Success Story, Japanese-American Style
By WILLIAM PETTERSEN
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By WILLIAM PETERSEN

ASKED which of the country's ethnic minorities has been subjected to the most discrimination and the worst injustices, very few persons would even think of answering: "The Japanese Americans." Yet, if the question refers to persons alive today, that may well be the correct reply. Like the Negroes, the Japanese have been the object of color prejudice. Like the Jews, they have been feared and hated as hyperefficient competitors. And, more than any other group, they have been seen as the agents of an overseas enemy. Conservatives, liberals and radicals, local sheriffs, the Federal Government and the Supreme Court have cooperated in denying them their elementary rights—most notoriously in their World War II evacuation to internment camps.

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Generally this kind of treatment, as we all know these days, creates what might be termed "problem minorities." Each of a number of interrelated factors — poor health, poor education, low income, high crime rate, unstable family pattern, and so on and on — reinforces all of the others, and together they make up the reality of slum life. And by the "principle of cumulation," as Gunnar Myrdal termed it in "An American Dilemma," this social reality reinforces our prejudices and is reinforced by them. When whites defined Negroes as inherently less intelligent, for example, and therefore furnished them with inferior schools, the products of these schools often validated the original stereotype.

Once the cumulative degradation has gone far enough, it is notoriously difficult to reverse the trend. When new opportunities, even equal opportunities, are opened up, the minority's reaction to them is likely to be negative—either self-defeating apathy or a hatred so all-consuming as to be self-destructive. For all the well-meaning programs and countless scholarly studies now focused on the Negro, we barely know how to repair the damage that the slave traders started.

The history of Japanese Americans, however, challenges every such generalization about ethnic minorities, and for this reason alone deserves far more attention than it has been given. Barely more than 20 years after the end of the wartime camps, this is a minority that has risen above even prejudiced criticism. By any criterion of good citizenship that we choose, the Japanese Americans are better than any other group in our society, including native-born whites. They have established this remarkable record, moreover, by their own almost totally unaided effort. Every attempt to hamper their progress resulted only in enhancing their determination to succeed. Even in a country whose patron saint is the Horatio Alger hero, there is no parallel to this success story.

PRESENT—Two decades after the war, Japanese Americans—here, in Los Angeles' "Little Tokyo" and on California farms—lead a generally affluent and, for the most part, highly Americanized life: "Even in a country whose patron saint is the Horatio Alger hero, there is no parallel to their success story."

PAST—In World War II, 117,116 Japanese Americans — citizens and noncitizens alike — were taken from their homes and held in internment camps. Above, an internee's sketch of a kindergarten class.

FROM only 148 in 1880 to almost 140,000 in 1930 the number of Japanese in the United States grew steadily and then remained almost constant for two decades. Then in 1960, with the more than 200,000 Japanese in Hawaii added to the national population, the total reached not quite 475,000. In other words, in prewar years Japanese Americans constituted slightly more than 0.1 per cent of the national population. Even in California, where then as now most of the mainland Japanese lived, they made up only 2.1 per cent of the state's population in 1920.

Against the perspective of these minuscule percentages, it is difficult to recapture the paranoiac flavor of the vast mass of anti-Japanese agitation in the first decades of this century. Prejudice recognized no boundaries of social class; the labor-dominated Asiatic Exclusion League lived in strange fellowship with the large California landowners. The rest of the nation gradually adopted what was termed "the California position" in opposing "the Yellow Peril" until finally Asians were totally excluded by the immigration laws of the nineteen-twenties.

Until the exclusion law was enacted, Japanese businesses were picketed. In San Francisco, Japanese were assaulted on the streets and, if they tried to protect themselves, were arrested for disturbing the peace. Since marriage across racial lines was prohibited in most Western states, many Japanese lived for years with no normal family life (there were almost 25 males to one female in 1900, still seven to one in 1910, two to one in 1920). Until 1952 no Japanese could be naturalized, and as noncitizens they were denied access to any urban professions that required a license and to the ownership of agricultural land.

