

Part I

Nisei and Issei

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Before Pearl Harbor

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked and crippled the American fleet at Pearl Harbor. Ten weeks later, on February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 under which the War Department excluded from the West Coast everyone of Japanese ancestry—both American citizens and their alien parents who, despite long residence in the United States, were barred by federal law from becoming American citizens. Driven from their homes and farms and businesses, very few had any choice but to go to “relocation centers”—Spartan, barrack-like camps in the inhospitable deserts and mountains of the interior.*

*There is a continuing controversy over the contention that the camps were “concentration camps” and that any other term is a euphemism. The government documents of the time frequently use the term “concentration camps,” but after World War II, with full realization of the atrocities committed by the Nazis in the death camps of Europe, that phrase came to have a very different meaning. The American relocation centers were bleak and bare, and life in them had many hardships, but they were not extermination camps, nor did the American government embrace a policy of torture or liquidation of the ethnic Japanese. To use the phrase “concentration camps” summons up images and ideas which are inaccurate and unfair. The Commission has used “relocation centers” and “relocation camps,” the usual term used during the war, not to gloss over the hardships of the camps, but in an effort to find an historically fair and accurate phrase.

This was done out of fear—fear of sabotage, of espionage, of fifth column activity. There was no evidence that any individual American citizen was actively disloyal to his country. Nevertheless, the World War II history of Americans of Japanese ancestry was far different from that of German Americans, Italian Americans or any other ethnic group. It is the bitter history of an original mistake, a failure of America's faith in its citizens' devotion to their country's cause and their right to liberty, when there was no evidence or proof of wrongdoing. It is a history which deeply seared and scarred the lives of Japanese Americans. How did it happen?

War inflamed many passions in the country. On the West Coast it rekindled the fears and prejudices of long years of anti-Asian agitation carried on by organized interest groups. Decades of discrimination against immigrants from Japan and public hostility toward Americans of Japanese descent fueled outraged shock at the Pearl Harbor attack and impotent anger against the Japanese as they swept through the Philippines and down the Malay Peninsula to Singapore. Reports of American battlefield deaths lit sparks in one community after another up and down the West Coast, where fear of invasion was very real. In significant measure, the evacuation decision was ignited by the fire of those emotions, especially in California.

The hostile reception and treatment of Japanese immigrants on the West Coast are the historical prelude to the exclusion and evacuation. Federal immigration and naturalization laws, frequently sponsored and backed by westerners, demonstrate this public hostility to Asians, particularly the Japanese. Laws which prohibited the ownership of land by Japanese resident aliens and imposed segregation in the schools tell the same story in the western states. Public perceptions and misconceptions about the Japanese in this country were affected by myths and stereotypes—the fear of “the yellow peril” and antagonistic misunderstanding of the cultural patterns of the Japanese in America. Resentment of effective economic competition also inflamed public feeling and, combined with differences of language and culture, left the small minority of Japanese Americans on the West Coast comparatively isolated—a ready target at a time of fear and anxiety.

IMMIGRATION AND LEGALIZED DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination in American immigration laws started with the Naturalization Act of 1790, which provided for naturalization of “any alien,

being a free white person."¹ Following revision of the statute after the Civil War, the act was read to prohibit any Chinese immigrant from becoming an American citizen.² It was generally assumed that the prohibition would extend to the Japanese as well and, in 1922, the Supreme Court interpreted the statute to prohibit the naturalization of any Oriental.³ Although immigrants from Asia could not become American citizens, their children born on American soil became citizens by birth.⁴ The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution assured to everyone born in the United States the rights and privileges of citizenship without regard to the status of one's parents.

The Chinese began immigrating into this country under these adverse conditions in the middle of the nineteenth century, several decades before significant Japanese immigration began. California was at the center of American discrimination against the Chinese and, later, against the Japanese. By 1870 approximately ten percent of California's population was Chinese. A great many of the Chinese immigrants were railroad laborers; when the transcontinental line had been completed in 1869 they were discharged wherever they happened to be. This left almost 10,000 unemployed Chinese in a depressed labor market, and anti-Chinese sentiment became widespread and vocal throughout the west. The financial recession of the 1870's was blamed on "cheap Mongolian labor," and protests were directed against the Chinese and their employers. The San Francisco labor movement prospered by using anti-Chinese agitation as an organizing tool. The Chinese threat, first characterized as unfair labor competition, eventually included claims of racial impurity and injury to western civilization. The press and political parties pandered to these anti-Chinese attitudes. After 1871, both the Republican and Democratic parties in California had anti-Chinese planks in their platforms. Moreover, an independent workmen's party organized in California around populism and anti-Chinese measures.⁵

Pressures mounted for the federal government to prohibit Chinese immigration.⁶ Under that pressure, Congress passed a Chinese exclusion bill in 1880 which President Hayes vetoed. In 1882, President Arthur vetoed a similar bill; however, as a compromise he signed into law a ten-year suspension of Chinese immigration.⁷ The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was renewed in 1892 and made permanent in 1902.⁸ Immigration and naturalization of the Chinese was not permitted until 1943, when the United States was allied with China in the Second World War.⁹

