

The 'Quiet Minority'

Tokyo-U.S. Differences Stir Fear and Militancy In Japanese-Americans

Cohesion, Pride and Top Jobs Are Aims as Many Declare Assimilation to Be Failure

'The Perfect Yellow WASP'

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MANZANAR, Calif.—A biting morning wind whips through the sagebrush and mesquite, blowing up billows of sand that momentarily blur the peaks enclosing this desolate valley. Not a soul is in sight, but there are ghosts everywhere.

Here and there, rising from the sand, are relics: decaying barracks floors, a guardhouse, a cemetery near an old garbage dump. They are the remains of a different Manzanar, one of 10 internment camps that 30 years ago held 110,000 Japanese-Americans who, it was feared, might otherwise conduct crippling sabotage in the U.S. and help Japan win World War II.

Beginning in the spring of 1942, federal authorities rounded up almost every Japanese-American on the West Coast, from old women to little children, and penned them into places like Manzanar where they lived surrounded by barbed wire, guards and the suspicions of their fellow Americans. Though many were allowed to leave the camps over the next couple of years and relocate outside the West Coast (some entered the U.S. armed forces), a number died in the camps, and others were incarcerated until 1945.

When they were imprisoned they were ordered to leave almost everything behind. Some sold their homes and businesses at heavy discounts or losses. Others finally returned to find their property stolen or in ruins or destroyed by vandals. In 1947 the Federal Reserve Board estimated their losses at \$400 million. The government paid \$38.5 million in property claims.

The Winds of Change

Few Japanese-Americans today believe that the degradation of Manzanar will again be visited on their people. But this camp, in the Owens Valley about 250 miles northeast of Los Angeles, stands as a stark reminder that white America's attitude toward citizens of Japanese extraction blows hot and cold with changes in relations between Japan and the U.S. With a definite chill between the two nations now, mainly because of economic matters, hostility is beginning to come to the surface again—and with it, fear. Some examples:

—In Phoenix, Star Chevrolet warns the public in ads: "Remember Pearl Harbor, when they tried to take your country from you. They are back with cheap imports to take your jobs, pensions and social security."

—During a strike at the Fontana, Calif., plant of Kaiser Steel Corp., workers on the picket line cry, "Jap steel! Jap steel!" and curse the supervisors who drive through in Datsuns and Toyotas. They say nothing to men driving Volkswagens.

—A South Carolina Congressman, Rep. James R. Mann, a Democrat whose constituents include many unemployed textile workers, inserts a song called "The Import Blues" into the Congressional Record. One verse: "Buying Jap-made products so sleazy to see/Is a damn fool thing for you and me/And I'm fighting back because I won't run/From the slant-eyed people of the Risin' Sun."

—The American Immigration Committee of Decatur, Ga., a small right-wing group, publishes a "population report" calling for an end to immigration of "aggressive Japanese" who, the committee warns, might wind up controlling the federal government.

—The Seattle firefighters' union magazine suggests, in an article intended to be humorous, that the lowering of the height requirement to 5-feet-6-inches means that rice and chopsticks will have to be delivered to all fire stations.

Cause for Alarm

The 600,000 Japanese-Americans aren't laughing. They know what even trivial insults can portend: being stuck in the middle between Japan and the U.S. And for those Japanese-Americans who might have thought that the old grudges have been forgotten by whites, there are disturbing indications to the contrary.

For example, in 1967, when relations between the two nations were better than they are now, researchers at the University of California at Los Angeles published a poll showing that 48% of Californians approved the incarceration of Japanese-Americans in camps during the war. According to researchers who supervised the study, the poll showed a strong relation between the image Californians have of Japan and acceptance of Japanese-Americans.

Faced with such attitudes, the historically passive "quiet minority" is beginning to grow restless—particularly the *sansei*, or third-generation citizen, and the more militant members of the *nisei*, or second generation.

Their militancy is a far cry from the confrontation tactics and near guerrilla warfare that have sometimes marked the black drive for civil rights. It nevertheless represents a major step for Japanese-Americans, who have not heretofore believed in rocking the boat or drawing public attention to themselves or challenging authority lest they endanger their drive to assimilate with American whites.

Policy Under Fire

By avoiding confrontation tactics and following a policy of assimilation rather than separatism, Japanese-Americans have become far more prosperous and better-educated than blacks or Mexican-Americans. But the prosperity came in the years soon after World War II when Japan wasn't a threat to the U.S. and the two countries got along well. Today many Japanese-Americans feel ignored by America. All the barriers are not yet down, they say, and they are beginning to feel that white Americans aren't particularly concerned about it.

