

The Problem People

By Jim Marshall

In a dozen new communities in the West, 100,000 Japanese and Japanese-Americans wait out the war and, unwillingly, promote some heavy thinking among their new neighbors



Manzanar was formerly an abandoned apple and pear orchard. Now Japanese-Americans labor to bring back the fields with irrigation, as the melting snows of the Sierra Nevada flow in man-built channels across acres of cropland

IN THE past few months a dozen new war-born communities have risen almost magically in the open spaces of the Far West. They range from hamlets of a few hundred people to cities of 10,000 and more. Altogether, their population is about 115,000—but only a few hundred of these are whites. The others are Japanese and Americans of Japanese ancestry. Although peopled and largely operated by members of an Asian race, these communities are as American as San Francisco or Topeka.



Nisei gather around the bulletin board for information. Manzanar, a community of 10,000, also has its own newspaper, the Free Press



Manzanar, located in the Mojave Desert, California, is a typical Japanese community. Here the inhabitants line up for chow at one of the cafeterias

The Problem People



Nisei girls in one of the Manzanar apartments. The women went to great effort to make their homes as attractive as possible



Opportunity is here for anyone who wants to work. This young surveyor is a nisei—second-generation Japanese—with a college degree

They hold elections, go to the movies, have traffic problems, read newspapers, stage fund drives and proceed with life much as any other town. Some of them even have war industries.

These new communities are the result of an Army order excluding all Japanese and their American descendants from a coastal zone that takes in the western halves of Washington, Oregon and California, and the southern half of Arizona. The Army incidentally could order you or us or the ninth-generation scion of a Mayflower family out of the zone. The Army has power over everyone in the zone; it could tomorrow order out all Italians and Germans and their descendants, in the interest of national security.

After the order was issued, the Army could have moved more than a hundred thousand men, women and kids of Japanese blood out of the zone overnight. It was prepared to do it, if necessary. Instead, it took nearly two months, doing

The Problem People

the job patiently and fairly, saving the evacuees what heartbreak it could, restraining crooks who tried to take advantage of the situation by offering ridiculous prices for Japanese property.

The Army insisted on fairness and justice; its leaders, from Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt down, realized that thousands of the migrants were loyal Americans, victims of a war situation for which they were not responsible. It asked for—and got—the co-operation of the Japanese in moving themselves wholesale to new environments. You may speculate, if you like, just how you would have fared in Japan last winter and this spring.

In just about twenty-eight days, Army engineers built shelters for 100,000 persons—together with community kitchens, hospitals, laundries, bath-houses and offices. Then it moved the 100,000 almost without incident, using only a handful of officers and men, without interfering with the war effort at all. In less than two months, the Western war zone was practically clear of Japanese, except for those in assembly and relocation centers.

Along with the dozen new communities, a dozen new problems are asking a solution. The problems really boil down to one: After the war, what is going to happen to these new cities and farm groups—*islands of Asia in white America?*

Maybe there's an answer to this; maybe there isn't. First, let's go look at a new Japanese-American city in the West; then let's go talk to the old settlers near by and find out what they think of it all. We may as well start at Manzanar in California.

Manzanar means apple grove, and a few weeks ago that's what it was—an abandoned pear and apple orchard, victim of a long and bitter war over water rights, between the Owens Valley ranchers and the city of Los Angeles. It belongs to Los Angeles, like thousands of acres in the valley. The city leased a strip, about seven miles long and from half a mile to a mile wide, to the government for taxes. On these 6,020 acres, the new city of Manzanar sprang up: long orderly rows of wooden buildings—apartments, mess hall, washrooms, offices.

You roll along U. S. Highway 6 toward Manzanar, with the white peaks of the Sierra Nevada and Mount Whitney to the westward; to the east are the gray and purple flanks of the Coso and Panamint ranges, and beyond them, Death Valley. North of Lone Pine, a dust cloud drifts on the desert gale as the tractors drag plows across the desert soil. Put water on this soil and the land turns green and lush. Today the melting snows of the high Sierras are flowing across Manzanar's acres, and busy

The Problem People

little yellow men are directing it down tiny runnels between the rows of radishes and corn and beans and potatoes and apples and pears and onions.

