

2151 Vine St.,  
Berkeley, Calif.,  
August 6, 1942.

Dear Charles Martin:

Knowing your interest in the Japanese situation, I think you'll be interested in this account of two days spent in the Japanese Relocation Camp at Manzanar, in California's isolated Owens Valley. I hope you'll regard this as a personal letter despite the mimeograph! Manzanar is administered by the War Relocation Authority under the OEM. The army is supposed to be keeping hands off; living conditions are supposed to be better; morale, improved. For Manzanar is "permanent."

This visit clarified things a lot for me. The slightly improved living conditions emphasised the fundamental wrong of the camps; showed that even in W.R.A. camps the army is dominant; made it clear that the paramount need is to change our entire course. I hope you will share your thinking with me on how we can effectuate such a fundamental change looking towards the speedy release of these innocent people.

The inane character of what is going on came into sharpest relief when we were with the children. At the "orphanage" Jimmy and Dickie and Mary and Yetsuko climbed all over me, laughing and calling - "Caboy! Caboy! give us a piggy back!" Yetsuko, about three years old, her round face framed by her straight, jet-black bobbed hair, giggled like any three year old bouncing on her "horso" (my knees.) Where a little stream flows through a shaded section four little kids played in the water. A boy in blue jeans and bright suspenders bossed the operations as the group carefully filled a bucket with stones, emptied it, filled it, emptied it again, repeating the process with all the logic of children. Beside the stream four smartly-dressed teen age girls played bridge, while nearby a young married couple had spread a blanket under a tree, talking quietly and reading the Sunday paper together.

Yet a wire fence separates these people from the road; soldiers with rifles patrol the boundary; at night, from the high watch towers, piercing daggers of light sweep across the desert.

Superficially Manzanar seems like a happy community. People are outwardly cheerful, children play. The surrounding mountain views are spectacular, some of the desert land is covered with old orchard or new lawns. The food, while varying from mess hall to mess hall, is usually adequate and often good. Fifty baseball teams "build morale," there are other sports, canteen with ice cream, pop, etc., a poor library, hospital, gardens, and a camouflage net factory.

A Manzanar resident has about as much privacy as a gold-fish, for the residents of this "boom city of 10,000" are crowded into their barracks like Harlem negroes in the slums. One young married couple share a room with an older couple and their grown son, only a curtain separating their army cots. These young people have nothing in common with the other family, one of whom tells stories about them all over the camp. The young wife said to me: "Its no easy thing to adjust to living with them in crowded quarters - and know you'll probably have to go on living like this for years."

I looked into many apartments and didn't see one that wasn't crowded. Where families were small, they shared a room with other families; where they were large, they were all jammed together in one room. "And the army tells us we can send for our furniture now. Ha ha. Where would we keep it, out in the desert?" The dislocation of family life which these conditions create will be one of the most serious long-run consequences of America's military necessity.

(over)

Manzanar is very subtle. No whips, no cursing blackshirts, no starvation, no summary executions. But if we fool ourselves thinking this isn't cruelty, we don't fool the Japanese. Talks with Sam Hohri, perched on a hospital bed, with others I knew or talked with long enough to get below the smiling exterior, showed how profound was the psychological suffering. Some are bitter, more just resigned, accepting their lot and trying to get as much physical pleasure from food, recreation, sex, etc., as possible. Both attitudes are breeding pools of fascism. Others are openly pro-Japanese and say to the others: "See? What did we tell you? Now will you believe this is a race war?"

The water of a little lake high on the Continental Divide flows both East and West. Many of the Japanese are likewise straddling two watersheds. If concentration camps continue, they will sink into the dry rot of cynicism and lack of concern, or harden with hatred and bitterness. Little children growing up race conscious and frustrated. Old people dying with the taste of uselessness in their mouths. On the other hand, if we get them out, give them some hope, they can still flow in another direction, towards tolerance, sensitivity, love of truth.

Some of our F.O.R. people are going to work in Centers like Manzanar this year - Joe and Betty Goodman, Jean McKay, Joyce Jacoby, the Marvin Crites', perhaps the Lucas. Their sacrifice, their desire to help coupled with their sympathetic ability are reassuring and inspiring. Good Caucasians are desperately needed in Manzanar, but I can think of no tougher job full of so many difficulties and moral dangers. As the army still dominates the situation, serious compromises are necessary for the pacifist to take such work; it would appear romantic to think that by going into the system a person can change it for the better. The "double standard" is everywhere: the Caucasian staff member gets better housing, better food, a car while the Japanese walk, air-conditioning at the hottest center where Japanese are dying of the heat, pay at normal rates while a Japanese woman cleans his house at \$4 per 48 hour week.

The mountains which rise precipitously above Manzanar are the highest and most beautiful in California. Pink in the early morning....harsh and white in the noontday heat....soft and inviting as the sun sets behind them.....aloof and inaccessible against the night. But the 400-odd barracks and other assorted buildings in the valley below form as depressing a sight as America offers today. They demonstrate a complete acceptance of concentration camps as a part of our American life. To change the whole system is the number one job, and though such a change may seem as remote to us as the mountains near Manzanar are to its imprisoned residents, we must tackle the job with imagination and faith. In what creative ways can we challenge the public conscience and break the sholl of indifference and hardness? I would appreciate hearing from you.

Dear Charles Martin:

Thanks for your letter, and I hope you can get the Screen Office Employees Guild working on the Japanese problem. Do you think our pamphlet, "American Refugees" will appeal to such groups? If not, do you have suggestions as to the type of literature that should be made available to them?

Cordially yours,

  
Caleb Foote