Significant Japanese immigration into the United States did not start until the late nineteenth century. In 1853, Commodore Matthew

Perry led an expedition to Japan to establish trade relations, and the next year he negotiated a treaty which opened Japan to American commerce.¹⁰ Relations between the two countries developed quickly. Direct shipping between San Francisco and Japan was begun in 1855; diplomatic relations were established in 1860, but by 1880 the total Japanese population in this country was only 148 persons.¹¹

Several factors increased Japanese immigration significantly in the following decades. Adverse economic conditions at home were an impetus to emigration in this instance as in many other movements to the United States. During the last half of the nineteenth century, Japan's economy industrialized rapidly, with attendant dislocations. By 1884 the disruption was significant, and led Japan to grant passports for contract labor in Hawaii where there was a demand for cheap labor and, in 1886, to legalize emigration.¹² Between 1885 and 1894, the years during which large-scale contract labor immigration continued, over 25,000 Japanese went to Hawaii.¹³ Many subsequently emigrated to the American mainland.¹⁴

As reports of better economic conditions in the United States were carried back to Japan, more immigrants were drawn to this country. In addition, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was perceived to leave room for cheap agricultural labor, which allowed immigration and recruitment of Japanese from both Hawaii and Japan.¹⁵ The Alaska gold rush of 1897-99 drained the Pacific northwest of labor needed to link Seattle and Tacoma with the east by railroad, so Japanese laborers were sought.¹⁶ By 1890 there were 2,039 Japanese immigrants and native-born American citizens of Japanese ancestry in the United States; by 1900 there were 24,326; between 1901 and 1908, a time of unrestricted immigration, 127,000 Japanese entered the United States.¹⁷

What were the characteristics of the immigrants? Their predisposition to the United States was probably more than economic, since the United States and its institutions were deeply admired by the Japanese—in Japanese government textbooks, Benjamin Franklin and Abraham Lincoln were models to be emulated.¹⁸ The vast majority were young adult males from the agricultural class—ambitious young men of limited means.¹⁹ The Japanese emphasis on small-scale individual enterprise served the immigrants well in the United States. In many cases, their knowledge of intensive cultivation, new to the west—including knowledge of soils, fertilizers, skill in land reclamation, irrigation and drainage—enabled them to cultivate and develop marginal lands successfully and to pioneer the production of new crops. Many were fishermen who eventually revolutionized the fishing industry.²⁰

Their occupations were overwhelmingly manual but their hard work, thrift, respect for education and social stability were a firm foundation for a better economic future.²¹

The Japanese who emigrated to the mainland United States settled on the West Coast, primarily in California. In 1900 41% of the ethnic group and, in 1940, 70% had made their homes in California.²² Numerically, they remained a tiny minority, making up only 2.1% of California's population at the time of greatest concentration, and in 1940 comprising only 1.6% of the population of California, most heavily concentrated in and around Los Angeles.²³

The California of 1900 to 1920 was highly heterogeneous, based on expansive resources, space and an expanding economy. A state largely populated by citizen newcomers, California society was unintegrated, unstable, mobile and loosely organized. The state was made up of culturally insulated and isolated communities. Without a general sense of community or purpose, many outsiders, such as the "Okies" of the Depression years, were regarded as inferior.²⁴

The Japanese immigrants were excluded from political life by the prohibition against naturalization and were effectively barred from participation in social and economic affairs. As with many new immigrant groups, they brought with them customs and mores which also tended to set them apart in the early years after arrival. There was a sustaining pride in the Japanese people and its culture, which honored traditional social values and cohesive group relationships, with particular deference to those in positions of authority and status within the family and the community.²⁵ There were also the obvious differences of language and religion. These factors promoted internal solidarity within the Japanese community and, combined with the hostile nativism of California, placed the Issei* in comparative isolation in the public and economic life of the West Coast.

The Japanese were a major focus of California politics in the fifty years before World War II. Their small numbers, their political impotence and the racial feelings of many Californians frequently combined with resentment at the immigrants' willingness to labor for low pay to make them a convenient target for demagogues or agitators.

*The *Issei* are the immigrant generation from Japan; the first generation born in the United States are *Nisei*, the second generation born here, *Sansei*. Those who returned to Japan for education are termed *Kibei* and the entire ethnic Japanese group in America are *Nikkei*.

