



# The Yellow Peril?



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and friends to establish a home for a man she had never seen before, this was undoubtedly a big disappointment. Whether they have been her inner thoughts she showed none.

Instead, she went right to work to make herself a good wife. As there was an abundance of work for women in factories, laundries and as domestics in homes where lack of English was no handicap, she had little trouble finding a job. Through a woman who lived in the next apartment, she got a job in a glove factory, doing piece-work sewing up work gloves.

Together, the couple worked hard, lived frugally and saved. When the first baby came, the wife had to quit working. But by this time, they had enough money saved to put a down payment on a small rooming house. In this way, the wife stayed home with the baby, taking care of the rooming house while the husband worked out and did all the heavy work around the rooming house in his free time.

By careful, shrewd management they were able to realize a fair profit from the small business. Soon they were able to leave a larger hotel, and to quit his day-work and devoted all his free time building up this hotel business.

By the early 1880s, when I was growing up in the north section of Seattle south of N. 4th, there was a great majority of the Japanese were living under similar circumstances. Numerous small shops were being established in that section of the city, which was then called "Jap town." There were small groceries, variety shops, laundries, clothing stores and several family businesses, all catering to local residents. Most had partitioned off the back room of the shops for their living quarters.

There were, of course, a few who had managed to live away from their business centers, in what the Japanese then called the "family house." But none had the inclusion of the streets to move into Seattle's residential districts.

There may have been a few who, through the success in their business ventures, would have been able to afford homes in such districts as Laurelhurst, West Seattle, Mount Baker, Magnolia Hill or any of Seattle's more fashionable residential districts. But all the success they may have accumulated could not buy their way into these areas. The over-protective writer law of exclusion stifled any Japanese move into that realm of white society.

First-generation Japanese, known as Issei, by now had all but given up any hope of assimilation into the American society. But for the Nisei, the second generation, the sons and daughters of the immigrants, it was a different matter.

determined their lot was work and sacrifice for their children, "Kodomo-nokome," for the sake of children, because their philosophy of life.

Where they failed in a complete acceptance into American way of life, these immigrants hoped their sons and daughters would succeed. Everything they did, every card they saved were aimed at one target — to train and educate their children so they would be accepted as first-class citizens in America.

So life went on in "Jap town." The Issei plugging along diligently, only asking their children to take advantage of every opportunity America offered them and become good, hard-working citizens.

The Nisei were growing up, adopting more and more American ways, attending universities, preparing for that day when they would try their wings in American society.

Breaking through the racial barrier, they discovered was no easy matter. Many failed against this wall and only a handful succeeded. It was a discouraging battle. Progress was slow and tedious. But little by little, they let their wings stretch.

The upward trend came to a sudden, shocking halt December 7, 1941. Those Japanese Issei which fell on Pearl Harbor shattered the very foundation of the Japanese-American. Overnight, the Japanese in America who had struggled their life in their effort to become good Americans suddenly found themselves enemies of the land they had chosen to call their home. As the infamous attack developed into a full-scale war in the Pacific, Japanese living in Seattle and other West Coast cities were subjected to regulations and restrictions until they were virtual prisoners in their own homes. Many of their possessions were confiscated by the police.

It was only a matter of time before they would be driven out of their homes. In spite of all this, most of the Japanese avowed their loyalty to America. Even after their possessions were reduced to a duffel bag of bedding and one suitcase, their faith in American fair play remained unshaken.

Then the inevitable evacuation day came. I remember it too clearly. We were loaded onto a bus with our duffel bag of bedding and one suitcase, not knowing whether our gear would see us home in Seattle again.

Like a herd of dumb animals we were driven into a barbed-wire compound, hastily constructed out in the wild agricultural land of Idaho. There were many delivered there. I think the country they had adopted as their own would impress them in a concentrated camp.

It was not too long after they were confined in this camp that some young men and women, who had security clearances, were volunteering to work harvest-

ing sugar beets and potatoes to ease the labor shortage caused by many white farm workers flocking to the coast cities to take in the fabulous wages paid by shipyards and aircraft plants.

In a sense, the Japanese were back where they started. Just as these venturesome young immigrants sailed from Japan to ease American labor shortages in the 1880s, young Japanese farmers now were venturing out into the hostile towns and farms to help harvest the crop which would rot in the fields for lack of laborers.

Soon others were allowed to leave the camp to pursue various trades and professions. Perhaps, for the first time in the history of Japanese in America, the population that had been concentrated on the Pacific Coast had been diffused throughout the country. Many migrated to New York, Chicago and all over the Midwest.

Those of military age volunteered to serve in the armed forces. These Japanese-American volunteers fought valiantly for the country which had imprisoned them and their parents behind barbed-wire fences. The volunteers, making up the 442nd Central Postal Directory, the 442nd Central Postal Directory, the 442nd Central Postal Directory, came home as one of the most decorated units.

Finally, when America had atom-bombed Japan into submission, those still remaining in the camps and those of us who had settled on the outside were given freedom to return to the West Coast. Many who had found homes elsewhere chose to remain where they were. Others returned to their old stamping grounds, to start rebuilding their future.

Today, you can go up to Beacon Hill, knock on any brick rambling home, with meticulously landscaped yards, and will meet a greeted by a Nisei, lawyer, doctor, dentist, pharmacist, electrical engineer or a fairly successful businessman.

For that matter, you also might find a Japanese-American family living in any of those residential districts which were stunted by the early immigrants for fear of discrimination.

Struggle against poverty? Fight against racial discrimination? Japanese-Americans are right in the thick of it. We came up too where we are by constantly struggling and increasingly fighting for our rights as human beings.

Our way may not be as spectacular as the Mexican riots, but we think we are climbing, an inch at a time, but still climbing. Knowing this still remains a long, arduous road and we attain complete, unconditional acceptance as first-class citizens, we continue to struggle and fight toward that goal.

This may sound like an "impossible dream," but we shall keep reaching for that "unreachable" star. That, someday . . . maybe . . . just maybe . . .