You drive past the neat buildings of a Military Police battalion and halt at a guard post. The sentry's teeth grin whitely across his bronzed, dust-grimed face. There aren't many sentries. Even if a Japanese walked out of the community, there'd be nowhere for him to go. It's harder to get in than it is out.

Manzanar Run by Civilians

Inside the community, there is nothing military at all. Everything is under civilian control—a handful of whites from the War Relocation Authority, hundreds of *issei* and *nisei* and a few *sansei*—as the first, second and third generations of Japanese are called among themselves. Between them, they operate what is now the biggest city in Inyo County; it contains half the county's population.

You wander around, up and down the streets, noting what you see, and suddenly you realize there is almost nothing very unusual here. It's just another typical American city—the sort of boom town with which the West has been familiar for decades. They're laying out a cemetery, building a hospital addition. A couple of *nisei* cops are arresting a truck driver for speeding. A Catholic priest is marrying Mary Uyesato and Arthur Hiraga, who tell you they were school sweethearts. There's an election going on for block leaders. Eagle Scout Philip Nagao is busy drilling a squad of kids, and the Girl Scouts are around, too.

In the library—given by the Los Angeles Board of Education—Miss Taka Saito is handing out *It Can't Happen Here* to young Tadao Kimura. Barber and beauty shops, a canteen and a co-op store are doing business. People are buying War Stamps and Bonds. Art classes are running. Mrs. Miya Kikuchi is teaching traffic safety to a class of young'uns. There's a card game going in the firehouse. In the maternity ward of the hospital Dr. Masako Kusayanagi is delivering a baby for Mr. and Mrs. Torushige Kawaguchi: "I guess we call him Robert," says the baby's daddy. At one apartment, Sergeant Oseki of the police force is threatening to raid late poker games. There is even a small zoo, with the kids studying kangaroo mice, jackrabbits, baby owls and other specimens of Sierra wild life.

Over in the city room of the Manzanar Free Press, Sam Hohri and his reporters and desk men are getting out the community newspaper. Miss Chiye Mori is working on plans for a monthly magazine. You chat with these boys and girls, all of them graduates of Coast schools

The Problem People

that happen in wartime. All we can do here is prove we are good sports and good Americans, and hope that people will respect us and our problems."

You walk over to a mess hall and go in with the long line that is fed cafeteria style. There is swell beef stew and spuds and summer squash and rice, heaping mounds of fresh bread and butter, milk for the kids, stewed peaches, green tea—and no ban on seconds.

In Manzanar, no one works who doesn't want to. Most of the new settlers—both *issei* and *amojas* (Americans of Japanese ancestry) do work, however. The nonworkers, mainly those who are sick or too old, not only get free room and board, but a small amount of spending money, in scrip, each month. Single men get \$2.50; married couples \$4. A family may get up to \$7.50. Those who work, if unskilled, get \$8 a month; skilled workers get \$12, and professional people and technicians \$16. This is for a 44-hour week.

In theory, the people in Manzanar are free to leave the camp and live and work anywhere except in the coastal war zone—if anyone will hire them and guarantee their safety. In practice, this seldom works out in individual cases, although various public projects are under way. As one Owens Valley rancher explained it, "What with help short the way it is, I could use a man or two from Manzanar and I'd be quite willing to pay standard wages, which is regulation, anyway. I don't think anyone would take a poke at my Japanese, either, but I couldn't guarantee their safety absolutely. So I'm out of luck—and so are they."

American-Japanese Co-operation

From the first, at Manzanar, there was co-operation between whites and Japanese. The new colony had plenty of brains among its inhabitants. It was only a few weeks old when Dr. James Goto of Los Angeles saved the life of Mervin Kidwell, service director of the center. White clergymen like Father Clement, and the Rev. C. J. Burnett of Santa Monica, held services in camp. The Maryknoll Mission put on movie shows. Chief Forester Douglas Robinson told the migrants about the country and its natural beauties.

