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THE JAPANESE MINORITY IN COLORADO
FOLLOWING EVACUATION

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The attitudes and reactions of people in Colorado toward "Japs" and Japanese Americans since Pearl Harbor can only be understood in terms of the historical setting.

There were only 48 Japanese in Colorado in 1900.¹ Shortly thereafter they began to settle in numbers in the Arkansas River Valley, in Denver, and north of Denver in Weld County. These early workers in rural areas began to move up the agricultural ladder. They established themselves usually in compact communities and, it is reported, sometimes became a majority in community life.²

The entrance of these people into communities did not go unnoticed during the first World War. In the minds of some local people mystery and secrecy clothed their arrival. People reported that they never saw them come; they believed they entered the community at night. Individuals reported that it was hard to keep an account of them because "they all look alike." Farmers said that "you never really knew whom you rented your land to because you couldn't tell them apart and like as not one person would rent it for a friend who would operate it, but the farmer could never tell the difference until midseason because they helped each other so much you never knew who was on your farm."³

There developed in the Arkansas River Valley and elsewhere during the period of the first World War a serious concern over the survival of churches, schools, and other institutions when the Japanese moved in.⁴

In only one instance were Japanese encouraged to come into Colorado. In the San Luis Valley in 1924 and 1925 a move was promoted by a group of men interested in selling or renting certain tracts of land to the Japanese as a means of developing gardening and extensive cultivation of land, and of increasing the railroad business.⁵ However, no significantly large number of Japanese moved into the area.

The number of Japanese and Japanese Americans in Colorado by decades, distributed by leading counties is shown in the table on page 260.

Compared with the number of foreign born from other countries, the number of Japanese aliens in 1940 was relatively small—only 865 in contrast to 49,122 foreign born from twelve countries in Europe. The increase of Japanese in the state was slowed down from the time of the first World

¹ Fourteenth Census of the U. S., 1920, Vol. III, page 139.

² Interview with W. F. Droge, former Agricultural Agent, Otero County, June 1, 1944.

³ *Idem.*

⁴ *Idem.*

⁵ Interview with A. J. Hamman, State Supervisor, Emergency Farm Labor Program, Colorado, May 13, 1944.

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County			1920		1930		1940	
	No.* Japa- nese	% of county pop.	No.† Japa- nese	% of county pop.	No.‡ Japa- nese	% of county pop.	No.‡ Japa- nese	% of county pop.
Adams	20	.2	263	1.8	437	2.2	336	1.5
Bent	27	.5	104	1.0	163	1.8	79	.8
Boulder	45	.1	63	.2	133	.4	82	.2
Costilla	—	—	—	—	171	3.0	174	2.3
Denver	585	.3	465	.2	349	.1	323	.1
Otero	100	.5	232	1.0	332	1.4	242	1.0
Pueblo	170	.3	103	.2	91	.1	103	.2
Weld	326	.8	726	1.3	712	1.1	660	1.0
Others	1,027	—	508	—	825	—	725	—
STATE	2,300	.3	2,464	.3	3,213	.3	2,734	.2

* Thirteenth Census of the U. S., 1910, Vol. II, page 215.

† Fourteenth Census of the U. S., 1920, Vol. III, page 139.

‡ Sixteenth Census of the U. S., 1940: Population Second Series, Colorado, page 61.

War to the late 30's by the net migration of Japanese people to California.

Before Pearl Harbor people of Japanese ancestry were generally accepted in community life in Colorado. They could without much question buy land, achieve agricultural status and community respect, establish business enterprises, send their children to school, and sit where they wanted to in a picture show, or join a Christian church of their choice.

After the President's Executive Order of February 19, 1942, authorizing the military commander to prescribe certain areas from which any or all persons might be excluded, Governor Carr through a public proclamation opened the portals of Colorado to voluntary Japanese evacuees.⁶ This aroused public sentiment.