But no degradation affected this people as might have been expected. Denied citizenship, the Japanese were exceptionally law-abiding alien residents. Often unable to marry for many years, they developed a family life both strong and flexible enough to help their children cross a wide cultural gap. Denied access to many urban jobs, both white-collar and manual, they undertook menial tasks with such perseverance that they achieved a modest success. Denied ownership of the land, they acquired control through one or another subterfuge and, *(Continued on Page 33)*

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by intensive cultivation of their small plots, helped convert the California desert into a fabulous agricultural land.

THEN, on Feb. 9, 1942, a bit more than two months after war was declared, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, giving military commanders authority to exclude any or all persons from designated military areas. The following day, Lieut. Gen. John L. DeWitt, head of the Western Defense Command, defined the relevant area as major portions of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, California, Nevada and Utah.

In this whole vast area all alien Japanese and native-born citizens of any degree of Japanese descent — 117,116 persons in all—were subjected in rapid succession to a curfew, assembly in temporary camps within the zone and evacuation from the zone to "relocation centers." Men, women and children of all ages were uprooted, a total of 24,712 families. Nearly two-thirds were citizens, because they had been born in this country; the remainder were aliens, barred from citizenship.

"Some lost everything they had; many lost most of what they had," said the official report of the War Relocation Authority. The total property left behind by evacuees, according to the preliminary W.R.A. estimate, was worth $200-million. After the war, the Government repaid perhaps as much as 30 or 40 cents on the dollar. The last claim was settled only in November, 1965, after two out of the three original plaintiffs had died.

What conceivable reason could there have been for this forced transfer of an entire population to concentration camps, where they lived surrounded by barbed wire and watched by armed guards? The official explanation was that "the evacuation was impelled by military necessity," for fear of a fifth column. As General DeWitt said: "A Jap's a Jap. It makes no difference whether he is an American citizen or not. . . . They are a dangerous element, whether loyal or not."

The cases of injustice are too numerous to count. One of the more flagrant was that of the so-called renunciants. After years of harassment, a number of Japanese Americans requested repatriation to Japan, and they were all segregated in the camp at Tule Lake, Calif. On July 1, 1944, Congress passed a special law by which Japanese Americans might renounce their American citizenship, and the camp authorities permitted tough Japanese nationalists seeking converts to proselytize and terrorize the other inmates. Partly as a consequence, 5,371 American-born citizens signed applications renouncing their citizenship. Many of them were minors who were pressured by their distraught and disillusioned parents; their applications were illegally accepted by the Attorney General. A small number of the renunciants were removed to Japan and chose to acquire Japanese citizenship. A few cases are still pending, more than 20 years after the event. For the large majority, the renunciation was voided by the U.S. District Court in San Francisco after five years of litigation.

WHO are the Japanese Americans; what manner of people were subjected to these injustices? Seen from the outside, they strike the white observer as a solidly unitary group, but even a casual acquaintanceship reveals deep fissures along every dimension.

The division between generations, important for every immigrant group, was crucial in their case. That the issei, the generation born in Japan, were blocked from citizenship and many of the occupational routes into American life meant that their relations were especially difficult with the nisei, their native-born sons and daughters. Between these first and second generations there was often a whole generation missing, for many of the issei married so late in life that in age they might have been their children's grandparents. This was the combination that faced General DeWitt's forces—men well along in years, with no political power and few ties to the general community, and a multitude of school children and youths, of whom the oldest had barely reached 30.

The kibei, American-born Japanese who had spent some time as teen-agers being educated in Japan, were featured in racist writings as an especially ominous group. For some, it is true, the sojourn in the land of their fathers fashioned their parents' sentimental nostalgia into committed nationalism. In many instances, however, the effect of sending a provincial boy alone into Tokyo's tumultuous student life was the contrary. Back in the United States, many kibei taught in the Army language schools or worked for the O.S.S. and other intelligence services.

Camp life was given a special poignancy by the Defense Department's changing policy concerning nisei. Until June, 1942, Japanese Americans were eligible for military service on the same basis as other young men. Then, with the evacuation completed and the label of disloyal thus given official sanction, all nisei were put in class IV-C—enemy aliens. The Japanese American Citizens League (J.A.C.L.), the group's main political voice, fought for the right of the American citizens it represented to volunteer, and by the end of the year won its point.