Following early incidents in the 1890's, anti-Japanese activity commenced in earnest in 1900. On May 7, 1900, local labor groups called a major anti-Japanese protest in San Francisco. Political, economic, and social arguments were made.²⁶ Mayor James Duval Phelan of San Francisco expressed the prevalent feelings:

The Japanese are starting the same tide of immigration which we thought we had checked twenty years ago. . . . The Chinese and Japanese are not bona fide citizens. They are not the stuff of which American citizens can be made. . . . Personally we have nothing against Japanese, but as they will not assimilate with us and their social life is so different from ours, let them keep at a respectful distance.²⁷

In the same year, the American Federation of Labor adopted a resolution asking Congress to re-enact the Chinese exclusion law and include all "Mongolian" labor. Also in 1900, both the Democrats and the Populists of California adopted expressly anti-Japanese planks in their platforms; similarly, the Republican position proposed effective restriction on "cheap foreign labor." In November 1901, a Chinese Exclusion Convention met in San Francisco. Designed to instruct Congress to extend the Chinese Exclusion Act, the convention determined not to seek Japanese exclusion only because the request would dissipate its message. Contemporary accounts of that convention show a growing hostility in California toward Japanese immigrants.²⁸

After Japan's striking victory over Russia in 1904-05, fear of Japanese territorial advances fueled the anti-Japanese immigration forces—movies, novels and newspapers reiterated accusations that Japanese in America were merely agents of the Emperor.²⁹ In February 1905, *The San Francisco Chronicle* began a series of anti-Japanese articles, the first entitled "The Japanese Invasion, the Problem of the Hour." Although the motivation for these articles is unclear, they evoked strong responses; some San Francisco clergy and the Japanese residents themselves objected, but the public in general supported the paper's views. In early March, both houses of the California legislature passed anti-Japanese resolutions.³⁰

Then in May 1905, delegates from 67 organizations met in San Francisco to form what became the Japanese Exclusion League (Asiatic Exclusion League), led primarily by labor groups. Ironically, many of the League's leaders themselves had emigrated from Europe. The League's motivations were racial and economic; its purpose, Japanese exclusion; its methods, legislation, boycott, school segregation and propaganda.³¹ By 1908, the League had over 100,000 members and

238 affiliated groups, mostly labor unions.³² The League's presence helped to catalyze anti-Japanese activity, despite the failure of its proposals. In the words of Roger Daniels, one of the foremost historians of Japanese Americans: "From the day of the League's formation, May 14, 1905, until after the end of the Second World War, there was in California an organized anti-Japanese movement that would eventually draw support from all segments of the state's population."³³

The next aim of the anti-Japanese activists, including the League, was to segregate schoolchildren of Japanese ancestry. In May 1905, the San Francisco School Board announced a policy of removing Japanese students to the one Oriental school so that "our children should not be placed in any position where their youthful impressions may be affected by association with pupils of the Mongolian race." On December 11, 1906, under increasing public pressure spurred by a coalition of labor and politicians, the school board issued an order which barred Asian children, including Japanese, from white primary schools. To put the problem in perspective, only 93 Japanese students, 25 of them born in the United States, were then in the San Francisco public schools.³⁴

School segregation in San Francisco made discrimination against the Japanese an issue of international diplomacy. The school board's order caused serious embarrassment to President Theodore Roosevelt, who learned of it through reports from Tokyo. Concerned about maintaining sound diplomatic relations with Japan, which had just demonstrated its military power by resoundingly defeating Russia in the Russo-Japanese War, Roosevelt began negotiations with California. After consultation, the President agreed that if the San Francisco School Board rescinded its order and if California refrained from passing more anti-Japanese legislation, he would negotiate with Japan to restrict immigration in a manner which did not injure that country's pride. Roosevelt also sent a message to Congress opposing school segregation and supporting naturalization of the Japanese. Public opposition greeted his views. Roosevelt did not press the naturalization legislation, and his message was regarded as an effort to placate Japan in the face of the school board order.³⁵

To carry out President Roosevelt's part of the bargain with Japan, Secretary of State Elihu Root drafted, and Congress passed, legislation generally authorizing immigration restriction from such intermediate points as Hawaii. On March 14, 1907, the President issued an Executive Order barring further Japanese immigration from Hawaii, Mexico and Canada.³⁶

In 1907 the two countries entered into the "Gentlemen's Agreement" under which Japan agreed not to issue more workers' passports valid for the continental United States, and to restrict issuance to "laborers who have already been in America and to the parents, wives and children of laborers already resident there." This agreement sharply curtailed, but did not eliminate, Japanese immigration. Between 1908 and 1924, many Japanese men resident in the United States brought to this country the brides of arranged marriages,³⁷ creating an inaccurate public impression that Japan had deceived the United States in implementing the agreement. Resentment was expressed as early as 1910, when campaign platforms of the Republican, Democratic and Socialist parties all included exclusionist planks.³⁸

The next phase of anti-Japanese activity, again centered in California, was an effort to prohibit land ownership by Japanese immigrants, a particularly harsh measure in light of the fact that a very high percentage of the immigrants were farmers. In 1913, the Democrats and the Progressives, led by the Governor of California and supported by some farmers who feared economic competition, pressed the California legislature to enact such a law. President Wilson lobbied against passage, as did major businesses interested in good relations with Japan. After extensive politicking, however, the state legislature passed the Alien Land Law of 1913 (the Webb-Heney Act), which barred future land purchases by aliens ineligible for citizenship and forbade such aliens to acquire leases for periods longer than three years.³⁹ The law was a particularly outrageous discriminatory measure aimed at the Japanese, but it did not end anti-Japanese agitation because it was easily avoided and largely ineffectual. Immigrant Japanese who had citizen children could vest ownership in the children with a parent as guardian; for those without children, a bare majority of stock could be transferred to a citizen as ostensible owner.⁴⁰ Such groups as the Anti-Jap Laundry League attacked the legislation.

