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Courageous Compassion in a Time of Terror

Roger P. Ebertz

Abstract

This article tells the stories of two Americans in the months and years following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor: Herbert Inouye, a young Japanese-American man, and Ralph L. Carr, Governor of Colorado. In doing so it provides an historical example of how a political leader can respond with courageous compassion in a time of great national fear, not unlike today.

The nation is in a state of fear. The news agencies report bombings in Europe on a regular basis. Cells are plotting against America and its allies in various parts of the world. Until now, Americans felt safe at home. Bombings exploded “over there,” not on America’s homeland. But now things have changed. The enemy has struck a deadly blow on America’s own soil. Fear spreads across America. Enemy loyalists are entering the country, the rumors say, in the guise of immigrants seeking a better life. Incensed and made fearful by what the news media and social networks are telling them, Americans want certainty that they are safe. Politicians call out for tight control of immigration. Governors refuse to welcome immigrants to their states. Homeland security must be maintained.
Am I describing the United States after the destruction of the twin towers? Or perhaps the response to the recent shootings in San Bernadino? No. I am describing the United States immediately after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Both then and now, U.S. residents were terrorized, afraid of evil lurking among them. In the wake of the Pearl Harbor bombing, many Americans, America’s media, and its politicians stereotyped all people of Japanese ancestry as spies and terrorists, loyal only to Japan. People who had come to America to seek a better life were vilified as the enemy simply because of their national background, and sometimes their religion. Shunned by neighbors, Japanese-Americans on the West Coast were forced to leave successful businesses and farms. Some said they should be sent back “home,” to a country that for many had never been their home. Ultimately, thousands of Japanese-Americans were imprisoned behind barbed wire and watched from guard towers in concentration camps across the nation’s inland.

In recent months, rank and file citizens and politicians have responded with fear to terrorist attacks both here and abroad. Some call for a ban on all Muslims entering our country. Some say immigrants should be sent “back home.” People of many nationalities and religions are harassed by their neighbors, simply because their neighbors think they are Muslims or Arabs. Some even suggest that Muslims should be put in internment camps for the sake of “national security.” The similarities between then and now are striking.

In this essay, I tell stories of two Americans in the months and years following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor: Herbert Inouye, a young Japanese-American man and Ralph L. Carr, Governor of Colorado. From the overlap of these two stories there emerges a picture of a kind of courageously compassionate leadership that is needed today, in a time of national fear.
The American Dream Disrupted

Everything Changed  Thirteen year old Herbert Inouye was enjoying a movie with a friend in Southwest Los Angeles the day Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. When the boys emerged from the theater they knew that something was very wrong. At home, Herb heard the news. Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, on U.S. territory. What would happen to legal immigrants from Japan living in the United States, like Herb’s parents? How should they respond? The family’s initial plan was to go on as if nothing had happened. It soon became obvious that this would be impossible. At school, kids who had been Herb’s friends shunned him. Fights between those of Japanese ancestry and others broke out on the school yard. Throughout the city, Japanese people were looked upon with suspicion (Inouye, “Memoirs - Part 1”).

Similar things happened across the United States. Distrust of anyone of Japanese ancestry spread like wildfire. Suggestions were made almost immediately that Japanese people on the West Coast, American citizens or not, posed a threat. Japan’s next step, they feared, would be an attack on the U.S. mainland. A rumor arose that a Japanese submarine had fired upon San Francisco (Carr, “Radio Address”). Spies were in place, the rumors said, among Japanese immigrants. Any person of Japanese descent could be a spy. The only solution, some argued, was to remove all people of Japanese heritage from the West Coast. For a brief period, Japanese people in western states were given the option to voluntarily move to inland states. Within months, however, politicians and government leaders made plans for forced removal.

Herb was born in the U.S and had never lived anywhere else. He was a U.S. citizen. Although his parents were not U.S. citizens,
they were accepted members of their community. Success for Japanese immigrants had not been easy. Inspired by a San Francisco-based organization called the Asian Exclusion League, anti-Asian violence broke out in West Coast cities. Over the first decades of the century, laws were passed restricting Asians from becoming citizens and owning land. On the national level, the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924 regulated immigration to the U.S. according to national origins (Lee). The explicit goal of these acts was to keep the proportions of ethnic groups in the United States from changing, thereby preventing the corruption of the “national character” (“Yellow Peril”). A more realistic reason for the laws was resentment at the success of Asian farmers and business people, Japanese immigrants in particular.