All this helped, as you found out if you walked around and talked to people. Yes, said the old folks and the *amojas*, physically it was all right; the food was good and there was plenty of it. But mentally, the people said, it was hard. They felt—especially the *amojas*—that they had been good Americans, and it was tough having to tear up their roots and start life all over again.

The people who were working seemed happiest. There was, for example, gray-

The Problem People

haired Walter Watanabe, who had been a nursery man at Redondo. Walter was bossing the growing of thousands of baby guayule plants from which rubber would be extracted. The college boys helping him were absorbed in their work.

Elsewhere on the big tract, scores of new settlers were quickly spreading a green carpet over the drab soil. In a year, Manzanar, you knew, would be a garden spot and the hot dust would drive before the wind no more.

That brought up another question: Will the Japanese and the amojas, having created this new community, want to leave it when the war is over?

Not all of them, thinks Sam Hohri, who is editor of the Free Press. Of the 10,000 in Manzanar, and of the other 90,000 in new communities, many will be content to stay, tied to the soil they have made productive, he believes.

Whether this will happen no one knows. Colonel Karl R. Bendetsen, an ex-lawyer from Aberdeen, Washington, who organized and supervised the Great Trek, says that "this question is one for the Congress to decide; it is not a question within the province of the Army, and the Army can make no promise of returning these people to their homes when the war is over." This has been Colonel Bendetsen's answer to various Western governors who have tried to get an undertaking from the Army about a re-evacuation into the Coastal zone.

George W. Savage, editor of the Inyo Independent and other valley papers, tells you how the white folks feel. When it first became known that about 10,000 migrants were to be added suddenly to the county population, there was some opposition. The valley folks had always been sturdily independent and they felt their valley was being invaded for no good purpose.

Some of the community leaders thought this way, too. But they mulled it over and finally George Savage crystallized opinion with a front-page editorial. He wrote: "This is our opportunity to do our part in this war. A few years ago we kicked against refugees from the Dust Bowl coming into California, and we should be fair enough to look after these California Japanese and not try to foist them upon other states. We have a duty to perform in the interest of national defense. Let's perform it cheerfully and as well as we know how."

After that, a committee was formed to find out just what sort of public works could be found for the migrants to do.

Several of these projects are under way. Both committee and Army insisted on fair treatment for the Orientals, together with standard wages and working conditions.

"But as far as we're concerned in the

The Problem People

valley," George Savage tells you, "this is temporary. It is our definite understanding that the Japanese will all be taken away after the war. That will suit us exactly."

Japs Not Wanted

For a time this spring, Japanese and amojas could move out of the Coastal zone voluntarily and under their own power. They could move anywhere they pleased, east of the zone boundary. Some hundreds did trek eastward, but many of these found the going hard.

All through the mountains it was the same story: Highway signs—No Japs Wanted. No Gas for Japs. Move Along, Togo. Despite this, many of the Japanese did manage to settle down in Denver and Salt Lake City and other places. But others finally gave up and voluntarily went into one of the new government communities.

Colorado already had a Japanese population of about seven thousand, mostly working in the sugar-beet industry. Many of the newcomers went into the work. Near Pueblo, the government leased the 30,000-acre Ingersoll ranch and started the migrants out on a share-cropping basis. Down at Lupton, a quarter-section was turned over to the Orientals, many of whom hired out to local farmers.

The migration stirred up a political battle. Governor Carr took the position that the state should play ball and help the federal government; he pointed out that amojas had the same rights as other Americans and said he proposed to see that they got them.

Senator Edward C. Johnson, a former governor, demanded the barring of all persons of Japanese blood, as he had attempted to bar Mexican-Americans from entering Colorado in 1935. Johnson's attitude was that "Colorado doesn't want to be made a dumping ground for the Pacific Coast states."

Carr and Johnson probably will be rivals for the Senate seat this fall and the Japanese issue may be decisive. Present indications are that public sentiment is with the governor.

