



Dr. Leonard Riggleman, president of Morris Harvey College from 1931 to 1964. University of Charleston, Schoenbaum Library

TWO AMERICAS

PART I OF II

by Kyle Warmack, Program Officer
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“... The principle on which this country was founded and by which it has always been governed is that Americanism is a matter of the mind and heart: Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry. A good American is one who is loyal to this country and to our creed of liberty and democracy. Every loyal American citizen should be given the opportunity to serve this country wherever his skills will make the greatest contribution...”

On February 3, 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued the above words as part of a larger statement concerning the enlistment of Japanese-American servicemen in the United States military. Even in retrospect, however, Roosevelt's expansive sentiment seems starkly at odds with his actions less than a year earlier, when on February 19, 1942, he issued Executive Order 9066—a now-infamous violation of constitutional rights that resulted in the incarceration of 122,000 people of Japanese descent in concentration camps.

On its face, EO 9066 did not specifically target Japanese-Americans. It merely authorized the Secretary of War to create “military areas” from which people could be expelled at a commander's discretion. 9066's three double-spaced pages are banal, bureaucratic, and relatively unthreatening. In practice, however, the order's purpose was well-understood: Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt of the Western Defense Command began removing Japanese-Americans from their homes all along the West Coast the following month.

The round-up and incarceration that followed is thoroughly documented. Using 1940 federal census data—with the help of an envoy from the U.S. Census Bureau—U.S. Army and civilian authorities scooped up Japanese-American coastal citizens with blinding speed, sent them to “assembly centers,” then to “relocation centers” in barren, unpopulated areas like Manzanar (California), Heart Mountain (Wyoming), Jerome (Arkansas), and others.

Less well-known today are the efforts of many domestic

groups sympathetic to the plight of their fellow citizens. Civic organizations that understood EO 9066 as an affront to democracy and civil rights (a view later vindicated by the U.S. Supreme Court and reparations signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s) sprang into being to assist the dislocated families in various ways, and though they could not match the bureaucratic clout of the federal juggernaut, their efforts nonetheless made a difference for many of those then wrongfully imprisoned and surveilled behind barbed wire.

One such organization, the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council (NJASRC), helped reboot the interrupted higher educations of several thousand *Nisei* (the first generation of American-born children of Japanese immigrants, who comprised the majority of Japanese-American college students at this time). NJASRC advocated staunchly and effectively for their release from camps back to colleges, albeit new ones outside the designated military areas. It was in such a form that the shadow of Japanese-American internment cast itself on West Virginia.

THE QUANDARY

There was no community of Japanese descent in West Virginia at the time. Since no internment camps were established east of the Mississippi River, to most West Virginians the plight of Japanese-Americans was probably remote and abstract. Traces of related activity in our state are therefore hard to find. To be sure, a small cadre of Axis diplomats—German, Italian, and Japanese—were held at the Greenbrier Resort during the war. Some Axis prisoners of war spent time nearby, as well as at Camp Dawson in Preston County. But these internees were not American citizens.

Ironically, Italian POWs at Camp Dawson were treated to picnics and entertainment by locals, which was a far warmer reception than what greeted prospective Japanese-American students at Morris Harvey College in 1942-43 (renamed the University of Charleston in 1978). It was here in the state's capital that a brief episode of local prejudice unfolded.

In May 1942, even before the sum total of Japanese-Americans to be incarcerated had reached their respective camps, NJASRC began finding college students a way out, inaugurating work with the War Department to list acceptable colleges and universities to which Japanese-American students could be sent. Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy signaled a softening in the Roosevelt administration's position when he stated, “Anything that legitimately can be done to compensate loyal citizens of Japanese ancestry for the dislocation to which they have been subjected, by reason of military necessity, has our full approval.”

Interested colleges could complete a NJASRC survey, the War Department would sign off, and then eligible students at the various camps could enroll at these colleges and continue their studies. The details are unclear in Morris Harvey's case, but there is every indication that its president, Dr. Leonard Riggleman, had to willingly submit the college's name for War Department consideration as a first step.

