment, and to lend a hand in the disposal of properties of other types.

We have helped in locating new managers for hotels, stores, and apartment houses owned by evacuees. We have found operators or purchasers for farms.

The value of property owned or operated by the evacuated Japanese has been estimated at more than 200 million dollars. The War Relocation Authority takes no responsibility at all for making decisions regarding disposal of this property; that is the right of the owner alone. But when he designates his wishes, we regard it as our job to see that his desires are carried out if possible.

One of the most challenging and serious problems which the War Relocation Authority has faced has been centered around the national sympathies of the evacuees. The aliens, for the most part, have certain sentimental ties to the land of their birth, even though practically all of them have been here at least 20 years, and many for thirty or forty years. Two thirds of the population is composed of American citizens. The great majority of the citizens have never been to Japan, speak no language but English, are American in their clothing, manners, tastes and slang. On the other hand, a small portion of the citizens have had much of their education in Japan and for practical purposes are more Japanese than American.

From the start, we recognized that there were those whose loyalties were with Japan also that there was a much larger group whose loyalties were definitely with the United States. The problem has been to establish standards for identifying those individuals who are strongly pro-Japanese or who might endanger the national security. For several months we have been engaged in a sorting process which has given individual consideration to all the adults in all the WRA centers. On the basis of extensive information which the War Relocation Authority has assembled, plus records of the Federal intelligence agencies, plus individual hearings in thousands of cases, we have been determining which members of the population can safely be granted leave to relocate in normal communities. Those whose national sympathies seem to lie with Japan rather than the United States and who are not eligible for leave are placed in one center, Tule Lake, in California.

Let me say a few words about the character of the population at Tule Lake. Most of the adult people there have indicated either by word or action that they prefer to be Japanese rather than American. But it is a mistake to think of the population at Tule as composed exclusively of agitators and potential saboteurs. Many of the residents are aliens of advanced years who have simply given up the struggle to become adjusted in this country and who want only to live out the rest of their days in the land of their birth. Despite their pro-Japanese leanings, very few of them, in my opinion, are actually troublesome or dangerous. Then there is also another group at the center—perhaps the largest single element in the whole population—which is made up of children and others whose records contain no evidence of disloyalty but who are living at Tule Lake merely because of family ties. These people, along with the aliens, probably constitute a majority of the total population.

At the same time, however, it is true that we now have at Tule Lake some of the most troublesome elements that were previously scattered among ten relocation centers. There are, for example, a considerable number of young American-born evacuees who have received the major part of their education in Japan and who seem to have been thoroughly indoctrinated with Japanese ideas. This group has always been particularly maladjusted at the relocation centers and some of them are among the leaders of those who are plainly out of sympathy with the United States. In addition, there are a number of young people, born and educated in this country, who have become embittered by the experiences of the past two years and have decided to cast their lot with Japan.

The population of Tule Lake at the present time is about 17,000 men, women, and children. In the nine other centers there are a few hundred others who have been denied leave clearance and so will be sent to Tule Lake. It now appears that most of these transfers will be completed some time in the spring, probably by May.

There are approximately 70,000 other people still in the relocation centers who are eligible for leave, and whom we in WRA will give every possible assistance in finding places to resettle. Making possible their relocation is the major objective of the War Relocation Authority, and all the rest of our activity is carried on with relocation in mind.

We realize that the cost of maintaining the entire evacuee population in relocation centers would mean an unnecessarily heavy drain on the taxpayers of the country. We set up our work programs at the relocation centers in such a way that the evacuees could contribute through voluntary work to their own support. And we have maintained that policy consistently from the very start. But even so, the expense of keeping 90,000 people in government centers and providing them with the essentials of life is a heavy one. I am sure you will agree that it should not be encouraged if there is any feasible alternative.

An even more important reason why we have placed so much emphasis on immediate relocation is the nation-wide manpower shortage. We realized from the beginning that the evacuated people represent a significant reservoir of energies and skills which is badly needed in our war production effort. At the start, we made rather elaborate plans for a work program at each relocation center. We had plans for manufacturing enterprises through which citizen evacuees could produce goods needed in the war effort; plans

for extensive development of raw land through clearing, irrigation, drainage; and plans for large-scale agricultural production. But before we had received more than half the evacuee population at the centers, we were forced to recognize that this was a cumbersome method of utilizing evacuee energies and skills and that it was fraught with many difficulties. Everything considered, it seemed quite clear that the evacuees could make a quicker and more effective contribution to our wartime production needs by returning as quickly as possible to private employment. Furthermore, there was an insistent demand for workers from the centers particularly from this part of the United States.

But aside from these wholly practical considerations, there is another even more significant reason for trying to depopulate the relocation centers. I am thinking of Americanization. There are many ways to define Americanism but I have always felt that it is a quality which we absorb quite naturally by living in a thoroughly American environment. It is as President Roosevelt has stated, "a matter of the mind and heart; Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry." We have made every effort to create an Americanizing atmosphere in the relocation centers. We have established the curriculum for our schools with particularly heavy emphasis on the history of American traditions and American institutions. We have taught these subjects in adult education classes and have stressed them in connection with public discussion forums. But despite all our efforts, I am afraid we never can succeed---in duplicating the atmosphere that prevails in a normal American community. The influences that operate every day and every week to make us a distinctive people on the face of the globe cannot be reproduced within an atmosphere of restriction---an atmosphere which makes a mockery of our American traditions. Relocation centers are and probably always will be essentially outside the mainstream of our national life.

