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YOU DO HAVE A FUTURE

The History of the Japanese in America Has Been a History of Progress, Says Sympathetic Writer

BY REV. FRED FERTIG

The following article was written by Rev. Fred Fertig, acting Young Peoples' pastor at the Japanese Christian Church. Rev. Fertig, whom we always refer to as "Fred" has always been a loyal friend of the Japanese and Japanese-Americans. After much coaxing "Fred" finally came around with an article for us. Here, tells us that despite the temporary setback, we have a future, and we sincerely agree with him.—Ed's Note.

I firmly believe that the history of the Japanese in America has been a history of progress, even though a slow progress with many a setback. When the first Issei came to these Pacific shores they were thought fit for only the most menial tasks. But after awhile some of the farmers and day laborers left the hoe or shovel and found desk jobs—and succeeded. Most of them could not develop minds, being too busy at earning bread. They could not argue their case before Anglo-Saxons because they spoke no English. But they saw to it that their children were educated and Americanized; so Americanized that the Japanese of Japan treated them as foreigners when the Nisei would travel there.

It was the poorly educated, silent first generation that led the yellow press of the 1910's and '20's to write of the Yellow Peril. The Exclusion Act of 1924 represented both the peak and the beginning of the decline in American anti-Orientalism. Since then we have had the Salt River bombings, but that was the only really violent expression against the Japanese. Of course there were a thousand petty ways that discrimination was shown against the "Americans with Oriental faces." Yet they suffered no more of racial prejudice on the whole than did the Mexican or Negro. Rocks were no longer thrown, and Japanese were not now called "Japs" but sometimes "Japanese" and often "Japanese Americans." These Japanese Americans were elected to student body offices, were accepted into Rotary Clubs, they led Community Chest campaigns, they were inducted into the national army.

Then came the war. Immediate restrictions were clamped on the movements of alien Japanese, and then later, on the lives of citizen Japanese. Spies and saboteur accusations filled the air. Did this mean that here had been no progress after all, no genuine assimilation or acceptance of those of Japanese ancestry into American life? Or if progress was granted, were all social gains to be lost?

There had been progress and there is proof easily at hand. If there was all the danger to the life of the Japanese that the newspapers and the politicians warned of, why was there not more of physical attacks, a wave of public—not newspaper and political—hysteria and hatred? The evils done against those of Japanese blood were not inspired very much by a long-established anti-Japanese feeling. What violence and discrimination was

practised came mainly from these men and movements who always will swing into action whenever there is a scapegoat to be found, a witch to be burned. They were disappointed and discovered themselves to be almost alone when they proclaimed, "At last the Yellow Peril has come, all rally and fight it!"

Instead of night raids and lynchings (though the rumors flew), was a surprising calmness and an unusual amount—for what we expected—of understanding. On the first night of the war I was talking to a taxi cab driver and asked him what he thought would happen to the folks down in Little Tokyo. "You know," he replied, "I'm going to feel kind of sorry for those Nisei. They'll probably get a bad deal out of this." How had he known about the "Nisei?" How come his well-wishing? "Oh, I'd just been reading up on them." New friends were found in strange places—among government officials, in church groups that had formerly stood off from the Japanese, a Chinese who loaned money to an Issei who had lost his job, a Korean boy who became engaged to a Nisei girl.

Now we must not make things out better than they are. We must not boost morale with rosey claims that are not finally true. Many of the economic and social privileges that had only been won after a long, sacrificial struggle are now at least temporarily put "in storage" by government order. But the government acts with real consideration for the welfare of the Japanese in America. Under international law enemy aliens would get no hearing boards, yet the U.S. provides the same and some Issei have already been released. An administrator at Santa Anita echoes Attorney General Biddle when he says he will see to it that the voting and general citizenship rights of the Nisei are preserved. And there is many a liberal and Christian among non-Japanese Americans who have dedicated the next years of their life to seeing to it that justice is done to those who also swear allegiance to democracy but happen to be born with a different color of skin.

I firmly believe that the history of the Japanese in America has been a history of progress, even though a slow progress with many a setback. This war has brought one of those setbacks, but war always sets back racial progress for awhile. For a time prejudices that had begun to be forgotten may be revived. And Japanese and Nisei social con-

ditions may temporarily be strengthened. Nevertheless, already a new spirit of racial equality is growing in the world. Sir Stafford Cripps in his trip to India is a token of that. Even though he now fails, men of his kind will still win the long battle for equality. A Nisei fruit-stand worker the other day said that he saw this evacuation and resettlement as a great experiment in social engineering. He betokens a growing group of second-generation youth that are breaking away from their original provincialism. You do have a future because of the racial brotherhood that calls now across the world, and because you dare to say with a U.S.C. student: "The future of Nisei-America is in our hands, to mold, to pattern, to build as we choose. Materially, we have nothing, but America is humanitarian—no one will starve. Morally and culturally, we have everything to offer; America is still a nation in the making, a nation growing rich with the contributions of many peoples—their arts, customs, and ideas. Irrespective of the permanence of the resettlement communities, we have every raw material necessary to produce strong, well-adjusted, socially-minded individuals who will contribute in a concrete way to American life—not embittered or frustrated or mentally crippled."

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