After the First World War, anti-Japanese activity in the United States intensified. Over the next several years, it had two foci—a more restrictive alien land law in California, and total prohibition of immigration from Japan. Four major organizations, reflecting the views of labor, "patriots" and farmers, supported and led this anti-Japanese movement: The Native Sons (and Native Daughters) of the Golden West; the American Legion; the California State Federation of Labor and the California State Grange.⁴¹ The old Asiatic Exclusion League was reorganized into the California Joint Immigration Committee.⁴² Small businessmen also opposed continued Japanese immigration,⁴³

and the California Real Estate Association opposed land ownership by Japanese aliens.⁴⁴ Big business, including the Chamber of Commerce, opposed a prohibition on immigration as a possible interference with trade,⁴⁵ and large-scale agriculture, interested in access to cheap labor, took the same position.

The breadth of the anti-Japanese groups, and their unity, were indeed effective. All united in adopting a five-point plan:

1. Cancellation of the "Gentlemen's Agreement;"
2. Prohibition against the entry of "Picture Brides;"
3. Rigorous prohibition against further immigration from Japan;
4. Confirmation of the policy that Asians should be forever barred from American citizenship; and
5. Amendment of the federal Constitution to provide that no child born in the United States should become an American citizen unless both parents were of a race eligible for citizenship.⁴⁶

In 1920 the groups in California succeeded in passing an initiative which further restricted Japanese landholding in California. The Los Angeles County Asiatic Association urged Californians to vote yes on Proposition One to "Save California—Stop Absorption of State's Best Acreage by Japanese Through Leases and Evasions of Law."⁴⁷ This measure was an attempt to shore up the Alien Land Act of 1913. The 1920 law prohibited any further transfer of land to Japanese nationals, forbade them to lease land, barred any corporation in which Japanese held a majority of stock from lease or purchase of land, and prohibited immigrant parents from serving as guardians for their minor citizen children.⁴⁸

This law also proved largely ineffectual. The provision barring Japanese parents from acting as guardians for their children was ruled unconstitutional.⁴⁹ Because there were many citizen children by 1920, avoiding the other new restrictions was not difficult. Nevertheless, the law had some effect: in combination with the prohibition on immigration, it reduced the number of acres held in California by persons of Japanese ancestry.⁵⁰ Similar anti-Japanese sentiment led to the enactment of parallel anti-alien land legislation in Arizona, Washington and Oregon,⁵¹ even though by 1920 only 4,151 Japanese lived in Oregon and owned only 2,185 acres of land.⁵²

From 1908 to 1924, while the Gentlemen's Agreement was in

effect, 159,675 Japanese immigrated into the continental United States.⁵³ Many immigrants, however, returned to Japan with their children. The 1910 census shows 72,157 persons of Japanese ancestry in the continental United States; the 1920 census shows 111,010 and the 1930 census shows 138,834.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, in large part because the Gentlemen's Agreement had been represented to California as an exclusion act,⁵⁵ many wrongly believed that Japan had breached the Agreement.⁵⁶ This mistaken view as well as the political and perceived economic interests of the anti-Japanese groups aided the drive to end all Japanese immigration. In 1920, the exclusionists formed the Japanese Exclusion League of California, organized under V. S. McClatchy and State Senator Inman to seek passage of exclusion legislation.⁵⁷ McClatchy was once publisher of *The Sacramento Bee* and a director of the Associated Press; from 1920 to 1932 he represented the California Joint Immigration Committee. Publicly adept, McClatchy was an untiring and successful advocate of Japanese exclusion—not on the basis of prejudice, he claimed, but because the Japanese were superior workers and thus an economic threat.⁵⁸ In 1924, at the culmination of isolationist trends in the United States and particularly of the anti-Japanese movement, the federal immigration law was changed expressly to exclude the Japanese.⁵⁹

After 1924, there were no major successful legislative initiatives against the ethnic Japanese until after Pearl Harbor, but anti-Japanese activity continued. For instance, there were repeated efforts to pass statutes banning aliens not eligible for citizenship from employment in the government and on public works projects,⁶⁰ and in 1938 the California legislature defeated a bill which would have removed the Issei from the tuna-fishing industry in San Diego and San Pedro.⁶¹ The Joint Immigration Committee worked to insure that the exclusion law was not amended, aided in the passage of alien land laws in the interior states and influenced the deletion of passages favorable to Japanese in textbooks used in California and Hawaii.⁶² Anti-Japanese agitation and sentiment continued to be part of the public life of the West Coast.

THE ROOTS OF PREJUDICE—MYTHS, STEREOTYPES AND FEARS

Stereotypes and fears mixed with economic self-interest, often growing out of and contributing to racial antipathy, were the seedbed for the politics of prejudice which bred discriminatory laws.

