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DEMOCRACY IN RELOCATION CENTERS

Remarks by
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I am glad that the Chairman stressed in his keynote remarks the fact that the Nation is at war; that we are here engaged in an activity vital to the present and long-time well-being of our Nation, and that we are conducting a laboratory in democratic living. A few years ago it was popular for educators in some quarters to profess a disinterest in spiritual and political values, and to offer students an array of ideas in these fields like so many dishes at a banquet from which they could take their choice. During that period many of us were inclined to sneer at religion, at patriotism, and disparage the waving of the flag and the expression of political beliefs. We have now learned, to our sorrow that democracy, not so lightly earned, must be defended.

When I left Denver I assumed that my part in this program would be to make a few complimentary remarks to you and to let you proceed with your business as teachers; however, a discussion with Dr. Ade on the train yesterday raised a question which I feel obligated to discuss here. The question was posed by the Superintendent of Schools at Granada, and was: "How shall we interpret democracy to a regimented people?"

This is a profoundly disturbing question and difficult of answer. It has been gnawing at my mind since Dr. Ade raised it and I feel that it must be faced squarely. It cannot be evaded because, in one form or

another, it is in the minds of all the people who are in the relocation centers. One Japanese-American boy said: "They tell us we are citizens of the United States, but here we are set aside from other citizens in internment camps; we have lost our rights of citizenship. What privilege, then, is it to be an American?" Another said: "I am told that I have the rights of a citizen, yet I cannot freely leave the community center. If you think you are a citizen, just try to walk out the front gate and see what happens to you."

Perhaps an experience of my own would serve as an answer to these boys. I had forgotten to bring the badge which was issued to me the first time I visited Heart Mountain and when Mr. Carter brought me to the gate last night, he explained to the guard that I was the Regional Director. The Military Police said, "Who the hell is the Regional Director? Where is his badge?" I, like any evacuee, had to have a pass to enter or leave the center. Either of us can enter or leave if we comply with the admission and leave regulations.

It is the essence of democracy that our Government derives from the people. In our Government, the people rule through their elected representatives, but we must remember that the rights of citizenship are meaningless without the responsibilities of citizenship, and we have learned that every man must give up some freedom of movement and sacrifice individual prerogatives for the good of society and for himself as a member of society.

We are passionately jealous of our rights under the Constitution, particularly the Bill of Rights which guarantees our freedom from dictatorship and recognizes the free spirit of the individual man. But even in the purest democracy there is no such thing as absolute freedom. We

are not free to trespass upon or to take another's property; we are not free to drive our cars to imperil the lives of other people, or to do many other things infringing upon the rights of others. Ours is a Government of laws, not of men. We Americans have willingly surrendered many individual rights because we know that if our representatives pass laws which are unfair, we can elect new representatives and change the unfair laws. In wartimes, restrictions on our freedom of movement are even more necessary than usual. Our boys are drafted into the armed services--in some cases against their will--and serve under restrictions which would be intolerable to citizens in times of peace. We gladly submit to rationing regulations, to denial of the right to travel freely anywhere and by any means we choose. We submit to onerous war taxes and in many ways accept limitations on our individual and property rights because we realize that, in a war for survival, the Commander in Chief must be free to use the manpower and resources of our nation and to conduct the military aspects of the war in such a way as to assure victory. These restrictions are not regimentation - they are the deliberate sacrifices of a free people determined to win a war in which their freedom is at stake.

Many of the evacuees feel that in accepting the situation in which they have been placed they are responding to their patriotic duty, and they do so gladly and without criticism, making such sacrifices as their assigned roles require. All of them will do so if they fully realize the significance, as well as the opportunities, implied in their situation.

I would like to trace briefly the development of the evacuee program. You must remember that the western coast is a military frontier and a potential battle zone. For strictly military reasons, the Japanese-Americans, chiefly through an accident of color, had to be removed from

that critical area. If we were invaded by Japanese forces, the first aim of the invader would have been to compel our Japanese-Americans to serve their purposes; a few of them might have been won by persuasion and others by duress. Because of their appearance, indistinguishable except as to costume from the real Japanese invaders, Japanese-Americans would have been liable to shooting on sight by their fellow Americans, or even by Japanese soldiers in the event of an invasion. If there were no invasion we would still have the risk that enemy Japanese would land on our western shores, as the Germans did in the east, and act as spies and saboteurs while passing as good Japanese-Americans. It was obvious, therefore, that the Japanese-Americans would have to leave this military zone. Lt. General DeWitt issued the order and the evacuation got under way.