That is decidedly not how the news of Morris Harvey's acceptance is represented when first announced in the student newspaper, *The Comet*, on December 4, 1942. Rather, the phrasing makes it seem as though the college's name was drawn out of a hat. “Morris Harvey has been approved by the War and Navy departments for the purpose of student relocation

and is eligible to admit Japanese-Americans who are now at relocation centers, . . . [as] announced in a recent letter to President Riggleman,” it states. The tiny front-page article, only three sentences long, ends with a prediction that would return to haunt Riggleman: “Because of local sentiment, acceptance of a student by the college under this relocation plan is considered unlikely.”

This projected “local sentiment” was muted at first. The capital's papers appear not to have picked up on the news at all. Five days after the announcement, at an executive committee meeting of the Morris Harvey board of trustees, members voted almost unanimously to give Riggleman authority to review and approve applications from eligible *Nisei* students. There was but a single dissenting vote from member A.G. Thompson, whose objections were enumerated in the meeting minutes. Not only did Thompson object to the timing—the first anniversary of Pearl Harbor had just passed—but he also opined that the executive committee lacked the authority to grant Riggleman sole approval of Japanese-American applicants. Such power, Thompson claimed, was only for the full board of trustees to bestow.

Outnumbered, Thompson may have decided to take his objections elsewhere. On January 22, 1943, the *Charleston Daily Mail* printed an article stating the opposition of the local American Legion post (probably Brawley Post No. 20) and a Morris Harvey alumnus who deemed the plan “repugnant” in a written statement directed at Riggleman. “[As] an American citizen I feel a deep sense of outrage at the suggestion,” said the alumnus, “that the latchstring of Morris Harvey should be available to the treacherous hand that drips with the blood of Pearl Harbor.” The statement's author chose to ignore the citizenship of the students in question, along with their innocence of any involvement with the Pearl Harbor attack. Indeed, the *Daily Mail* tacitly supported this representation by quietly omitting the *Nisei* students' American citizenship entirely: the article calls them only “Nipponese” and “Japanese.”

College presidents from time immemorial have dealt with divergent public opinions from all quarters, not merely from alumni. The problem for Riggleman in this case was the identity of this particular irate alumnus: newspaperman, oil tycoon, political powerhouse, and Morris Harvey donor Walter Hallanan.

THE OPPOSITION

Walter Sims Hallanan was born in Huntington in 1890, the son of a doctor. Possessed of enormous intelligence and drive, he became a reporter for the *Huntington Herald* after graduating from Morris Harvey College, which was then located in Barboursville. When the *Herald* merged with the *Huntington Dispatch* in 1909, 19-year-old Hallanan became the *Herald-Dispatch*'s first managing editor. In 1913, he leveraged his political influence to become Governor Henry D. Hatfield's private secretary. When Hatfield left office, Hallanan was appointed the state's youngest-ever tax commissioner.

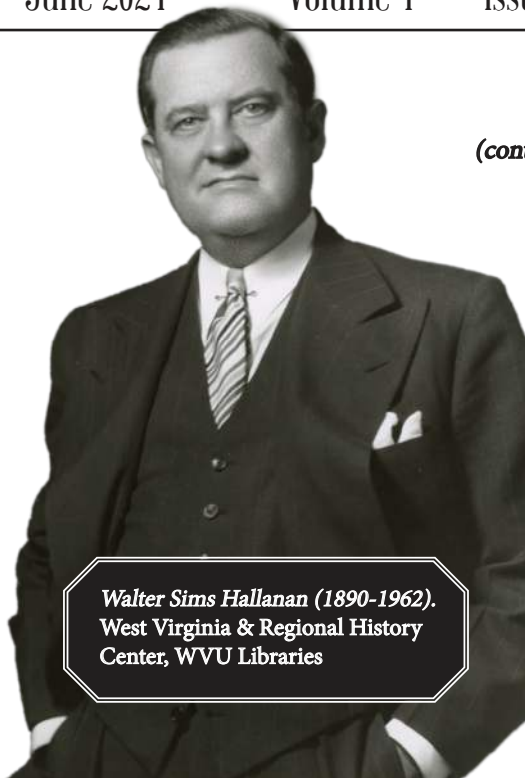
In 1923, Hallanan ventured into business on his own, founding the Plymouth Oil Company. He would be an oil man for the rest of his life, including service on the Petroleum Industry War Council during World War II, as well as its peacetime counterpart, the National Petroleum Council. The workaholic Hallanan was a natural businessman and quickly started turning a profit in his extractive vocation—the kind of profit that enabled him in 1927 to donate \$25,000 (over \$400,000 in 2024 dollars) to his alma mater, Morris Harvey College, while serving as a state senator. He continued to actively support the college even after Dr. Riggleman, who took the post of president in 1931, cut institutional ties with the Methodist Church and moved the college to Charleston in the mid-1930s.