“The Yellow Peril”

Underlying anti-Japanese sentiment in the United States was fear of the “yellow peril.” The origin of the term is obscure, but in its earliest forms the abstraction imagined a wave of “coolie” immigration, fed by a high birthrate and famine conditions in China, which would engulf the whites of California and the Pacific Coast.⁶³ This notion stirred both fear and hatred, although at its peak in 1907 Japanese immigration was less than 3% of immigration to the United States, and in California the Japanese never reached 3% of the state’s population.⁶⁴

This creature of propaganda was first turned upon the Chinese and later the Japanese. American confusion between the Japanese and the Chinese, and increasing Japanese immigration on the West Coast, often led the public to view both groups as a single racial threat.

The unexpected military victories of the Japanese over the Russians in 1904-05 added fuel to the fire. After the Russo-Japanese War, rumors circulated in California that Japan would organize the wealth and manpower of China to provide and equip armies that would revive the power of Genghis Khan and create a real “yellow peril”—hordes of Asians overpowering and subjugating a scattered white population strung out along the immense Pacific Coast. Fear of possible war with Japan, a now-powerful country, exacerbated these anxieties. Much anti-Japanese activity in the United States, including the Alien Land Law of 1920 and the Oriental Exclusion Act of 1924, provoked strong protest from Japan and fostered fears of war. As Japan grew more aggressive and hostile after 1931, anxiety revived. Japan’s invasion of Manchuria, its desertion of the League of Nations, its abandonment of agreements on naval limitation, the further invasion of China, and the bombing of the American gunboat *Panay* on the Yangtze River in 1937 fed public concern about war with Japan and, aided by the press, revived fear of the yellow peril.⁶⁵

Popular writing, the movies, and the Hearst newspapers in particular, promoted the fear.⁶⁶ “Patria,” produced by Hearst’s International Film Service Corp. in 1917, and “Shadows of the West,” circulated by the American Legion, both portrayed Japanese immigrants as sneaky, treacherous agents of a militaristic Japan seeking to control the West Coast.⁶⁷ Two novels written by the respected Peter B. Kyne and Wallace Irwin about dangers of Japanese land ownership were serialized in the *Saturday Evening Post* and Hearst’s *Cosmopolitan*.⁶⁸ Pseudoscientific literature began to discuss the inferiority of Eastern and Southern European stock as well as the “yellow people.”⁶⁹ Madison Grant’s 1917 work *The Passing of the Great Race* argued that immigration was “mongrelizing” America; Lothrop Stoddard published *The*

Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy in 1920; Stoddard and Grant together were influential in expounding the new racism.⁷⁰

Purported espionage by those of Japanese ancestry in the United States was advanced as one threat from the yellow peril. Allegations that persons of Japanese descent were a "secret army" for Japan and the Emperor were constantly repeated by anti-Japanese agitators.

The "Japanese Birthrate"

Fears of Japanese expansionism and the "yellow peril" were fed by wild overestimation of the birthrate among persons of Japanese ancestry in the continental United States. When the 1920 Alien Land Law was being considered, Governor William Stephens of California asserted that the greatest danger to white Californians came from the high birthrate of the Japanese. A state report sought to demonstrate that the Japanese birthrate was three times that of white citizens of the state. The report failed, however, to take account of the fact that the pattern of Japanese immigration led to older husbands bringing to the United States young brides who, married only a few years at the time of the survey, were at the peak of their fertility. To compare that sample to the birthrate among all women of childbearing age in California was misleading. In fact, the long-range birthrate of the immigrant generation fell below that of the contemporary European immigrant groups and only slightly above that of native whites during the 1920's and 1930's. By 1940 the birthrate among Japanese Americans in every state on the West Coast was lower than the birthrate of the general population. The "high Japanese birthrate" was a myth.⁷¹

Education, Religion and Associations

The Issei left behind a country characterized by pride, strong moral convictions, and community cohesiveness. Many cultural patterns were transplanted into Japanese community life in the United States. Although the Issei were criticized for being clannish, early discrimination reinforced the typically separate living patterns of non-English-speaking immigrants and delayed their cultural assimilation. The Issei responded by trying to raise their children in a two-culture environment. What resulted was a general acceptance among Nisei of some traditional Japanese mores, and continuing criticism from anti-Japanese groups that the immigrants and their families were unassimilable and pro-Japan.

Many Issei wished to prepare their children for life in either country, fearing that future discriminatory laws would prevent them

from continuing to live in the United States. Dual citizenship, pursued actively or passively, was one contingency measure. Japan, as well as several European countries, had traditionally followed the principle of *jus sanguinis*, meaning that the children of Japanese nationals, regardless of country of birth, were citizens of Japan. Expatriation and citizenship acts passed in Japan in 1916 and 1924 modified the *jus sanguinis* principle, however, so that after 1924 ethnic Japanese born in the United States had to be registered promptly with the Japanese consul in order to obtain dual citizenship. The Japanese Association, established on the West Coast to promote Japanese immigrants' interests, encouraged Issei to expatriate their Nisei children and worked to terminate dual citizenships. By the 1930's, only twenty percent of the Nisei held dual citizenship.⁷²