Most of the volunteers went into a segregated unit, the 442d Infantry Combat Team, which absorbed the more famous 100th Battalion. In the bloody battles of Italy, this battalion alone collected more than 1,000 Purple Hearts, 11 Distinguished Service Crosses, 44 Silver Stars, 31 Bronze Stars and three Legion of Merit ribbons. It was one of

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Not Guilty

Hawaii's Japanese in World War II were spared the injustices inflicted upon mainland Japanese Americans. Immediately after Pearl Harbor, there were, inevitably, allegations that they had sabotaged the defenses there. These rumors were investigated in full four times over—by Honolulu's chief of police, by the Secretary of War, by the director of the F.B.I. and, finally and most completely, by John A. Burns, now Governor of Hawaii and then a Honolulu police lieutenant in charge of counter-espionage and a liaison officer with military intelligence—and proved completely false. But the lesson of this quadruple vindication was lost in the morass of mainland racial prejudice.—W.P.

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the most decorated units in all three services.

With this extraordinary record building up, the Secretary of War announced another change of policy: the nisei in camps became subject to the draft. As District Judge Louis Goodman declared, it was "shocking to the conscience that an American citizen be confined on the ground of disloyalty, and then, while so under duress and restraint, be compelled to serve in the armed forces, or be prosecuted for not yielding to such compulsion." He released 26 nisei tried in his court for refusing to report for induction.

The Government's varying policy posed dilemmas for every young man it affected. Faced with unreasoning prejudice and gross discrimination, some nisei reacted as one would expect. Thus, several hundred young men who had served in the armed forces from 1940 to 1942 and then had been discharged because of their race were among the renunciants at Tule Lake. But most accepted as their lot the overwhelming odds against them and bet their lives, determined to win even in a crooked game.

In John Okada's novel "No-No Boy," written by a veteran of the Pacific war about a nisei who refused to accept the draft, the issue is sharply drawn. The hero's mother, who had raised him to be a Japanese nationalist, turns out to be paranoid. Back in Seattle from the prison where he served his time (he was not tried in Judge Goodman's court), the hero struggles to find his way to the America that rejected him and that he had rejected. A nisei friend who has returned from the war with a wound that eventually kills him is pictured as relatively well-off. In short, in contrast to the works of James Baldwin, this is a novel of revolt against revolt.

THE key to success in the United States, for Japanese or anyone else, is education. Among persons aged 14 years

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or over in 1960, the median years of schooling completed by the Japanese were 12.2, compared with 11.1 years by Chinese, 11.0 by whites, 9.2 by Filipinos, 8.6 by Negroes and 8.4 by Indians. In the nineteen-thirties, when even members of favored ethnic groups often could find no jobs, the nisei went to school and avidly prepared for that one chance in a thousand. One high school boy used to read his texts, underlining important passages, then read and underline again, then read and underline a third time. "I'm not smart," he would explain, "so if I am to go to college, I have to work three times as hard."

From their files, one can derive a composite picture of the nisei who have gone through the Berkeley placement center of the University of California over the past 10 years or so. Their marks were good to excellent but, apart from outstanding individuals, this was not a group that would succeed solely because of extraordinary academic worth. The extracurricular activities they listed were prosaic — the Nisei Student Club, various fraternities, field sports, only occasionally anything even as slightly off the beaten track as jazz music.

Their dependence on the broader Japanese community was suggested in a number of ways: Students had personal references from nisei professors in totally unrelated fields, and the part-time jobs they held (almost all had to work

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G.I.'S—In World War II, all nisei, though native-born citizens, were first classified as enemy aliens. They had to fight for the right to serve. *Below:* Members of the much-decorated 442d Infantry Combat Team and 100th Battalion, wounded in France and Italy. *Left:* A nisei veteran, home safely, is welcomed by his father.

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their way through college) were typically in plant nurseries, retail stores and other traditionally Japanese business establishments.