The Inouyes represent many Japanese immigrant families who persevered in spite of the resentment and legal discrimination. Pursuing the American dream, some were quite successful. But after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, everything changed. In a day, Herb and his family had gone from being accepted community members to enemy aliens. All because their ethnic heritage was Japanese.

The Inouye Family Moves to Colorado  

A few months after the Pearl Harbor attack, Herb’s brother Roy received a warning from the sheriff of Los Angeles County, for whom Roy was a gardener, that plans were underway to incarcerate Japanese people living on the West Coast, whether citizens or not (Inouye, “Memoirs - Part 2”). And so, on February 8, 1942, Herb’s family and several others set out in a caravan of three vehicles bound for Colorado. The night before they left, vandals broke the window of their pickup. Anti-Japanese sentiments hounded them along the way. As they crossed from California into Arizona, Army Military Police questioned their mission and threatened to search their vehicles. They were allowed to proceed across a bridge spanning the border but were told not to open the windows or throw anything out of the car as they passed. A guard saw that the pickup window
was open, blew a whistle and pointed a gun into the window. Herb was terrified. When they finally explained the window was broken, they were allowed to continue with a guard riding on the fender with his rifle, including its bayonet, pointed inside the cab. Herb writes that they were so shaken, “that we couldn’t talk for some time, even after the Military Police departed” (“Memoirs - Part 2”).

Across the border, the Arizona State Patrol escorted them into Flagstaff, allowing them only a short stop for gas and food to go. This pattern continued across Arizona and New Mexico. Local and national radio stations picked up the story of their move and followed them each step of the way. “‘A caravan of Japs passing though Winslow, Arizona . . .’ ‘Now the Jap caravan is entering Joseph City, Arizona . . .’ ‘The Jap caravan has reached Holbrook, Arizona . . .’” (Inouye, “Memoirs - Part 2”). Residents in towns and cities through which they passed lined up along the highway to jeer, throw rocks and bottles, and yell “We hate Japs,” and “Don’t stop here!” In Albuquerque they were interrogated individually by the New Mexico State Police and allowed to continue only on the condition that they not stop until they were out of the state.

On the third day, just after passing into Colorado, they spotted a Colorado Courtesy Patrol Car. Assuming they would be stopped and questioned, they pulled over to the side of the road. “When he saw us stop,” Inouye writes, “the patrolman came over to the truck, tipped his cap and said, ‘Welcome to Colorado. Governor Ralph Carr and the State of Colorado welcome you. How can I be of service to you?’” At the border of Arizona, Herb’s family had faced the barrel of a rifle. In the towns along the way they had dodged rocks and bottles. At the border of Colorado, they received a welcome (“Memoirs - Part 2”).
Who was Ralph Carr?

Formative Years Ralph Carr had grown up in Colorado, the son of an unsuccessful gold and silver prospector. He spent most of his young life in Cripple Creek, working part-time jobs to help his family make ends meet. But his mother, committed to Ralph’s education, didn’t let working keep Ralph from school. He did well in literature and writing, and learned Latin by the age of six. Graduating from Cripple Creek High School, he received a partial scholarship to the University of Colorado, where he studied journalism. Carr went on to the University of Colorado Law School, earning his way by writing for the Rocky Mountain News and the Cripple Creek Times (Schrager 111). Shortly after graduation, Carr married Gretchen Fowler, whom he met while an undergraduate (28).