Next to parental authority, education was the strongest mold of values. To preserve their cultural heritage and to ensure their children's success in the Japanese community, or, if necessary, in Japan, Issei stressed the learning of the Japanese language.⁷³ Such language instruction was not unusual among first-generation immigrant groups. A large segment of the Nisei attended Japanese language school despite the generation gap which developed between Issei and Nisei as the young Japanese Americans came to identify more closely with American values. These classes were held after school, which made for a very long day of "education," drawing resentment from many Nisei and resulting in few ever truly mastering Japanese.⁷⁴ The education program of the schools was diverse but the lessons typically embodied and taught respect for parents and elders, self-reliance, obligation, hard work and other virtues believed to be inherently Japanese.⁷⁵ The language schools also supplied a stage for Japanese folklore, plays, songs, novels, and movies, all emphasizing Japanese ethics that in many instances paralleled the "Puritan work ethic." Although the schools were much Americanized over time, their approach depended on the teacher and the local community, and some schools stressed Japanese nationalism and loyalty. Senator Daniel Inouye recounted his experience in one such school in 1939:

Day after day, the [Buddhist] priest who taught us ethics and Japanese history hammered away at the divine prerogatives of the Emperor . . . He would tilt his menacing crew-cut skull at us and solemnly proclaim, "You must remember that only a trick of fate has brought you so far from your homeland, but there must be no question of your loyalty. When Japan calls, you must know that it is Japanese blood that flows in your veins."⁷⁶

Eventually, Inouye was thrown out of the school in a dispute about religion. Inouye's own career is ample proof that even such emotional instruction often had negligible effect. Nevertheless, the language schools and the much-stereotyped and exaggerated code of the *samurai* were viewed by many on the West Coast as threats to the American social system.

A smaller number of children were sent to Japan for formal education. These Kibei lived with relatives in Japan and returned with an education designed to be the key to their success in a Japanese community excluded from mainstream America. The length of time spent in Japan varied a great deal, as did the age at which children were sent; in consequence, the impact of the education varied considerably. A number of those who spent many of their formative years in Japan found it somewhat difficult to identify and to communicate with their American-educated peers, Nisei or Caucasian,⁷⁷ although they had not become fully Japanese either. With such variation within the group, calculating the total number of Kibei is not very illuminating, but by 1940 several thousand Nisei had had substantial education in Japan.⁷⁸

The Buddhist church was also an educational influence for the Nisei. Although theologically different, Buddhism and Christianity shared many ethical similarities, including values of honesty, charity and hard work. But Buddhism was distrusted and largely misunderstood by Caucasians,⁷⁹ and even officials of Japan opposed the vigorous introduction of Buddhist missionaries into America.⁸⁰ Moreover, the Issei believed that joining Christian churches would open more doors for them in terms of employment and social acceptance.⁸¹ By the 1930's half the Nisei were Christians⁸² and, just before the war, in Seattle's ethnic Japanese community, Christians outnumbered those subscribing to Oriental religions.⁸³

The Shinto religion had very few followers and was less understood in America than Buddhism.⁸⁴ Village Shinto in Japan overlapped Buddhism; state Shinto developed later and was less a religion than a patriotic worship of the emperor used initially to overthrow the Japanese feudal system. This cult was dominated by highly nationalistic fervor but its influence among Japanese in America was small, perhaps because its peak of influence came only after most of the Issei generation had left for the United States and reached adulthood. In fact, criticism of some of the ultra-nationalistic aspects of Japanese life in the 1930's led to the banning in Japan of some publications by Japanese Americans.⁸⁵

Excluded from politics and many social functions of the white-dominated social structure on the West Coast, Issei formed a multiplicity of ethnic organizations and associations. Initially associations were established mainly for social purposes and were called *kenjinkai*, since members of each association were from the same *ken* or province of Japan. These developed and perpetuated an inner community within the entire Japanese community. The *kenjinkais* were mainly significant to the immigrant generation and the Nisei showed little interest in them. Other Issei associations sprang up as well. By 1905, in San Francisco alone, fifteen *ken* societies; seven religious organizations; and associations for tailors, cobblers, restaurateurs, barbers and houseworkers; a students' club; and a residence for women were established.⁸⁶ Politically strongest were the Japanese Associations, established in response to increased anti-Japanese activity. The most important function of the Association was to serve as a legal adviser and lobbyist. Critics among the white majority in California claimed the Association was under the direct influence of Japan, and suspicion of the Association and its leaders grew, peaking at the the start of the war.⁸⁷

Nisei, seeking to assert their citizenship rights and to champion the rights of Japanese Americans and Japanese immigrants, formed two independent organizations immediately after World War I: The American Loyalty League in San Francisco and the Progressive Citizens' League in Seattle. These groups had little influence until the late 1920's, when many Nisei reached adulthood. The two merged into a national organization, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL). The League was too young and poorly organized to achieve much success in improving the social and economic stature of the Nisei before the war, but it did provide an association separate from the Issei.⁸⁸

All of these cultural patterns—dual citizenship; the language schools and education in Japan; foreign religion, particularly Shinto; and ethnic organizations, particularly groups of Issei veterans who had served in Japan—became targets for the anti-Japanese faction on the West Coast. They were viewed as proof that the ethnic Japanese would not or could not assimilate to "American" life and represented an alien threat to the dominant white society. It bore a kinship to the know-nothing nativism that sprang up on the East Coast during the European immigrations of the nineteenth century. The ethnic institutions were also wrongly viewed as mechanisms through which the Japanese government could influence and control the Issei and Nisei. Unfortunately,

there was little informed American opinion to counter these exaggerated, alarmist views.