The point that I want to emphasize is that the orders of the military authorities did not imply the disloyalty of the evacuees, or require them to be placed in internment camps, or even in relocation centers such as we are operating. A certain few were picked up and placed in internment camps because they were known to be enemy aliens, or because they had been employees of the Japanese Government, but the vast majority were simply told that they had to leave the military areas and were free to go wherever they willed.

After several thousand had voluntarily left the restricted areas it became apparent that the removal of 120,000 people, forced to leave their homes, property, and employment, and move inland in times of war, would be a very harsh thing unless assistance were given. Because of the attitude of many of our Caucasian people it would also be difficult for the evacuees to find employment inland unless they were given aid

and protection. The procedure of setting up the assembly centers as a stop-gap measure, and the relocation centers for more permanent residence, was for the sole purpose of facilitating the orderly movement of these people, to provide such assistance and protection as they might require, and to give them a haven until they could find normal places of residence and employment.

It is unfortunate that many of the uninformed public still consider these relocation centers as internment camps. We should do all in our power to dispel the misunderstanding, and perhaps this will best be done through the recently announced liberal employment policies approved by Director Myer and as explained by him in his recent visit here. It should now be clear to every evacuee that his movements are limited only by his ability to find employment outside the centers, and by the attitude of the people and local officials in the areas to which he desires to go. These factors, which I have discussed, should determine our attitude toward these people, as well as our obligations toward our jobs and toward them.

Our laws do not permit it and it is our duty to see that the Japanese-Americans do not become a regimented people. We are fighting a war to insure that the individual shall be free, and that there shall be no regimentation or oppression of minorities. Judging by the attitude displayed by you people here, I am sure that we shall do nothing while evacuees are in the center to cause them to feel regimented, or to cause any man to lose his sense of dignity as a free soul. We must remember that in administering this community we have no program, no ideas, and no prohibitions to impose, and that restrictions and orders should be limited to the minimum to provide safety and decent living.

conditions to evacuees residing here. In many ways your Project Director is comparable to the Mayor of a city, and you on the administrative and educational staff are comparable to city employees, whether elected or appointed. As in any city, the Director must provide police and fire protection, must have regulations safeguarding the rights of all the evacuees, and in this, as in any ordinary town, the rights of the individual are curtailed where they may conflict with the rights of all. But let us remember that city employees are the servants of the people, and we are here to serve and assist rather than to impose our will upon the residents. Infractions of the law and violations of essential administrative regulations must not be countenanced, but within the framework of law, the residents should be free to make their own decisions and conduct their own affairs. I do not think that democracy needs to be interpreted to these evacuees--it cannot be interpreted in speeches or instructions. In the final analysis we do not interpret democracy, we live it.

These folk who are temporarily our guests will go from these centers at the proper time, believing in democracy only if democracy has been lived here. Let us remember again that the rights of a democracy carry **with them** responsibilities of a democracy. Nine-tenths of the problems that will arise here and which will give greatest concern are probably none of our business at all and should be passed back to the people for solution. Self-initiative and ability to work out one's own affairs are the traditional attitudes of Americans everywhere. The Japanese-Americans, because they have shared our life, share these attributes. Let us not soften them up and destroy that heritage by thinking that we have to do things for them here which they have done

for themselves all their lives.

I am glad to see that the members of the administrative staff, as well as the teachers, are in attendance at this first session of your conference. We are all teachers, all educators; the man from the finance division, or the agricultural supervisor, the engineer who works with a crew in rehabilitating your irrigation system, all must be instruments in teaching and demonstrating that democracy is still the supreme way of life. Teaching the precepts of democracy in your school rooms will be of little avail if we do not practice them throughout our work and play. Together, we and the Japanese-Americans are conducting a unique experiment in democratic living. I hope that all of us will approach our tasks with tolerance, thoughtfulness, and patience. I wish you great success in your part of this venture, and joy in your work.