The young Carr family moved to Antonito, a small town in southern Colorado, with a population of around 900 residents (“Antonito, Colorado”). As a small town attorney he found that many of his clients spoke only Spanish, so he taught himself Spanish. Ralph and Gretchen adopted two children and enjoyed live in Antonito. After eleven years, Carr’s success as an attorney led to his appointment as Conejos County Attorney, and later to his appointment to be the Assistant Attorney General of the State of Colorado. The Carr family moved to Denver (Schrager 29). As Assistant Attorney General for the State, Carr gained national notoriety by successfully defending Colorado’s water agreements before the U.S. Supreme Court (10–11). After only two years in office, Carr was chosen in 1929 by Herbert Hoover to be the U. S. Attorney for Colorado, a job which pitted him against the toughest of Colorado’s crime families (31). It was with this background of experience that Ralph Carr, in 1938, reluctantly accepted the pleas from fellow members of the Colorado Republican party to run for Governor of Colorado (16–18).
Love and Concern for People

By 1939, when he took office as governor, Ralph Carr had proven his moral character. He was a man who “loved people” (Schrager 3). Carr had a respect for the worth of human beings, whatever their ethnic origins. When he became the governor, he hired a black man to be his office receptionist. Early in his career, Carr defended Spanish speaking immigrants. As an attorney, Carr represented the down and out. “I sense their feelings when I’m around them. And I sympathize particularly with the poor devil, who, because of circumstances, including often his own misconduct and blindness, gets himself into a place where he needs a pat on the back” (qtd. in Schrager 3). As a defense attorney, he won friends for a lifetime. Later, as Governor, when Carr considered prisoners’ requests for commutation, he would travel to the state prison to meet the prisoners personally (40). Although he knew that human beings can do bad things, he was a firm believer in the American ideal that people are “innocent until proven guilty.”

Carr was also ruthlessly honest. At one point during his campaign for Governor, Carr happened upon a bar owner who offered free beer to Carr supporters. Referring back to the days when Carr was the U.S. Attorney General, Carr asked the man, “Didn’t I put you in prison?” The bar owner affirmed that it was true, but explained, “you were the only public official we weren’t able to buy. Now I’m an honest business man and I want another [honest man] in office” (qtd. in Schrager 31).

Political Convictions

As a politician, Carr defended states’ rights and opposed the proliferating size of the federal government under Franklin Delano Roosevelt (Schrager 55). He
stood for ethics in government and fiscal responsibility. Speaking to a state facing a 1.6 million dollar deficit, Carr used his inaugural address to announce massive cuts in state funding, slashing bureaucratic waste and shifting funds from special interests to the state’s general fund to meet the crisis. At the same time he opposed new taxes, especially those that would burden Colorado’s property owners (38). Carr’s political views were rooted in a strong commitment to the Constitution of the United States. As events unfolded during his second term, his commitment to human rights became even more pronounced. As his biographer, Adam Schrager, writes, “He clung to the writings of Abraham Lincoln and to his belief in the U.S. Constitution” (8).

Carr’s actions, especially his budget cutting measures, evoked strong responses from many in the state. But by courageously sticking with his convictions and pragmatically working with others, Carr managed in his first term in office to correct the state’s ailing economy and win the people of Colorado to his side. Even national observers were taking notice of his effective leadership (Schrager 42). But events beyond his control would dominate his second two-year term as governor.

After the Attack

The attack on Pearl Harbor changed Herb Inouye’s life. It changed the life of Ralph Carr as well. Although Carr had been elected on a platform of fiscal responsibility and states’ rights, it was the aftermath of the Pearl Harbor attack that defined his second term. Because anti-Japanese hatred was especially strong along the West Coast, some Japanese, like Herbert Inouye’s family, chose voluntarily to move. As more and more Japanese moved into the Mountain States, fear ran wild. “The Japanese will be living next door,” people protested. “How can our children be safe when ‘Japs’ are living right among us!” The federal government assured the people that the FBI would keep their eyes on possible saboteurs (Hosokawa 239). But fueled by the fear, and the
sensationalism of the press, white Americans were not satisfied. No person of Japanese ancestry, whether a citizen of the United States or not, could be trusted to live among them (Daniels 20).