ECONOMIC STATUS

The relative economic status of the Nikkei affected anti-Japanese agitation in the United States as did general economic conditions. Frequently, anti-Japanese activity increased during periods of recession if competition from the ethnic Japanese was perceived as an economic threat.⁸⁹ This makes an understanding of the economic position of the Nikkei important to comprehending both the prewar and wartime history.

Since most of the Japanese who immigrated to the United States had worked in agriculture in Japan, farming was by far the predominant occupation among the Issei.⁹⁰ Other early immigrants found work as manual laborers for railroads, lumber companies, canneries or mines.⁹¹ Initially, the Japanese concentrated in railroads, sugar beets and hop-harvesting. Both types of agricultural work paid by the piece, so meager incomes could be increased by hard work. The Japanese later moved into a wide range of farming activities, growing and cultivating citrus fruits, vineyards, berries and vegetables.⁹² When these immigrants first arrived, many worked for \$1 a day while other workers were earning up to \$1.65 for the same work.⁹³ They took lower wages to obtain work; even low pay in the United States was higher than what they would have been able to earn in Japan.⁹⁴

About half the Japanese in California were engaged in agriculture. Often, a Japanese immigrant would begin as a migrant laborer for a year or two, then settle in one place to harvest for a single farmer. The next step was sharecropping. After that, the worker would rent land, either paying cash or, for the first year or two, clearing the land in lieu of rent. The goal was ownership.⁹⁵ Land tenure statistics for California illustrate the pattern.⁹⁶

TABLE 1: Japanese American Land Tenure in California

	<i>Shared Crop</i> (in acres)	<i>Leased</i> (in acres)	<i>Owned</i> (in acres)
1904	19,572½	35,258½	2,422
1909	59,001½	80,232	16,449½
1919	383,287	74,769

By 1910, 39,000 persons of Japanese ancestry were engaged in agriculture; of these, 6,000 were independent, mostly tenant, farmers.⁹⁷

The skills of the Issei as intensive farmers were rewarded. In 1917, for example, the average production per acre among all California farmers was less than \$42; for the average Issei it was \$141.⁹⁸ In 1920, the market value of the crops produced by California Issei was \$67 million, or over 10% of the total California value. They were able to develop marginal areas effectively. In part because of the alien land laws, the Japanese selected quick-growth crops which required minimal capital investment; for instance, in southern California, they concentrated on truck farming rather than citrus growing.⁹⁹

In Oregon by 1940 the Nikkei grew an estimated \$2.7 million worth of produce. In Washington in that year, they raised more than \$4 million of produce. They also commenced farming in states where they had come to work on the railroads: Utah, Wyoming, Montana, Nebraska, Idaho, Colorado and Nevada.¹⁰⁰

After World War I, total acreage under Japanese cultivation declined. By 1941, the value of all crops from Nikkei farms in California was \$32 million (compared to the World War I high of \$55 million). The decline was brought about by reduced Japanese acreage as well as plummeting crop values during the Depression.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the Nikkei were important to the California agricultural economy; they were expected to produce 30-40% of the state's truck crops in 1942.¹⁰²

Because of hostility and discrimination by whites, the Japanese entered agricultural produce distribution, primarily in Los Angeles, where they came to dominate the fruit and vegetable supply system by 1940.¹⁰³ The Japanese also entered produce marketing in Fresno, Sacramento, Seattle and Salt Lake City; in San Francisco, however, they were excluded from produce marketing.¹⁰⁴

The Nikkei were also shopkeepers, primarily serving their own community. A detailed study of the Nikkei in Los Angeles (about one-third of the Japanese in the United States) shortly before World War II determined that most of those in business operated small enterprises with low capital investment that survived because of the unpaid labor of family members.¹⁰⁵ Before World War II, the Nisei were gradually moving into clerical work, seeking the security of jobs over the status of independent enterprise.¹⁰⁶ Other occupations of Nikkei before World War II included fishing, fish cannery work, housework and gardening.

Few were professionals.¹⁰⁷ This was so despite remarkable educational achievements. In 1940, the median education for all people of Japanese descent 25 years old and older was 8.6 years, compared

with 9.9 years for Californians and 8.6 years for the entire United States population. But these numbers included the Issei, who typically had few years of schooling; for Nisei 25 years old and older, the 1940 median education was 12.2 years in California.¹⁰⁸ Continuing discrimination made finding a job difficult for college-educated Nisei and prevented a great many from entering higher professional, white collar or skilled occupations.¹⁰⁹ By 1940, only 960 persons of Japanese ancestry were employed as professionals in California, and the main source of white collar employment was federal civil service.¹¹⁰

The estimated median income for the Nikkei in California in 1940 was \$622. This compares with a median income for the entire United States labor force of \$627 and for California of \$852 in the same year. In 1940, the Nikkei had high rates of employment: 96.7 percent of those in the labor force were employed, compared to 85.6 percent for the entire California population.¹¹¹ This higher rate may, however, include a substantial percentage of low-paid family workers.