By the time he began stirring the pot against Morris Harvey's acceptance of Japanese-American students in 1943, Hallanan had been leading the state's GOP for over a decade and was serving as the Republican National Committee's vice chairman. And Hallanan's interest in Riggleman and the college's policies was not merely the distant paternalism of a rich donor—Walter's daughter, Elizabeth “Betty” Hallanan was then a new student at Morris Harvey, where she would soon be the first woman elected as its student body president. In short, Riggleman, who was seeking funds to build a real campus after years of borrowing space in downtown Charleston buildings, could ill afford to anger a wealthy, influential man like Walter Hallanan.

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Most of Morris Harvey College's classes in the 1930s and 1940s were held in the old public library in downtown Charleston. University of Charleston, Schoenbaum Library



Walter Sims Hallanan (1890-1962). West Virginia & Regional History Center, WVU Libraries

(continued from front)

Without responding to Hallanan by name, or even addressing head-on whether the college would actually seek Nisei enrollment, Riggleman had asserted the college's patriotism, its dedication to democratic ideals, and the credentials of the proposed program itself. He further implied, again without a direct barb at Hallanan, that those raising their voices in protest were not in possession of the full facts.

Five days later the matter was concluded, at least as far as the public would ever see. On January 28, 1943, again in the *Daily Mail*, Hallanan walked back his statements and "denied having criticized the college or its president." Instead, the oil magnate said he "criticized the government proposal to educate American-Japanese students at the college." He called the proposition "outrageous," but did not launch any new invectives. Now he was fighting on Riggleman's terms, with the *Daily Mail* using Riggleman's inclusive "American-Japanese" label instead of the exclusionary "Nipponese." It is unclear whether the Charleston American Legion post ever carried out further protests, and the controversy faded from view.

RIGGLEMAN RESPONDS

Fortunately for Morris Harvey, Leonard Riggleman was no public relations slouch, either. To this day, Riggleman is the longest-serving and most defining president of the college (for whom the main building on the University of Charleston's campus is named). A Methodist minister and Morris Harvey alumnus himself, he steered the institution through the Great Depression, its move to Charleston, World War II, and all the way into the presidency of Lyndon Johnson.

Riggleman's response to Hallanan's bloody-shirt-waving critique was both swift and deft. The day following Hallanan's opening salvo in the *Daily Mail*, the same paper published portions of a statement by the Morris Harvey president. "At the request of the war relocation authority [sic] and with approval of the War Department, the Wartime Civil Control Administration and the U.S. Office of Education," Riggleman said, establishing the extensive bona fides of the student relocation program, "I have been notified that Morris Harvey college [sic] has been approved by the army and the navy as one [of about 100] of the educational institutions to which they would be willing for carefully selected American-Japanese students to be sent. I consider it a compliment to the institution to be so trusted."

This riposte turned a potential liability (relocated students) into a strength (the trust of the federal government in wartime). Even more importantly, the reverse hyphenation employed by Riggleman—"American-Japanese"—emphasizes a truer portrait of these prospective students, who were more American than Japanese, yet also corrects Hallanan's omission without a direct counterattack. But Riggleman's real masterstroke concludes the article, stating in full:

"Morris Harvey college is a product of American democracy, dedicated to the proposition that 'ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make ye free.' The college is represented on every battle front of the world by its students who are fighting that Morris Harvey and other institutions like it may survive, and that our democratic way of life may be preserved and extended. But when rumor and error parade as facts, civilization is in grave danger."

The water had not quite finished boiling within Morris Harvey itself, however. On February 9, the college's full board convened for its regular meeting and the *Nisei* issue was raised, much as executive committeeman Thompson had wished it back in December. Trustees made and seconded a motion to allow Japanese-American enrollment to proceed—but only if the board was given final approval of any applicants. President Riggleman was empowered to call a special meeting for that purpose, should the need arise. The *carte blanche* extended to Riggleman by the executive committee in December was not to be realized.