*The Governor’s Distress* Distressed by the growing hatred of Japanese people he saw in his State, Governor Carr reminded his constituency that America was a “melting pot” of immigrants from all over the world. “We cannot test the degree of a man’s affection for his fellows or his devotion to his country by the birthplace of his ancestors. . . . If there are among us those who are wrong or who are unfriendly to our country and its people, we have men who know it and who will ferret them out” (qtd. in Schrager 90). Japanese who were citizens, Carr argued, had a right to move wherever they chose. The Constitution ensured their rights as much as any American (Carr, Letter to Thomas J. Morrissey). To violate their rights was to endanger the rights of all. Without explicitly inviting them to Colorado, Carr made it clear that he would not prevent them from coming, and even welcome them when they came. “They are as loyal to American institutions as you and I” (Carr, “Radio Address”). Yet, in spite of Carr’s efforts, Coloradoans were not convinced. Carr’s political rival, Edwin Johnson blasted Carr as a “Jap lover,” proposing that instead of welcoming the fleeing Japanese, the governor should call out the Colorado National Guard to prevent anyone of Japanese ancestry from crossing the border (Maeda).

*Resisting Racism* Facing growing pressure to move all West Coast Japanese, the federal government developed the plan to build “relocation camps” across the inland West and Midwest and began rounding up Japanese people, both citizens and non-citizens. An uproar arose from the inland states. Governor after governor made clear that the Japanese were not welcome. “The State of Wyoming,” wrote Wyoming Governor Nels Smith, “cannot acquiesce to the importation of these Japanese into our state” (qtd. in Schrager 131). The governors of Arizona, Arkansas, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, Idaho, Nevada, North Dakota,
and New Mexico all issued statements refusing the placement of Japanese people in their states. Even in Colorado, the two U.S. Senators and one of the state’s congressmen “expressed unanimous opinion against an importation of Japanese to Colorado” (Schrager 211–213). Anti-Japanese hatred was rampant across the State. One Colorado army recruiter was issuing “Japanese hunting licenses.” Still another wrote, “Let them swim back to where they came from” (qtd. in Schrager 106, 120). Native Sons of Colorado, an organization of Colorado citizens, issued a statement calling for the state to “prevent these almond-eyed sons of the Orient from being dumped on our door step” (‘Native Sons”).

In spite of the pressure, Carr refused to seek exclusion of Japanese from Colorado simply because they were Japanese. Unlike many, he recognized the complexity of the situation (Carr, “Radio Address”). While he recognized there was some danger of spy activity, he refused to treat all Japanese as suspicious simply for this reason. Over and over, he reminded those he spoke with that one could and should not judge a person by the color of his or her skin. On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, clearly designed to authorize the detention and removal of Japanese people from the West coast. Carr’s response: “Now, that’s wrong! . . . Some of these Japanese are citizens of the United States!” His biographer, Adam Schrager, reports that Carr couldn’t believe what he was reading. “Why would a man want to put those people in jail? . . . I’m not going to do it. They’re citizens of the United States” (qtd. in Schrager 133).

The Code of Humanity Carr believed that the mass detention of Japanese people was wrong. But he also made clear that if and when Japanese were brought to Colorado, he would both cooperate with the federal government and treat the Japanese with respect, whether they were citizens or not. In his speech laying out his view, Carr warned against “inflammatory statements and threats” against even “unwelcome guests.”
Referring to a statement by a young soldier that offered “the firing squad” as the proper response to the situation, Carr denounced such “reckless statements,” both because they could invoke responses from the enemy, but also because “such conduct is not approved by the code of humanity” (Carr, “Radio Address”). Although Carr was passionate about the rights of citizens, he was also committed to the dignity of all humankind.

Amache, the Inouye Family, and Governor Carr

The Inouye Families Farm in Colorado

On June 29, 1942, construction began on a “relocation camp” near Granada, Colorado. The camp, nicknamed “Amache” to distinguish it from the nearby town of Granada, eventually imprisoned more than 7,000 Japanese people, many of them U.S. citizens, during the war years (“Timeline”). The Inouye family had avoided incarceration by moving voluntarily to Colorado before the internment orders were given. While the internment camp at Granada was being built, the Inouye family turned a small abandoned farm in Colorado into a working operation. Fred Christensen, the land’s owner, welcomed his Japanese tenants. But whenever news arrived of a Japanese victory in the war, their farm was vandalized. At one point, Christensen heard that a lynching party was being organized against the family and came over with guns to protect them (Inouye, “Memoirs - Part 3”). In spite of such oppositions, the Inouye family did their best to live peaceably with their neighbors.