Economic advancement for the immigrants was built on hard work, frugality and willingness to save and invest. Individual effort was aided by stable family structure and by ethnic organizations such as credit associations. Very few Japanese went on relief during the Depression. But such self-improvement frequently brought resentment from economic competitors, so that laborers and later independent farmers grew antagonistic to the Nikkei as their economic self-interest was affected.¹¹² V. S. McClatchy was particularly direct in expressing these views, arguing that Japanese immigration should be cut off because the immigrants were superior workers against whom West Coast whites could not compete.

RACE RELATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

The status and treatment of Issei and Nisei is best understood against the background of the country's history on racial questions, posed most often between blacks and whites.¹¹³ In 1940, racial segregation by law was still widespread and racial discrimination by custom and practice was found everywhere, largely accepted as part of American life. The Supreme Court still construed the constitutional promise of equal protection of the law for all Americans regardless of race, creed or color to require only that the states or the federal government provide equal though segregated facilities for the separate races. The supposed test

equality, however, was rarely met. "Scientific" studies, based in part on intelligence testing widely used by the military during World War I and in part on views of evolution, kept alive the theory that blacks were inferior and that there was a hierarchy of capability and attainment among the races. Whatever the reasons or motives, much of the country believed in fundamental racial differences and practiced those beliefs through some form of discrimination or segregation.

While racial discrimination was most deeply entrenched in the south, the problem was national. By 1940, blacks were no longer so heavily concentrated in the south. In the early 1900's mechanization of agricultural production in the south destroyed the paternal debt-perpetuating sharecropping system and displaced many blacks. During World War I, they had begun migration to the north and midwest, some gaining employment in war industries. Since immigration was restricted by law shortly after World War I, continued growth of industry, particularly during the prosperous 1920's, drew upon increasing black migration for unskilled labor. Although the Depression interrupted the process, the trend was fixed. Consequently, race relations were no longer seen as simply a southern problem. 1942 opened with race riots in Detroit, after an attempt to open a housing project for blacks in a white neighborhood.¹¹⁴

Particularly in the south, blacks, by law, learned in segregated schools, worked at segregated jobs and went home to segregated neighborhoods. They were effectively barred from voting and political activity by poll taxes, literacy tests, and a system of carefully maintained Jim Crow laws and practices. Elsewhere the color line was imposed by custom, but it was found almost everywhere. Blacks were effectively banned from most unions. In 1940 professional baseball was still a segregated sport. The federal government did virtually nothing to interfere with these state systems and social customs. When America entered World War II, blacks and whites did not mix in the armed forces; blacks served in segregated units throughout the war. The federal government accepted the predominant racial views and prejudices of the American people. And, for all its economic liberalism, the New Deal had done very little to advance equal treatment of the races.

By the time of Pearl Harbor, small signs of change could be discerned. In 1938, the Supreme Court had held that Missouri could not refuse to provide a law school for the black people of the state.¹¹⁵ The case was the first on the long road to school desegregation, but *Brown v. Board of Education* was still sixteen years away. And only when a

group led by A. Philip Randolph threatened to march on Washington did President Roosevelt establish a Fair Employment Practices Commission in January 1941 to police the practices of contractors with the federal government.

The inconsistent impulses of the nation's attitude toward blacks at the time the United States entered World War II is effectively captured in a diary entry of Henry L. Stimson, the Secretary of War. He recounted his effort to dissuade Archibald MacLeish, then working in the government's Office of Facts and Figures, from giving a speech decrying Army discrimination against blacks. Stimson's account combines an appreciation of the injustice of past treatment of blacks and the need for racial justice in the United States with the rarely-challenged assumption of the society that racial differences will persist and that whites retain inherent racial advantages. These were views born not of animus but of a recognition of what Stimson and many, many others believed was a realistic appraisal of the facts of life.

I gave [MacLeish] my life history, so to speak, on the subject because I have come in contact with this race problem in many different ways during my life. I told him how I had been brought up in an abolitionist family; my father fought in the Civil War, and all my instincts were in favor of justice to the Negro. But I pointed out how this crime of our forefathers had produced a problem which was almost impossible of solution in this country and that I myself could see no theoretical or logical solution for it at war times like these, but that we should merely exercise the utmost patience and care in individual cases. I told him of my experience and study of the incompetency of colored troops except under white officers, and the disastrous consequence to the country and themselves which they were opening if they went into battle otherwise, although we were doing our best to train colored officers. I pointed out that what these foolish leaders of the colored race are seeking is at the bottom social equality, and I pointed out the basic impossibility of social equality because of the impossibility of race mixture by marriage. He listened in silence and thanked me, but I am not sure how far he is convinced.¹¹⁶