Their degrees were almost never in liberal arts but in business administration, optometry, engineering, or some other middle-level profession. They obviously saw their education as a means of acquiring a salable skill that could be used either in the general commercial world or, if that remained closed to Japanese, in a small personal enterprise. Asked to designate the beginning salary they wanted, the applicants generally gave either precisely the one they got in their first professional job or something under that.

To sum up, these nisei were squares. If they had any doubt about the transcendental values of American middle-class life, it did not reduce their determination to achieve at least that level of security and comfort. Their education was conducted like a military campaign against a hostile world; with intelligent planning and tenacity, they fought for certain limited positions and won them.

The victory is still limited: Japanese are now employed in most fields but not at the highest levels. In 1960, Japanese males had a much higher occupational level than whites —56 per cent in white-collar jobs as compared with 42.1 per cent of whites, 26.1 per cent classified as professionals or technicians as compared with 12.5 per cent of whites, and so on. Yet the 1959 median income of Japanese males was only $4,306, a little less than the $4,338 earned by white males.

FOR all types of social pathology about which there are usable data, the incidence is lower for Japanese than for any other ethnic group in the American population. It is true that the statistics are not very satisfactory, but they are generally good enough for gross comparisons. The most annoying limitation is that data are often reported only for the meaninglessly generalized category of "nonwhites."

In 1964, according to the F.B.I.'s "Uniform Crime Reports," three Japanese in the whole country were arrested for murder and three for manslaughter. Two were arrested for rape and 20 for assault. The low incidence holds also for crimes against property: 20 arrests for robbery, 192 for breaking and entering, 83 for auto theft, 251 for larceny.

So far as one can tell from the few available studies, the Japanese have been exceptional in this respect since their arrival in this country. Like most immigrant groups, nisei generally have lived in neighborhoods characterized by overcrowding, poverty, dilapidated housing, and other "causes" of crime. In such a slum environment, even though surrounded by ethnic groups with high crime rates, they have been exceptionally law-abiding.

Prof. Harry Kitano of U.C.L.A., has collated the probation records of the Japanese in Los Angeles County. Adult crime rates rose there from 1920 to a peak in 1940 and then declined sharply to 1960; but throughout those 40 years the rate was consistently under that for non-Japanese. In Los Angeles today, while the general crime rate is rising, for Japanese adults it is continuing to fall.

According to California life tables for 1959-61, Japanese Americans in the state had a life expectation of 74.5 years (males) and 81.2 years (females). This is six to seven years longer than that of California whites, a relatively favored group by national standards. So far as I know, this is the first time that any population anywhere has attained an average longevity of more than 80 years.

FOR the sansei — the third generation, the children of nisei—the camp experience is either a half-forgotten childhood memory or something not quite believable that happened to their parents. They have grown up, most of them, in relatively comfortable circumstances, with the American element of their composite subculture becoming more and more dominant. As these young people adapt to the general patterns, will they also—as many of their parents fear —take over more of the faults of American society? The delinquency rate among Japanese youth today is both higher than it used to be and is rising—though it still remains lower than that of any other group.

Frank Chuman, a Los Angeles lawyer, has been the counsel for close to 200 young Japanese offenders charged with everything from petty theft to murder. Some were organized into gangs of 10 to 15 members, of whom a few were sometimes Negroes or Mexicans. Nothing obvious in their background accounts for their delinquency. Typically, they lived at home with solid middle-class families in pleasant neighborhoods; their brothers and sisters were not in trouble. Yori Wada, a nisei member of the California Youth Authority, believes that some of these young people are in revolt against the narrow confines of the nisei subculture while being unable to accept white society. In one extreme instance, a sansei charged with assault with the intent to commit murder was a member of the Black Muslims, seeking an identity among those extremist Negro nationalists.

In Sacramento, a number of sansei teen-agers were arrested for shoplifting—something new in the Japanese community but, according to the police, "nothing to be alarmed at." The parents disagreed. Last spring, the head of the local J.A.C.L. called a conference, at which a larger meeting was organized. Between 400 and 500 persons—a majority of the Japanese adults in the Sacramento area —came to hear the advice of such professionals as a psychiatrist and a probation officer. A permanent council was established, chaired jointly by a minister and an optometrist, to arrange for whatever services might seem appropriate when parents were themselves unable (or unwilling) to control their offspring. According to several prominent Sacramento nisei, the publicity alone was salutary, for it brought parents back to a sense of their responsibility. In the Japanese communities of San Francisco and San Jose, there were similar responses to a smaller number of delinquent acts.