So the policy of assimilation is being seriously questioned for the first time by many Japanese-Americans who believe that it hasn't worked. Instead they want to promote more cohesion and racial pride, challenging authority when they think authority is taking advantage of them, and joining with other Asian minorities as well as blacks and Chicanos in fighting discrimination.

In the San Francisco Bay area, with a large population of Japanese-Americans and many militants, young protesters have picketed S. I. Hayakawa, the president of California State University, San Francisco, who is a steadfast believer in assimilation, calling him a "banana"—yellow on the outside, white inside—the equivalent of the blacks' epithet "Oreo."

Japanese-Americans in San Francisco have also allied themselves with Chinese-Americans, Filipinos, Samoans and other Asian minorities to form an Asian-American Political Caucus that seeks representation on the city's school board and city council. They have even protested the visit of Japanese warships to the city, asserting that their presence would only be harmful to Japanese-Americans.

Elsewhere, other changes are occurring. At least one Japanese-American underground paper has been formed, there are two other Asian-American papers, and Los Angeles now has an Asian-American bookstore. Many California colleges have Asian-American student centers and courses in Asian-American studies.

California has about 215,000 Japanese-Americans, second only to Hawaii. Hawaii has about 225,000. They constitute 40% of Hawaii's population, and discrimination isn't much of a problem there. Other states with sizable Japanese populations are New York and Washington, with 20,000 each; Illinois, 17,000; Oregon, 6,800, and Texas, 6,500.

The growing solidarity of Japanese-Americans, and their increased willingness to become more visible as a minority, were evident in the case of Dr. Thomas T. Noguchi, the flamboyant Japanese-American coroner of Los Angeles County. In 1969 his superiors discharged Dr. Noguchi on the ground that he wasn't doing his job properly.

Dr. Noguchi fought back with the help of JUST (Japanese United in Search for Truth), a group that thought the firing may have been racially inspired. The group collected over 10,000 signatures protesting his dismissal and raised money for a court challenge. The coroner was subsequently reinstated and is still on the job.

Militants concede it is difficult to get Japanese-Americans to take a more active role because of the notion of *shikatanai* (translated loosely as "it can't be helped"), which reflects a fatalism and belief in accommodation that arrived here with the first immigrants from Japan and which continues today with many of their descendants.

Impact of Affluence

In addition, the material affluence that many Japanese-Americans have experienced in recent years may have made them less interested in pushing for social equity.

George Omi, a landscape architect in Sausalito, Calif., is perhaps typical of those Japanese-Americans who appear to have "made it" in white America. Mr. Omi says he "detached" himself from San Francisco's Japanese-American community seven years ago because he wanted a better future for himself and his family in the suburbs. Though he spent 2½ years in an internment camp, he says that he isn't bitter about it and that he wants nothing more than to be a respected and accepted citizen in his home community. That is still the goal of many—to blend into the white world.

But for others, that isn't enough. William Marumoto, a White House special assistant, says there is need to escape "the complacency of affluence." He adds, "A lot of us are out there in the suburbs now, with two-car garages, color TV, electric hibachis, the whole image of making it in America. Everything is okay now, and all we have to worry about is our kids smoking pot, the mortgage on our crabgrass, and how the Rams will do next fall. We have become the epitome of westernization. We have become the perfect yellow WASP."

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Mr. Marumoto adds, however, that despite this material success, anti-Japanese feelings can sprout up again. "The root of the trouble, prejudice based on race, most certainly still exists," he says.

He ticks off some figures showing that, outside Hawaii, Japanese-Americans are almost invisible in power positions: Of some 1,600 mainland colleges and universities, only one has a Japanese-American president (Mr. Hayakawa, a famous semanticist); although there are 20,000 school districts on the mainland, Mr. Marumoto says he knows of no Japanese-American superintendent of schools; and there are, according to Mr. Marumoto, only about 20 Orientals—the number of Japanese-Americans among these 20 isn't available—among the 5,500 civil service employees in "supergrade," or top federal positions.

"Technological Coolies"

Others besides Mr. Marumoto complain that Japanese-Americans, though skilled and decently paid, are denied access to high positions. "We are no longer laboring in the fields," says Raymond Okamura, a chemist with the California Department of Public Health, "but we are now nothing more than technological coolies who are systematically denied management positions in most white enterprises."