A Visit to Amache

At the end of the first summer, in September of 1942, Herbert took his mother to visit her sister Helen and her family at the Amache relocation center. He was
shocked and depressed. The camp was surrounded by a wire-mesh fence topped with angled barbed wire. Herbert recalls the “nauseating odor” of the fresh tar paper that covered the barracks, and remembers the 20-feet-by-20-feet units in which each family lived. Noise traveled through the thin walls. The light was too dim to read. Dining halls and lavatory facilities were an inconvenient walk, especially in the dark and cold nights of Colorado (Inouye, “Memoirs - Part 4”). In the nearby town of Granada, while some were friendly to the internees, signs in some store windows declared, “No Japs Allowed” (Maeda).

After the establishment of the center, Governor Carr sought the best for the Japanese people in Colorado. While his opponents insisted that anyone of Japanese heritage be kept under strict guard, Carr saw no harm in releasing workers to Colorado farms. A sugar beet farmer near Julesburg was experiencing a shortage of qualified labor because of the war. Carr sought to facilitate the move of a group of Amache internees to help the farmer. Governor Carr saw this as a great opportunity for both the local farmers and for the Japanese themselves (Carr, Letter to George S. Lilley).

Ralph Carr’s Political “Downfall”

In 1942, Carr was nominated as the Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate. He ran against Senator Edwin Johnson, a former Democratic governor. Carr had been popular before the war, but his defense of Japanese-Americans and other people of Japanese ancestry living in America had not been well received. In the 1942 Colorado elections, Republicans won victories across the state. The Senate race between Carr and Johnson was the sole exception. Johnson defeated Carr by a margin of only one percent (“United States”). While Carr had insisted that a person should not be discriminated against simply because of his or her ethnic heritage, Johnson had advocated excluding anyone with Japanese blood from the state. Most analysts believed it was Carr’s stance toward the Japanese that lost him the race (Hosokawa 226).
After his defeat, Ralph Carr returned to the practice of law. He found he needed a housekeeper and personal assistant. Carr offered the job to Wakako Domoto, a 27-year-old, who was just being released from Amache. Before her family had been incarcerated, Domoto served as the bookkeeper for her family’s business, graduated at the top of her high school class, and attended Stanford for two years. Her office skills were utilized at Amache. So when Ralph Carr asked the center administrators to recommend someone to assist him, they suggested Wakako Domoto. Hesitating at first, Wakako took the job. Speaking later, Ralph Carr’s son Bob told the Tokyo Broadcasting System, “Even when he saw he couldn’t stop [internment], he wanted to make sure they were treated as humanly [as possible], equal rights for all.” And as Carr’s granddaughter Katherine Lynch, later explained, “He wanted to demonstrate to Colorado, he’d trust them in his own home” (qtd. in Schrager 309).

Ralph Carr’s Compassion

Aristotle insisted that the way to really learn virtue is to observe and imitate the life of a good person (21; book 2, ch. 1). Carr was a compassionate man, from whom we can learn much. What is compassion? Here is my definition: Compassion is pain or distress a person feels in identification with the pain or distress of another, either an individual or a group, which inclines the one who feels it to respond with help.¹ Ralph Carr was clearly distressed by the treatment people of Japanese ancestry received. He was angered by the hateful words and the actions of both individuals and the government. This distress arose from his identification with those who were being harmed. Carr saw immediately that the attack on those of Japanese descent was an attack on himself. “If you harm them, you must harm me.” Ralph Carr’s identification with the distress of others may not have been highly emotional, but it was genuine. He spoke of his stand as “the application of the Golden Rule to a very trying problem of life” (qtd. in Schrager 223). It was
based, among other things, on a strong sense that human beings share a common value, and that the violation of someone else’s value is a violation of one’s own value. Finally, Carr’s experience of compassion inclined him to respond on behalf of those who were being harmed.