The voluntary migration eastward was short-lived. The Army soon stopped it and made arrangements to handle the Great Trek in an organized way. It did the complicated job with only thirty-five officers under Colonel Bendetsen. Under Army leadership, the Federal Reserve Bank helped Japanese to get fair prices for their property; other civil departments did their bits.

Steadily, the Army moved more than one hundred thousand Japanese and amojas into eighteen temporary assembly centers and from there into permanent communities back of the war zone. Every attempt was made to keep fami-

The Problem People

lies together. It did the job efficiently and humanely and, as rapidly as it could, turned the whole project over to civilians for administration. In the new cities, there is no military influence whatever.

The various relocation centers were constructed to the usual accompaniment of union racketeering and the forced extraction of high fees from men who wanted to work. But early this summer, nine new cities in six areas were being operated by Japanese and *amojas* under white supervision. There was Manzanar. On the Colorado River Indian Reserve in southwestern Arizona, there were three communities centering around Parker. Two more were running along the Gila River on the Pima Reservation in southern Arizona. Another was at Tule Lake in northern California; the eighth was on the old Minidoka irrigation project in southern Idaho, near a town hopefully named Eden. A ninth was near Granada, Colorado, on the Colorado-Kansas border.

In each of these, and in new ones to be set up, the main idea is to make them self-supporting, democratic American communities. There are schools and other educational opportunities; the new settlers will vote this fall just like everyone else. The *issei* and *nisei* are co-operating in the plan, according to M. S. Eisenhower, who is director of the War Relocation Authority. He adds that the co-operation is being given "wholeheartedly and cheerfully."

All over the West there is talk of a permanent solution of the Japanese problem but no one ever has invented a workable plan. Typical of one brand of emotion is the idea of Congressman John Rankin, whose state of Mississippi harbors hardly a Jap. Rankin says all members of the Japanese race hold "pagan philosophies and atheistic beliefs." He adds that "most of them are antagonistic to everything for which we stand."

Almost any Westerner will dispute both these statements, even though he may "have no use for the dirty Japs." Most Japanese are Baptists, Presbyterians, Catholics and so on. Army, Navy and F.B.I. generally agree that a great majority of *amojas* are loyal.

Rankin's solution is: Deport them all. This solution fails on two grounds—you can't deport American citizens; and Japan wouldn't take them if you could. The average age of the *issei* at present is well over sixty; in a few years the Japanese-American group will be completely American—by birth—and because of its physical characteristics, it will remain a more or less isolated group, like the Chinese-American communities.

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The Problem People

The Races Keep Apart

It is a pretty general conclusion in the West that it will be generations before Americans of Japanese ancestry will be assimilated into the nation—if ever. There is hardly any intermarriage with whites; less mixing of bloods than between Negroes and whites. In most states the Orientals live in segregated areas—not legal but actual. However much they wish to become part of the social and economic life of their communities, they can't. Social theorists argue against this but there is some human instinct that keeps the races apart and apparently always will.

It could be that, after the war, the new settlers in Manzanar and Parker and Tule Lake and Minidoka will have built up for themselves, among the whites, enough respect and good will to allow them to remain permanently. Before the war, Japanese communities in the West were generally respected or at least tolerated. But if this doesn't happen, the migrants will just go back where they came from, pick up where they left off and drift back into the island communities in which they formerly lived.

This may not follow some lofty melting-pot ideal, but it works fairly well. Before the war, the two races rubbed along. Most of the Japanese were prosperous; they seldom were in trouble with the law. Scores of them worked for the city governments on the Coast—Los Angeles, which fired all her *amoja* workers after the attack on Pearl Harbor, has promised them their jobs back when it's over.

If, for a minute, you can forget the philosophy of the thing and remember the stern, war-born facts of the situation—the hard necessity for taking no chances with the safety of the Pacific Slope or for that matter the whole nation—then no one can say that the Japanese and *amojas* have not had a square deal—a deal about which no American need feel other than proud.

THE END