THE YELLOW PERIL?

The Hard Life of Japanese Immigrants And How Their Assimilation Has Progressed

By YOICHI MATSUDA

The Seattle Times Magazine, February 9, 1934. The Seattle Times. The yellow peril had been transformed into a neon sign in Japan, where it was used to advertise various goods. In America, the yellow peril had also been transformed, but into a different form entirely. It was now a term of political and racial discrimination against Asian immigrants, most notably the Japanese.

The first mention of the yellow peril in America was made in 1868, by the journalist Horace Greeley. He wrote that the influx of Chinese immigrants was causing a “yellow peril” to America. This was the first time the term was used in a political context. The yellow peril was used to describe the perceived threat that Asian immigrants posed to American society.

The yellow peril was often used in a negative way to describe the supposed threat that Asian immigrants posed to American society. It was used to justify the exclusion of Asian immigrants from certain occupations and to support anti-immigrant legislation.

The yellow peril was also used to justify the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. The internment was seen as a way to protect American society from the supposed threat that Japanese Americans posed to national security.

Today, the term yellow peril is still used to describe the perceived threat that Asian immigrants pose to American society. However, it is now used in a more neutral way, and is often used to describe the cultural diversity of America.

WHY PERIL?

How It Looks Today

The Civil-Rights Scene

By MIHIO KATAGIRI

The cause of justice is indivisible. The only way to achieve justice is to fight for it, not just to support it. That is why I stand with Chinatown and support the struggle for justice and freedom.

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and friends to establish a home for a man she had never seen before, this was undoubtedly a big disappointment. Whatever she had 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 piecework.

Together, the couple worked hard, lived economically, 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. By this time, the wife stayed home with the baby, making it possible for the husband to work more and save in the long run.

By the early 1920s, when I was growing up in that small section of Seattle south of Yesler Way—a majority of the Japanese were living in a similar way. Numerous small shops were being established in the section of the city, which the whites called "Jap town." There were small groceries, variety stores, laundries, clothing stores, and many small 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, uptown, in what the Japanese then called the "family house." But none had the inclination or the means to move into Seattle's residential districts. There may have been a few who, through the success of their business ventures, would have been able to afford homes in such districts as Laurelhurst, West Seattle, Mount Baker, Magnolia, Bluff or any of Seattle's more fashionable residential districts. But all the wealth they may have accumulated could not buy their way into these areas. The ever-present unwritten law of exclusion still barred the Japanese move into that realm of white society.

First-generation Japanese, known as Niseis, by now had all but given up any hope of assimilation into the American society. But for the Niseis, the second generation, the sons and daughters of the immigrants, it was a different matter. These immigrant parents long ago had determined their lot was work and sacrifice for their children. "Kodomo-no-tame," for the sake of children, became their philosophy of life.

Where they failed in a complete acceptance of American way of life, these immigrants hoped their sons and daughters would succeed. Everything they did, every cent 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 Niseis plugged along diligently, only asking their children to take advantage of every opportunity America offered them and become good-law-abiding citizens.

Breaking through the racial barrier they discovered, was no easy matter. Many bucked against this wall and only a handful succeeded. It was a discouraging battle. People were suspicious and reluctant. But little by little, they felt they were climbing. This upward trend came to a sudden, shocking halt December 7, 1941. Those Japanese bombs which fell on Pearl Harbor shattered the very foundation of the Japanese-Americans. Overnight, the Japanese in America who had struggled so hard in their effort to become good Americans suddenly found themselves enemies of the state and had chosen to call their home.

As the infamous sneak 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 showed their loyalty to America. Even after their possessions were reduced to a duffle 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 duffle bag of bedding and one suitcase, not knowing whether we would ever see our home in Seattle again.

Like a herd of dumb animals we were driven into a barbed-wire compound, hastily constructed out in the wild sagebrush land of Idaho. There were many-dejected people who, unlike our ancestors, had adopted as their own would imprison them in a concentration 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 harvesting sugar beets and potatoes to ease the labor shortage caused by many white farm workers flocking to the coast cities to make the fabulous wages paid by shipyards and aircraft plants.

In a sense, the Japanese were back where they started. Just as those venturedome young immigrants sailed from Japan to ease American labor shortages in the 1800s, young Japanese-Americans now were venturing out into the hostile towns and farms to help harvest the crop which would not be 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 life 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 viciously for the country which had imprisoned them and their parents behind barbed wire. The volunteers, making up the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, came home as one of the most-decorated units.

Finally, when America had attacked 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 well might be 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 these residential districts which were shunned 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 to where we are by constantly struggling and incessantly fighting for our rights in our own way.

Our way may not be as spectacular as the blazing riots, but we think we are climbing, inch at a time, but still climbing. Knowing there still remains a long road to climb until 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." Then someday... maybe... just maybe...