Many Japanese-Americans complain that even Japanese companies setting up U.S. subsidiaries hire almost no Japanese-Americans for responsible posts, preferring to employ native Japanese or "real" Americans as show-window types better suited to dealing with Americans.

In their personal lives, too, Japanese-Americans are constantly given the impression that what Lt. Gen. John L. DeWitt said 30 years ago is an accurate statement of the feelings of much of white America today. Gen. DeWitt, who was in charge of the wartime internment of Japanese-Americans, said: "A Jap's a Jap . . . it makes no difference whether he is an American."

Japanese-Americans whose families have been here for generations say they are still treated as Japanese. "No matter how good my English is, or how stylishly I'm dressed, I am still viewed as a foreigner by most white Americans," says Paul Takagi, a Sacramento-born sociology professor at the University of California at Berkeley.

Prof. Takagi, like many Japanese-Americans, fears that discrimination will mount as more and more blame is heaped on Japan for U.S. economic problems. "In the 1930s we had a similar situation," he says. "It started with bad-mouthing of the Japanese and then the hostility was turned on us. And I'm afraid it's happening again."

Warren Furutani, a fourth generation Japanese-American from Los Angeles who has been an active supporter of many social causes, says: "As soon as I get on the picket line, whites shout at me, 'Why don't you go back to where you came from!' The minute we start to rock the boat, we are no longer accepted."

Japanese-American groups also complain

that their requests for state and federal aid for the needy in their communities are regularly turned down. One frustrated fund-raiser says: "The impression seems to be that we have all made it materially and that there aren't problems like poverty, juvenile delinquency and drug abuse."

Indeed, "the last 25 years have been pretty good ones for Japanese-Americans," says Jeffrey Y. Matsui of Los Angeles, former associate director of the Japanese-American Citizens League, a national organization with 25,000 members that is active in fighting discrimination. "But lately," Mr. Matsui adds, "we've been sounding warnings that the honeymoon may be over and that tougher times are coming."

There are ample lessons in history. The first Japanese in the U.S. came to the West Coast in 1869 but were pretty much left alone until after 1890. By then, they were present in large numbers and many had moved out of the laboring class to compete in business with white entrepreneurs. Under pressure from exclusionists, the U.S. got Japan to agree in 1908 to a so-called "Gentlemen's Agreement" limiting the influx of Japanese laborers to the U.S. In 1913, California prohibited Japanese from owning land or from leasing it for more than three years.

Anti-Japanese feeling largely evaporated between then and 1920, after Japan entered World War I on the side of the Allies. But then the steady growth of Japanese military and industrial power over the next 20 years led to growing hostility toward Japanese-Americans; they were viewed as part of "The Yellow Peril."

In 1924, under heavy pressure from California, Congress excluded Japanese from entering this country. Exclusion was repealed in 1952.

Relations Today

Today, many Japanese-Americans believe relations between Japan and the U.S. are worse than at any other time in the last 25 years. And many white Americans believe that the aggressive trade policy and economic strength of modern Japan pose a real danger to their own well-being. Hence such reactions as the shouts at the Fontana picket line and the South Carolina Congressman's attack on Japanese imports.

Many Americans have become increasingly concerned about Japan's growing trade surplus with the U.S. The surplus was in the U.S.'s favor until the mid-1960s, and as recently as 1968 the surplus in favor of Japan was only \$1.1 billion. Last year it was \$3.2 billion, and this year some experts predict it may reach \$4 billion.

In addition, many Americans resent the rigid quotas that Japan has on many items that U.S. businessmen would like to export to Japan, including many agricultural products such as beef and oranges, and computers and many computer components.

The extent to which such resentment of Japanese economic power and policies turns into resentment of Japanese-Americans may be indicated by the response to a photographic exhibit that deals sympathetically with the Japanese-Americans who were interned in the World War II camps. The exhibit has prompted a number of hate calls and letters in several California cities where it has been shown. And Robert Abernathy, a newsman for KNBC-TV in Los Angeles, is still stunned by the violent viewer reaction to a brief item reviewing the exhibit.

"In the first 10 minutes after the segment went on the air, we got 55 calls cursing us for implying that the round-up of Japanese-Americans had been a mistake," he says. "The callers didn't see any difference between Japanese soldiers in the Western Pacific and Japanese Americans here." Mr. Abernathy adds:

"They thought internment was better than they deserved, then or now."