Governor Carr's attitude was responsible for many Japanese Americans voluntarily coming to Colorado, even though the Governor insisted his declaration was not to be construed as an invitation to aliens.⁷ The net voluntary movement of Japanese to Colorado from the Western Defense Command Area from March 12 to October 31, 1942, according to the official records totaled 1,963.⁸ As of April 30, 1944, indefinite leaves had been granted to 2,017 evacuees from relocation centers to take up residence in Colorado.⁹ A minimum of approximately 600 others released from the centers had entered Colorado as secondary migrants.¹⁰ At various times during this period some hundreds of evacuees were temporarily in the state as

⁶ *The Denver Post*, March 1, 1942.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ U. S. War Department. *Final Report On Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast, 1942*. U. S. Gov't Printing Office, 1943.

⁹ War Relocation Authority. *Indefinite Leaves—Departures by Center, State of Destination*. Monthly Report No. 46 (mimeographed).

¹⁰ War Relocation Authority. *Indefinite Leaves by Area*. Semimonthly Report No. 25 (mimeographed).

seasonal agricultural laborers. The present size of the minority, including resettlers and survivors of the basic 1940 population, is probably not much in excess of 8,000 persons, or about 0.7 percent of the 1940 population of Colorado.

Some who oppose further settlement of Japanese Americans in Colorado base their concern upon the relative potential concentration in the state. At the time of Pearl Harbor the Japanese were 1 to 410 of the total population in Colorado; in California they were 1 to 73. If the rate of settlement to date continues, the concentration in Colorado will be 1 to 60 by the time the present population of camps is exhausted.¹¹

Other than farmers' requesting Japanese evacuees for agricultural labor during the summer of 1942 and 1943, little notice was given to Japanese Americans in Colorado until February 1944. Then the issue flared into the open following the publication of the Japanese atrocity stories. Governor Vivian was requested to call a second extraordinary session of the Colorado General Assembly to consider drafting for inclusion on the November ballot a constitutional amendment to prohibit ownership of land in Colorado by alien Japanese.¹²

Both proponents and opponents of the amendment professed to be rational. The caution with which the majority of people in Colorado felt that the matter should be handled is expressed in the following editorial.

If the governor and the Assembly and the people in turn believe that Colorado would be better off with a constitutional amendment prohibiting land ownership by Japanese aliens, let's have it.

But this basic departure from our traditional way of life in Colorado should be considered strictly on the facts. This is no time for loose and extravagant statements, no time for rabble-rousing. Japanese aliens in Colorado represent less than one-fifth of one percent of the total population.¹³

Those who opposed the measure generally felt that the facts substantiating it were grossly exaggerated and that passing it would be playing into the hands of Japanese propagandists and would endanger the lives of American prisoners in Japanese hands.¹⁴

The Attorney General of Colorado favored the proposed legislation and suggested that since the bill was similar to California's it was defensible in the Supreme Court.¹⁵ There was no unanimity of opinion among legislators on this matter, however. Neither was there agreement as to the kinds of property the proposed bill would prevent aliens from owning.

Governor Vivian received a barrage of telegrams from citizens in the irrigated farming districts in Colorado urging him to take prompt action on the amendment.¹⁶ Some members of the Assembly had stated, "within

¹¹ Personal correspondence of the author with Donald M. Leshner, Colorado House of Representatives, Denver, June 15, 1944.

¹² *Rocky Mountain News*, Feb. 2, 1944.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

recent weeks 3,000 Japanese aliens have bought land in Adams County alone."¹⁷ Investigation of these charges showed that actually only 23 Japanese or Japanese Americans had bought land in Adams County in the preceding two years.¹⁸ It was further pointed out that aliens constituted only a small part of the total Japanese population, and that most of the alien settlers were elderly people, largely women.

Sharp debates arose during legislative hearings not only between legislators, but also between citizens who were called to testify. Dean Paul Roberts, St. John's Episcopal Cathedral, Denver, warned of "oppression of minorities as something that can start out small and grow out of control—not a danger in itself now, perhaps, but an evil which may get out of all bounds."¹⁹ Dean Roberts also pointed out that Japanese Americans have a larger proportion of men in the armed services than any other minority group in the country.²⁰

On the other side, Dr. J. W. Wells, Mayor of Brighton, said:

We have built a little town we are proud of, and it was built by Brighton people—with Americans, American ideas and American ingenuity. Now we are being overrun with Japanese who, with plenty of money, are buying our farm-lands, businesses and residences in increasing numbers. Some are American-born, yes; but they have parents who still pay homage to the emperor of Japan.²¹

The people who committed the atrocities to Americans on Bataan are not the same as those buying our land, but they are tied by blood and upbringing. What will our soldiers think when they come back and find Japanese owning our farms and business establishments?²²

Testifying at the hearings, one Japanese American soldier, introducing himself as an American citizen by birth and an American Soldier by choice, said that tens of thousands of soldiers are dying for democracy, "not because they are white, or black, or yellow, but because they feel democracy is worth dying for."²³ He continued, "Our training for the battlefield kept us on maneuvers for 48 hours with our only food a piece of bread. That bread was heaven sent. Your democracy is too—don't tamper with it."

The State House of Representatives by a vote of 48 to 15 passed a resolution to place on the ballot a proposed constitutional amendment giving the legislature the right to pass laws to prevent Japanese aliens and others ineligible to citizenship, as well, from owning property in Colorado.²⁴ The Senate rejected the bill by a vote of 15 to 12.²⁵

Reactions in the state to the defeat of the resolution were varied. Some opponents of the bill said that the vote in the House of Representatives was not a reflection of public opinion because "the bill soon became a politi-

¹⁷ *Rocky Mountain News*, Feb. 3, 1944.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *The Denver Post*, Feb. 6, 1944.

²⁰ *Rocky Mountain News*, Feb. 6, 1944.

²¹ *The Denver Post*, Feb. 6, 1944.

²² *Rocky Mountain News*, Feb. 6, 1944.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *The Denver Post*, Feb. 8, 1944; correspondence with Donald M. Leshner, June 15, 1944.

²⁵ *The Denver Post*, Feb. 9, 1944.

cal issue."²⁶ A clue to public opinion in the state is given in the script of "Colorado Speaks," a weekly radio program over station KLZ. This program is based upon a purported cross-section of public opinion as expressed in editorials of various weekly and daily newspapers. Of thirteen editorials quoted on this program from February 5 to February 19, six approved the action of the legislature in refusing to place the measure before the electorate next fall and seven condemned it for doing so.

Although the measure was defeated in the Assembly, a short time later a petition was circulated to put the issue before the electorate in the November election. A Citizens' Emergency Committee, including many ministers and educators, was formed to oppose the petition. However, the required 26,900 signatures were obtained in a very short time. Later a group of citizens incorporated the American League of Colorado, with Dr. J. W. Wells as president, to conduct the campaign for passage of the proposed amendment this fall.²⁷

This brief survey suggests certain basic issues around which the whole problem of Japanese and Japanese Americans in Colorado has developed. They may be classified roughly, for purposes of analysis, into four general areas: 1) economic, 2) political, 3) cultural and racial, and 4) civil liberties. Each of these fields is clouded and confused with myths, legends, and stereotypes profusely mingled with fact, accentuated by journalistic hysteria. In all it is very difficult to separate them.²⁸

In the economic realm the Japanese Americans in Colorado as elsewhere have been very thrifty and frugal. The imagined standard of living of the Japanese, although in most cases probably equal to that of the average Caucasian, is looked upon by many of the latter group as a threat to their own standards. The Japanese people in Colorado have been efficient competitors in producing and marketing agricultural products.

Today in Colorado there is not one community to the writer's knowledge which would welcome a Japanese American family. Many communities have taken positive steps to prevent Americans of Japanese ancestry from acquiring property or even becoming tenants.²⁹ Inability to obtain a license to operate stores excludes Japanese Americans from favorable business sections of some cities and towns in Colorado. Threatened boycotts against real estate operators, public opinion, and zoning ordinances prevent them from buying residential property in some sections of larger cities.³⁰

Occupationally there is little opportunity for the Japanese American in Colorado outside of agricultural labor, household work for girls in large cities, and unskilled work in some few industrial concerns.³¹

²⁶ Interview with Arthur A. Brooks, House of Representatives, Denver, May 26, 1944.

²⁷ *The Denver Post*, June 5, 1944.

