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Letter from Elmer L. Shirrell, Project Director Tule Lake to Staff [re: Use of the terms "Japanese", "Camps" and "Internment"], October 2, 1942

Elmer L. Shirrell

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MEMORANDUM TO: All Staff Members

Following is a copy of a memorandum from D. S. Myer received October 2, 1942:

"MEMORANDUM FOR: Regional Directors and Project Directors.

SUBJECT: Use of the terms "Japanese", "Camps" and "Internment".

The words that we use in correspondence, in reports, and in conversation with the evacuees exercise a great deal of influence in determining the attitude of the evacuees and of the American public toward the activities of the War Relocation Authority. It is, therefore, distinctly worthwhile for employees of the Authority to make an effort to avoid using certain terms that are misleading and inappropriate.

It is inaccurate to refer to the persons who have been evacuated from the West Coast as "Japanese." The Japanese are the people who live in Japan. The persons who have been evacuated from the West Coast are people of Japanese ancestry, but they are not "Japanese" in all cases. With a few exceptions, they have come to the United States because they want to live here, and two-thirds of them are citizens of the United States.

It is even more objectionable, of course, to refer to the evacuees as "Japs." They do not like the word; nor would you if they were an American of Japanese ancestry. "Japs" means the subjects of the Japanese Emperor, living in Japan.

The term "camp", when used to refer to a relocation center, is likewise objectionable. It leads people to confuse the relocation centers administered by the War Relocation Authority with the detention camps and internment camps administered by other agencies.

The evacuees are not "internees". They have not been "interned." Internees are people who have individually been suspected of being dangerous to the internal security of the United States,
who have been given a hearing on charges to that effect, and have then been ordered confined in an internment camp administered by the Army.

In lieu of the misleading, question-begging, and emotion-laden terms "Japanese", "Japs", "camps", and "internees", employees of the War Relocation Authority should refer to the persons who have been evacuated from the West Coast as evacuees, and to the projects as relocation centers. Some people have been referring to the evacuees as "colonists". This term is not objectionable, but the term "evacuee" seems preferable. Where the context makes the meaning clear, the term "resident" is, of course, also acceptable.

I should appreciate your calling the contents of this memorandum to the attention of the members of your respective staffs.

/s/ D. S. Myer
Director

Elmer L. Shirrell
Project Director