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Jiro Enomoto Graduation Address, 1943

Jiro Enomoto

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COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

The story of the building of our American empire has been one of crisis after crisis which were manifested in wars, depressions, labor and internal strife, racial prejudice, and countless other obstacles in the path of progress. These problems have confronted numerous generations of Americans and it has been the lot of each generation to solve them with a better America as their goal.

Today, we the Nisei are confronted with a problem which seems to us to be colossal in magnitude, not unlike the war raging on the four corners of the earth which exemplifies the greatest problem facing the American public today.

At no time since the momentous day of December 7, 1941, has the position of Japanese Americans in the United States been as critical as it is today. We may consider ourselves as an army - an army engaged in a struggle against those forces in the outside world which use as their weapons, prejudice, racial animosity, and hate with the ultimate purpose of depriving us of our sacred rights as Americans. Our right to live happily and freely in the post war America hinges on the way we fight this war against injustice. Although the majority of us are still confined in relocation centers all over the country the vanguard of our army has already begun to fight. How? By leaving the uninspiring life of the centers to resettle in the Eastern states of this country.

We are beginning to realize, for the present at least, that our destiny as Nisei lies in the industrial cities of the East and plains of the Midwest. Our fulfillment of this destiny lies in two steps. The primary step is relocation and the secondary step is assimilation.

When we leave the west coast and W.R.A. camps behind we must also leave behind all those actions which have tended to arouse suspicion and distrust toward the Nisei in the pre war era. Once outside we must not congregate into groups in which Nisei associate solely with Nisei thereby leaving ourselves open to further attack from our opponents. Although this may prove difficult we must realize that so long as we live in a narrow and confined world of our own making so long will a barrier exist between the people of America and ourselves. We must go into the outside world prepared to work and mingle with all the races and creeds which make up the life blood of America.

Equally important will be our ability to see the future as it really is devoid of any illusions of easy living or quick prosperity. The road we are about to take will be a difficult one and we must keep in our hearts the knowledge that only through patience, hard work, and study will we reach its end.

The 397 members of the first graduating class from Tri State High School are but a portion of the army of Nisei in the United States but before each of us lies perhaps the greatest challenge which has faced any generation of Americans in history. It is within our power to set a precedent for all of our race to follow and to help create a land free from all the ugly elements of racial hatred in which coming generations of Japanese Americans may live in peace and harmony. Toward this goal we, the American youths of Japanese ancestry, must hereby pledge our lives, our hearts, and everlasting effort.

-- Jiro Enomoto

Class of 1943

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