**Ralph Carr’s Courage**

Compassion may incline one to act, but other factors may get in the way. One of these factors is fear and the threat of harm to oneself. It is here that we see the importance of *courageous* compassion. Nancy L. Schwartz has proposed that “courage involves acting well in the face of danger to the self” (341).² Schwartz’s “practical definition” is helpful in summarizing the courage of Ralph Carr. He was motivated to act on behalf of Japanese people living in the United States. But acting well brought danger to himself. On a personal level, Carr faced the real possibility of physical attack, and even death, at the hand of those who opposed him. On a political level, he faced the danger of personal attack and political defeat. And finally, on the social and political level, he had to weigh the dangers of allowing Japanese people to settle in the state. Yet, in the face of all three of these types of danger, to his person, to his political career, and to his constituents, Carr knew he had to do what was right, and he had the courage to do it.

Aristotle suggests that courage is a “mean” between excessive fear and excessive confidence. It is not that a courageous person does not fear. The courageous person recognizes the dangers she faces. But she faces these dangers in the right way, in a balanced way. As Aristotle writes, “a person is courageous who endures and fears the things he should, in the way he should, when he should, and is similarly confident, since a courageous person feels and acts as things merit and in the way reason prescribes” (47; book 3, ch.7). Aristotle’s words are a fitting description of Ralph
Carr. He did not minimize the dangers, but he acted as the situation merited and as reason prescribed.

The Need for Courageous Compassion Today

We live in a time of fear and terror. Shootings and bombings are reported abroad and at home. Rumors of terrorists among us are spread through the media and social networks. People fear the woman wearing the hijab, or the man who speaks with an Arab accent. Racist and hateful words are spoken, violent actions are perpetrated, against those we perceive as looking like the enemy. Our politicians do little to calm our fears. Instead they encourage them and manipulate us on the basis of them. They win our votes by pandering to our fear.

We live in a time when displaced people all around the world are searching for a place to live. Migrants fleeing sectarian wars in nations like Syria, Afghanistan, and Eritrea. Both Muslims and Christians flee violent persecution. They want to find a place to live in peace. And yet, because of their religion, or because of their ethnic heritage, they are feared and excluded. Reflecting the fears of their constituencies, leaders of nations speak out to bar their immigration. Within the United States, governors of state after state speak out against immigrants coming to their states. Presidential candidates propose walls along borders to exclude people trying to enter the country from Mexico and even suggest rounding up Muslims and putting them in internment camps. Politicians cry out that if we allow them to come, we will destroy our “national character” as a nation.

We live in a time when there is a tremendous need for courageous compassion. Political, religious, economic, and ecological factors have all contributed to upheaval in our world and tremendous suffering among our fellow human beings around the globe. We face a choice. Will we welcome these fellow citizens of the world with compassion, or will we exclude them
out of fear? Will we act out of fear, isolating ourselves with walls and barriers, or will be face our fears rationally, as the situation merits?

In reflecting back on his family’s move to Colorado, Herb Inouye remembers his welcome to Colorado. “Governor Ralph Carr and the State of Colorado welcome you. How can I be of service to you?” Herbert could hardly believe what he heard, wondering what sort of man Ralph Carr must be. “What a noble and honorable man he must be? This one act,” he writes, “changed my whole perspective on true Americanism and restored my faith in the United States of America” (“Memoirs - Part 2”). In the last fifty years, long after his death, Ralph Carr has been recognized by many groups for the courageous compassonately person he was. In December of 1999, the Denver Post named Carr Colorado’s Person of the Century.

How will we restore the world’s respect for the United States? How can we restore America to its greatness? By militaristic bravado? By building walls and excluding others? Or by becoming people of courageous compassion, committed to treating all people with respect, finding ways to help the homeless, the migrants, the oppressed, facing dangers with balance and reason? May we have the courageous compassion to do the right thing.
Notes

1 There is a rich discussion of the nature of compassion in the philosophical literature. A seminal article referred to elsewhere in other essays in this issue is Nussbaum. My own thinking was also stimulated by Cates, Crisp, Frakes, and Snow.

2 As with compassion, there is a rich literature in the journals about the concept of courage. In addition to the Schwartz article referred to here, I have found the articles by Rorty and Neville helpful.

Works Cited


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