It is our hope that the people eligible for leave in the relocation centers may be relocated into ordinary American communities at the earliest possible date. Almost 20,000 have now left the centers on indefinite leave and have made homes for themselves. Most of these are the young adults with few family responsibilities, who can easily adapt themselves to new conditions. Our big problem now is to make possible the relocation of family groups, including the eligible aliens, most of whom are well along in years, without as much resiliency as their children who have relocated. We recognize their relocation as the most difficult job we have yet undertaken. Yet we feel it is a job that must be accomplished if the American way of life is to have real meaning to these people.

Many of you in this area have become acquainted with evacuees who have left the relocation centers. Some two thousand have established their homes in the state of Utah, and several thousand others have cultivated and harvested Utah's sugar beets, vegetables, and picked Utah turkeys on a seasonal leave basis. In general, they have been accepted without question; their labor has been in demand and they have worked well.

There has been some discrimination yes, particularly in opposition to their entering business or farming on their own, even though they are welcomed with open arms as ordinary labor by most of these sources.

That smacks of a desire for slave labor---Those who advocate such a system, who welcome evacuee labor but would deny them the privilege of entering business or forgetting the principals of free enterprise, of free competition, which are fundamental to our democracy.

But this opposition is also a part of our democracy and is entitled to its full say. Only when all phases are thoroughly understood through free discussion can a fair decision be reached.

I want to congratulate the people of Utah generally however, for their acceptance of these war refugees. It is all the more remarkable because you adjoin the evacuated area in which certain interests have seen fit to continue their persecution of this minority group.

It seems to me that one reason for the generally favorable reception accorded evacuees in the state of Utah is that many of you here are only two or three generations removed from the early settlers of the state, and you remember that they too were a minority group; they felt the sting of intolerance and persecution; they participated in a mass migration which was not altogether of their own choosing. Remembering the history of your own forbearers, it has been a natural thing for you to provide the members of another minority group with opportunities to make new lives for themselves. In so doing, you have given significance to the democratic principles set forth in the constitution; principles which some special interest groups are seeking to destroy, disguising their activities under the name of patriotism.

The problem of this fractional segment of the nation's population is national in scope, and no one section of the country can shirk its responsibilities for finding a democratic solution. The people in the relocation centers came from the Pacific Coast states. For the time being, they must live outside the area which they used to call home. Many of them undoubtedly will remain outside, either in the places where they resettle first, or in other places which look more attractive.

In a country as large, as rich in resources and opportunities, and as populous as the United States, there is no logical reason why the 115,000 people who were evacuated from their homes in the Pacific Coast area cannot be absorbed into the national life in such a way that their abilities may be used and that the people become inconspicuous individuals rather than members of a problem group. It would seem to be in the national interest and in the interest of the people of Japanese descent themselves to spread out more widely than they have done in the past, and to avoid the re-establishment of the compact communities which were common in the Pacific Coast area before evacuation.

Most of the people still look upon the West Coast as home. Most of them hope and expect to return home when the military situation becomes such that exclusion is no longer necessary. When that time comes, either during the war or at its end, there can be no question that the evacuated people should have the right to go back to their former homes if they choose to do so.

I mention this because there are groups on the West Coast who have been campaigning for months to stir up sentiment to keep the evacuees permanently excluded from their former homes. The plague of intolerance

which they have fostered has spread into other areas; well organized efforts undoubtedly will be made to spread it still further. The efforts will be carefully disguised in the cloak of patriotism. What proportion of the people will be affected by this campaign of hate propoganda I won't attempt to predict. I find it hard to believe that the American people will tolerate for very long the fostering of hatred for fellow Americans and the destruction of American ideals when their sons are giving their lives to protect those ideals.

I think it is important for all of us to remember that several thousand boys wearing the uniform of the United States Army have Japanese names and faces. As one of them put it, "It isn't the slant of a man's eyes that counts; the important thing is the slant of his heart."

There can be little question about the slant of the heart of Sergeant Komoto, who recently visited his family at one of the relocation centers in Arizona. He was on leave from an Army hospital recovering from wounds inflicted by an enemy machine gun. He wears the Purple Heart, America's oldest military award. The Miyagi family at the Gila River relocation center wrapped their Christmas packages early last fall for their son and brother. The packages had a long way to go. In February they came back, bearing the stamped word "Deceased." Masuyoshi Miyagi had died in Italy where he was a sergeant in the Fifth Army.

For more than a year after the outbreak of war, American boys of Japanese descent were not accepted in the United States Army. In January, 1943, the Army announced that they would be accepted on a voluntary basis, and hundreds of them volunteered from the Relocation Centers. A few weeks ago involuntary induction through Selective Service was announced by the War Department and already several hundred young Americans whose homes are in the relocation centers have taken their physical examinations and will be inducted as their turn comes. The nation is asking them to fight. So it isn't out of order to ask "Have we given them something to fight for?" Is the foremost democracy of the world going to ask them to fight for the privilege of being discriminated against in such things as selecting a place to live or a line of work to follow? I cannot believe such a situation will exist for very long. It is going to be difficult to justify denying the wives, children and parents of one group of soldiers the rights which are accorded the wives, children and parents of all other soldiers.

We need to keep in mind that any such restoration of rights will be opposed, for the American principles of freedom and equality have enemies at home, just as certainly as they have enemies abroad. Those enemies need to be recognized, met, and conquered.

I firmly believe that to the great majority of Americans, this nation is truly the land of the free and that most of us are willing to make a sincere effort to keep it so regardless of race, creed or ancestry.

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