Apart from the anomalous delinquents, what is happening to typical Japanese Americans of the rising generation? A dozen members of the Japanese student - club on the Berkeley campus submitted to several hours of my questioning, and later I was one of the judges in a contest for the club queen.

I found little that is newsworthy about these young people. On a campus where to be a bohemian slob is a mark of distinction, they wash themselves and dress with unostentatious neatness. They are mostly good students, no longer concentrated in the utilitarian subjects their fathers studied but often majoring in liberal arts. Most can speak a little Japanese, but very few can read more than a few words. Some are opposed to intermarriage, some not; but all accept the American principle that it is love between the partners that makes for a good family. Conscious of their minority status, they are seeking a means both of preserving elements of the Japanese culture and of reconciling it fully with the American one; but their effort lacks the poignant tragedy of the earlier counterpart.

Only four sansei were among the 779 arrested in the Berkeley student riots, and they are as atypical as the Sacramento delinquents. One, the daughter of a man who 20 years ago was an officer of a Communist front, is no more a symbol of generational revolt than the more publicized Bettina Aptheker.

It was my impression that these few extremists constitute a special moral problem for many of the sansei students. Brazenly to break the law invites retribution against the whole community, and thus is doubly wrong. But such acts, however one judges them on other grounds, also symbolize an escape from the persistent concern over "the Japanese image." Under the easygoing middle-class life, in short, there lurks still a wariness born of their parents' experience as well as a hope that they really will be able to make it in a sense that as yet has not been possible.

THE history of the United States, it is sometimes forgotten, is the history of the diverse groups that make up our population, and thus of their frequent discord and usual eventual cooperation. Each new nationality that arrived from Europe was typically met with such hostility as, for example, the anti-German riots in the Middle West a century ago, the American Protective Association to fight the Irish, the national-quota laws to keep out Italians, Poles and Jews. Yet, in one generation or two, each white minority took advantage of the public schools, the free labor market and America's political democracy; it climbed out of the slums, took on better-paying occupations and acquired social respect and dignity.

This is not true (or, at best, less true) of such "nonwhites" as Negroes, Indians, Mexicans, Chinese and Filipinos. The reason usually given for the difference is that color prejudice is so great in this country that a person who carries this visible stigma has little or no possibility of rising. There is obviously a good deal of truth in the theory, and the Japanese case is of general interest precisely because it constitutes the outstanding exception.

What made the Japanese Americans different? What gave them the strength to thrive on adversity? To say that it was their "national character" or "the Japanese subculture" or some paraphrase of these terms is merely to give a label to our ignorance. But it is true that we must look for the persistent pattern these terms imply, rather than for isolated factors.

The issei who came to America were catapulted out of a homeland undergoing rapid change — Meiji Japan, which remains the one country of Asia to have achieved modernization. We can learn from such a work as Robert Bellah's "Tokugawa Religion" that diligence in work, combined with simple frugality, had an almost religious imperative, similar to what has been called "the Protestant ethic" in Western culture. And as such researchers as Prof. George DeVos at Berkeley have shown, today the Japanese in Japan and Japanese Americans respond similarly to psychological tests of "achievement orientation," and both are in sharp contrast to lower-class Americans, whether white or Negro.

The two vehicles that transmitted such values from one generation to the next, the family and religion, have been so intimately linked as to reinforce each other. By Japanese tradition, the wishes of any individual counted for far less than the good reputation of his family name, which was worshiped through his ancestors. Most nisei attended Japanese-language schools either one hour each weekday or all Saturday morning, and of all the *shushin*, or maxims, that they memorized there, none was more important than: "Honor your obligations to parents and avoid bringing them shame." Some rural parents enforced such commandments by what was called the *moxa* treatment—a bit of incense burned on the child's skin. Later, group ridicule and ostracism, in which the peers of a naughty child or a rebellious teen-ager joined, became the usual, very effective control.