²⁸ Correspondence with Joe Masaoka, Regional Director, Japanese American Citizens' League, Denver.

²⁹ Interview with D. L. Joehnck, District Farm Labor Supervisor, Rocky Ford.

³⁰ Interview with Arthur A. Brooks, May 26, 1944.

³¹ Reported by Placement Bureau, Denver Public Schools.

Some of the material presented earlier suggested that the Japanese issue had become a political football. Some opponents of the alien land law said those favoring it were merely seeking an opportunity to enhance themselves politically. Governor Carr's stand on the Japanese did not become an open political issue during his campaign for senator, but his successful opponent was outspoken in criticizing Carr's method of handling the Japanese problem. Governor Carr himself admitted in a speech in Portland that he realized at the time that his stand on the Japanese issue would end him politically.³²

The whole field of cultural and racial conflicts was brought to the foreground in numerous ways. The quotation by Mayor Wells above suggests an opinion that is held by many people, namely, that Japanese are "Japs" whether born and reared in this country or any other.

The following shows the feeling of a Japanese American toward the evacuees.

A group whose position because of the war was made precarious naturally looked with asakance and even resentment toward the influx of newcomers with their identical physical characteristics. They felt that the larger numbers would be looked upon with suspicion and that consequently their own assailable position in the community would be endangered.³³

Various techniques have been used to deprive the Japanese Americans of their civil liberties, such as economic, professional, and other activities mentioned earlier. In addition to the author's experience, reports have come to him that some communities have attempted to restrict the section of picture shows in which they can sit. Others make them unwelcome at certain church services.³⁴

This paper would not be complete without mention of the reaction of the Japanese Americans to the problem. Joe Masaoka, Regional Director, Japanese American Citizens' League, Denver, expresses these opinions:

Most of them [Japanese Americans] feel that their forced evacuation from California was due less to "military necessity" than to journalistic, political, and articulate pressures. Certainly the result accomplished was the culmination of decades-long agitation by organized groups such as the California Joint Immigration Committee and Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West. The opportunity which brought this to fruition was the Pearl Harbor misinformation, and allegations of sabotage and espionage by the Japanese populace. Most believe that the real background of evacuation was economic and political opportunism.

More than anything else American citizens of Japanese extraction keenly resent the popular tendency to place their citizenship status subordinate to that of Italian and German "enemy aliens."

Most still feel that while the loss of property and financial stakes on the west coast was stupendous the greater indignity was their being demoted to a status of second-class citizenship. Certainly the psychological impact upon our Japanese Americans has been unprecedented.³⁵

Many Japanese Americans also look upon their segregation in the armed forces as serious.

³² *The Denver Post*, Sept. 3, 1943.

³³ Correspondence with Joe Masaoka, June 9, 1944.

³⁴ Interview with Arthur A. Brooks, May 29, 1944.

³⁵ Correspondence with Joe Masaoka, June 15, 1944.

The Japanese American Citizens' League has adopted a positive program of loyalty to this country and devotion to the war effort. They have confidence in American democracy and in the American people, and feel that all Americans try sincerely to be fair, honest, and decent. In spite of certain current undesirable situations, they feel that constructive participation of Japanese Americans in American life will be the means of their becoming a part of the great American melting pot rather than being considered as counterparts of the "Jap" militarists against whom all of us are fighting.

Ask them if they have American friends and their answer is "Yes" with the following qualifying remarks. "Out of every one hundred people in the United States, five percent are opposed to us and they express themselves; five percent are openly for us—they express themselves. The ninety percent don't pay very much attention to us. It is our job to behave in such a way that we can command the respect and gain the attention of the ninety percent."²⁶

In terms of democratic ideals which the average Coloradoan professes, the handling of the Japanese problem in the state is a challenge for objective study and rational behavior. There are few black marks chalked up against persons of Japanese descent in Colorado; few if any have been on relief; their names have not blotted police records; their children have been good scholars; they are generally cooperative in the war effort. Our challenge today is to develop patterns of community integration whereby Japanese Americans with the same ideals as the Caucasian American can become integrated into community life where each can say "We belong to a nation with liberty and justice for all."

²⁶ Interview with Joe Masaoka, May 29, 1944.