

Memorandum, Dillon S. Myer to the Secretary of the Interior, March 6, 1944. Papers of Dillon S. Myer.

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MAR 6 1944

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY

Subject: Considerations relating to the reopening of the evacuated areas of the West Coast to loyal and law-abiding evacuees.



Dear Mr. Ickes:

The government's policy relating to the return of evacuees to California and the evacuated portions of Washington, Oregon, and Arizona is controlled by the War Department. The ultimate and satisfactory completion of the relocation job depends, in my judgment, upon reopening the evacuated zone at the earliest possible moment to the evacuees who remain in the nine relocation centers. Consequently, I recommend that negotiations be resumed with Secretary of War Stimson at an early date regarding revision of the present policy, so as to allow an orderly movement of eligible evacuees into the evacuated areas.

During the past year this matter has been discussed from time to time. Specific negotiations were carried on in writing at two different periods. Since this earlier correspondence provides background information essential for understanding the problem as it exists today I am attaching copies of it. On March 11, 1943, I wrote a confidential letter to Secretary Stimson summarizing the history and progress of the relocation program during its first year and outlining the problems then existent. I suggested three possible approaches to the problems, pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of each, and recommending that definite steps be instituted to remove restrictions from loyal American citizens and law-abiding aliens. Other recommendations included reestablishing Selective Service for Japanese-Americans at the earliest possible date and allowing certain groups to return to the evacuated area after reasonable precautions were taken to sort out those likely to be disloyal. On March 12, 1943, I wrote to Assistant Secretary of War McGloy attaching a copy of my letter to Secretary Stimson. In

this letter to Mr. McCloy I discussed the objectives of the segregation policy and indicated that the major objectives should be removal of restrictions from loyal citizens and law-abiding aliens and at the same time provision for the national security by arranging for proper disposition of those who were definitely pro-Japanese

On May 10, 1945, Secretary Stinson replied to my letter of March 11, urging that a segregation program be instituted immediately and agreeing that if these were done perhaps some action might be taken before the end of the war in regard to my other recommendations. On June 8, 1945, I replied by reviewing the different recommendations made by Secretary Stinson in relation to the segregation program, outlined some of the problems involved, and indicated that we were proceeding with such a program.

Early in October, 1945, I took up the matter further with Mr. McCloy, first in conversation and later in a letter on October 16. I outlined my belief that there was a need for joint planning and suggested that representatives of the War Department be designated to work with representatives of the War Relocation Authority to think through all the problems involved in removing or relaxing the exclusion orders, outline procedures, and define the responsibilities to be accepted by the War Department and by WRA, if and when the military situation should develop to the stage where the return of evacuees to the evacuated area seemed feasible.

Mr. McCloy sent a copy of my letter to General Emmons for comment. On November 18, 1945, Captain John Hall, of Mr. McCloy's office, sent me some excerpts from General Emmons' reply of November 10. General Emmons pointed out certain problems, indicated that the Army should not assume any responsibility for the public relations problem involved in the return of Japanese-Americans to the evacuated area, and suggested that the problem was purely civilian. He also indicated that WRA had requested the assignment of certain Army personnel to the Authority to work on the problem. On January 17, 1946, I again wrote Mr. McCloy, pointing out that there was a misunderstanding on the part of General Emmons, and again indicated that I felt that joint planning was essential but that we were not asking for a detail of Army personnel to WRA. I suggested joint effort in the planning as well as in the execution of suggested plans. I have had no further reply from Mr. McCloy.

Since my letter to Secretary Stinson was written on March 11, 1945, certain important steps have been taken. The combat team of

Japanese-American volunteers at Camp Shelby has been organized and has practically completed its training. On January 21, 1944, the War Department announced that Selective Service procedures would again be applied to citizens of Japanese ancestry who were considered eligible by the War Department. In the meantime the major part of the segregation program has been completed. Approximately 17,000 people are now living at the Tule Lake segregation center. During the next 60 to 90 days all leave clearance hearings should be completed. The evacuation proclamation has been changed to allow Japanese-American soldiers in uniform to return to the West Coast on furlough. Certain individual cases have been considered and wives of Caucasians, in particular, have been allowed to return to the Coast.



As I look ahead there seem to me now to be, as there were a year ago, three practicable plans of action available. In my letter of March 11, 1943, I discussed these as plans A, B, and C. Plan A would continue the program as it now stands with no revision in policy regarding return to the West Coast. Plan B would open the West Coast for the return of all evacuees who have not been denied leave clearance by the War Relocation Authority. Plan C would provide for the return of certain special groups of evacuees including (1) soldiers of the first World War who became American citizens by a special act of Congress because of their service in the Army, (2) wives and children and perhaps other family members of Japanese-American soldiers now in the armed forces, (3) evacuees who have been passed upon by the War Department as eligible for war plant work, and (4) perhaps other selected categories. A year ago I recommended that plan C be adopted with the suggestion that we move toward plan B as fast as the military situation would allow. I now feel that enough progress has been made in the segregation program and that the military situation has so changed that plan B should be adopted without delay.

Adoption of plan B would require development of a careful, detailed program for return to the Coast of all eligible evacuees who wished to return. If the plan were adopted I would then recommend that within a reasonable time after the excluded area was opened the residents of Tule Lake should be transferred to the custody of the Department of Justice. The War Relocation Authority could then devote full time to liquidation of the relocation centers. This would involve assisting all eligible evacuees either to return to the Coast or to relocate elsewhere. With the exclusion orders

revoke the government would be justified in doing what it cannot now do, force all eligible evacuees to relocate. If plan B could be made effective by July 1, 1944, WRA can be liquidated by July 1, 1945.

I should like to discuss this matter with you in more detail since there are many questions not covered in this memorandum and the accompanying file. Naturally, this is a subject that must be thoroughly thought through before it is given any public notice. It is the type of program to which the antagonists of WRA would seriously object. That is one of the good reasons I think it should be considered seriously.

Sincerely,


Director



Attachment

DSM: Jh

3-6-44

(Handwritten note, possibly upside down or mirrored)
D. J. Meyer (WRA)