This respect for authority is strongly reinforced in the Japanese-American churches, whether Buddhist or Christian. The underlying similarity among the various denominations is suggested by the fact that parents who object strongly to the marriage of their offspring to persons of other races (including, and sometimes even especially, to Chinese) are more or less indifferent to interreligious marriages within the Japanese groups. Buddhist churches have adapted to the American scene by introducing Sunday schools, Boy Scouts, a promotional effort around the theme "Our Family Attends Church Regularly," and similar practices quite alien to the old-country tradition.

On the other hand, as I was told not only by Buddhists but also by nisei Christian ministers, Japanese Americans of whatever faith are distinguished by their greater attachment to family, their greater respect for parental and other authority. Underlying the complex religious life, that is to say, there seems to be an adaptation to American institutional forms with a considerable persistence of Buddhist moral values.

IT is too easy, however, to explain after the fact what has happened to Japanese Americans. After all, the subordination of the individual to the group and the dominance of the husband-father typified the family life of most immigrants from Southern or Eastern Europe.

Indeed, sociologists have fashioned a plausible theory to explain why the rate of delinquency was usually high among these nationalities' second generation, the counterpart of the nisei. The American-born child speaks English without an accent, the thesis goes, and is probably preparing for a better job and thus a higher status than his father's. His father, therefore, finds it difficult to retain his authority, and as the young man comes to view him with contempt or shame, he generalizes this perception into a rejection of all authority.

Not only would the theory seem to hold for Japanese Americans but, in some respects, their particular life circumstances aggravated the typical tensions. The extreme differences between American and Japanese cultures separated the generations more than in any population derived from Europe. As one issei mother remarked to the anthropologist John Embree: "I feel like a chicken that has hatched duck's eggs."

Each artificial restriction on the issei—that they could not become citizens, could not own land, could not represent the camp population to the administrators — meant that the nisei had to assume adult roles early in life, while yet remaining subject to parental control that by American standards was extremely onerous. This kind of contrast between responsibility and lack of authority is always galling; by the best theories that sociologists have developed we might have expected not merely a high delinquency rate among nisei but the highest. The best

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GENERATIONS—*Right:* The wife of a prosperous businessman, an active clubwoman and Brownie leader, Mrs. George T. Aratani is a second-generation Japanese American, or nisei. Her garden overlooks a lake in the Hollywood Hills. *Above:* Violinist Roy Tanabe, 27, belongs to the third generation, the sansei. He is the first Japanese to play with a major American symphony orchestra, the Los Angeles Symphony.

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theories, in other words, do not apply.

One difficulty, I believe, is that we have accepted too readily the common-sense notion that the minority whose subculture most closely approximates the general American culture is the most likely to adjust successfully. Acculturation is a bridge, and by this view the shorter the span the easier it is to cross it. But like most metaphors drawn from the physical world, this one affords only a partial truth about social reality.

The minority most thoroughly imbedded in American culture, with the least meaningful ties to an overseas fatherland, is the American Negro. As those Negro intellectuals who have visited Africa have discovered, their links to "negritude" are usually too artificial to survive a close association with this—to them, as to other Americans—strange and fascinating continent. But a Negro who knows no other homeland, who is as thoroughly American as any Daughter of the American Revolution, has no refuge when the United States rejects him. Placed at the bottom of this country's scale, he finds it difficult to salvage his ego by measuring his worth in another currency.

The Japanese, on the contrary, could climb over the highest barriers our racists were able to fashion in part because of their meaningful links with an alien culture. Pride in their heritage and shame for any reduction in its only partly legendary glory—these were sufficient to carry the group through its travail. And I do not believe that their effectiveness will lessen during our lifetime, in spite of the sansei's exploratory ventures into new corners of the wider American world. The group's cohesion is maintained by its well-grounded distrust of any but that small group of whites—a few church organizations, some professors, and particularly the A.C.L.U. in California—that dared go against the conservative-liberal-radical coalition that built, or defended, America's concentration camps.

The Chinese in California, I am told, read the newspapers these days with a particular apprehension. They wonder whether it could happen here—again.

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