LOST OPPORTUNITIES

Curiously, the results of the vote on this motion were not recorded, but the remaining years of the war conclude the story more fully: No record exists of a *Nisei* student ever enrolling at Morris Harvey as part of the relocation program, nor do any subsequent board minutes mention the issue again. Mere days after this meeting, Riggleman was reelected by the board of trustees, and a February 17 *Charleston Gazette* article about the college's near-term priorities and programs makes no allusion whatsoever to Japanese-American student relocation—let alone to the brief public spat between Riggleman and Hallanan only weeks before. While the door technically remained open to Japanese-Americans, "local sentiment" had indeed cost Charleston the opportunity to welcome a new group of fellow citizens into their midst.

Whether any students behind barbed wire at Manzanar, Heart Mountain, or elsewhere ever seriously considered Morris Harvey will probably never be known. If they were rigorously examining their options, however, the newspaper articles labeling them "the treacherous hand that drips with the blood of Pearl Harbor" made it clear that local support for their presence was limited, at best. Given that no other West Virginia colleges or universities were on the War Department's list, *Nisei* students could be forgiven for concluding that West Virginia did not want them around.

This is an unfortunate legacy. Though many *Nisei* did encounter prejudice when they ventured out under the auspices of the NJASRC program, the organization's efforts still netted overwhelmingly positive results. Over 4,000 students ultimately continued their educations at 600 different institutions. As NJASRC lauded the widespread enrollment of students in a late-war pamphlet, it nevertheless noted, "Not many *nisei* [sic] have entered southern schools, although all but two of the southern states have accepted a few." West Virginia may have been one of these two recalcitrants.

Examining these events is not meant to single out Hallanan or Morris Harvey College for unique moral failings. The West Virginia State Federation of Labor also lobbied U.S. Senator Harley Kilgore to reject Japanese-American student resettlement. The American Legion as a whole, not merely the Charleston post, was largely opposed to the idea. And many other institutions and communities misdirected feelings of wartime patriotism against their fellow Americans in this way. Rather, uncovering this brief episode highlights a portion of West Virginia's place within the larger national response—varied and contentious as it was—to the question of whether these young citizens of a certain birthright would be allowed to pursue life, liberty, and happiness as the war raged.

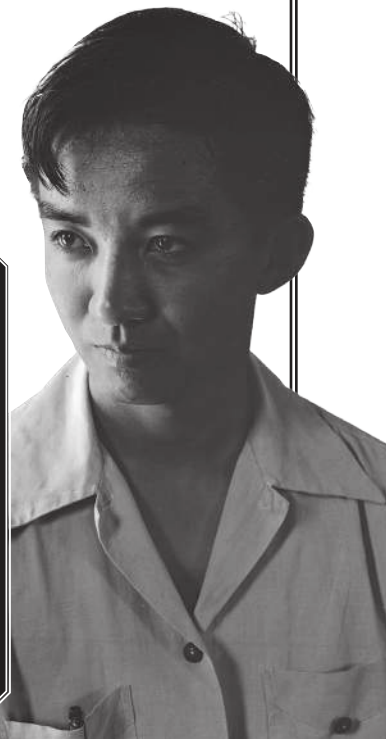
Not all was doom and gloom, however, when it came to West Virginians and their relationships with Japanese-Americans during World War II. In addition to Leonard Riggleman's democratic and tolerant attitude, other West Virginians manifested a different sort of response to the forced relocation and internment of Japanese-Americans. We look forward to sharing some of those stories in the August issue of *The Broad Side*.

The full history of NJASRC is far more complex than space allows here. For further reading on Japanese-American internment, the Council recommends the Densho Digital Repository: ddr.densho.org. Also recommended is Allan W. Austin's book, *From Concentration Camp to Campus* (University of Illinois Press, 2004).

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UNITED *WE STAND*

Harvey Akio Itano (1920-2010), photographed here in his birthplace of Sacramento, California, was a beneficiary of the NJASRC program. Itano was valedictorian of his UC Berkeley class, but could not attend graduation in 1942 due to wartime relocation (when this photo was taken). NJASRC placed him at St. Louis University, where he obtained his medical degree. He later pioneered important research on sickle cell anemia. National Archives



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