

The Internment of the Japanese during World War Two

by Phillip W. Weiss

On December 7, 1941, Japan launched a surprise attack on the U. S. military base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, causing more than 2,400 deaths and inflicting major damage to U. S. naval and air forces in the Pacific Ocean. This attack was part of a massive Japanese offensive stretching from the central Pacific to India. The next day, December 8, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, his anger and indignation undisguised, asked Congress for a declaration of war against Japan; the president's request was quickly granted. In his message to Congress, President Roosevelt said that December 7, 1941, was a "date that will live in infamy." A complex set of factors had led up to the decision by the Japanese to attack.

In the United States, the immediate public response to the Pearl Harbor attack was one of fear and hysteria bordering on panic. With much of the American Pacific fleet destroyed and with the Japanese on the march, the West coast of the United States seemed vulnerable to attack. The entire country was in a state of alarm. *The Washington Times Herald* reported: "Japanese Open War on U. S. Fleets in Battle Off Honolulu." *The Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph* reported: "U.S. Loss Heavy In Jap 'Blitz' on Hawaiian Islands." *The Brooklyn Eagle* reported: "N.Y.-Bound Enemy Planes Alarm Entire Northeast." *The Albany Times Union* reported, in a war extra: "Japs Try to Bomb Coast; Routed Off Golden Gate." *The Baltimore News-Post* reported: "N.Y. Warned Enemy Planes Are Near City."

On December 11, Japan's allies, Germany and Italy, declared war on the United States.

In the United States, the rounding up of aliens commenced immediately. On December 9 the *Brooklyn Eagle* reported that nearly 400 Germans and Italians had been detained the night before, bringing the total number of aliens seized nationwide to 1,300.

In Hawaii, the territorial governor proclaimed martial law and the army reported that certain enemy agents had been apprehended and detained and that a party of saboteurs had been landed in northern Oahu.

After war was declared, the 5,000 soldiers of Japanese ancestry serving in the U. S. military were immediately reclassified as enemy aliens, including those who were American citizens, and most were discharged from the military.

Fearing that the Japanese community could be harboring saboteurs and spies, the Secretary of War requested authorization from the President of the United States to remove persons of Japanese ancestry, including those with American citizenship, to detention camps. On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 which authorized and directed

the Secretary of War, and the Military Commanders whom he may from time to time designate, whenever he or any designated Commander deems such actions necessary or desirable, to prescribe military areas in such places and of such extent as he or the appropriate Military Commanders may determine, from which any or all persons may be excluded, and with such respect to which, the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Secretary of War or the appropriate Military Commander may impose in his discretion.

Acting pursuant to this Executive Order, military commanders designated the entire west coast of the United States a military area and removed approximately 110,000 persons of Japanese ancestry residing in that area to ten internment camps located in various parts of the United States. Over two-thirds of those persons detained were American citizens. The relocation of the Japanese was one of the largest mass migrations in history. Entire families, such as Ray and Yone Tanaka of Los Angeles, California, and their two daughters, aged 6 months and 3 years, were uprooted. The American-born actor George Takei was 4 years old when he and his family were ordered to leave their home. The Japanese left behind approximately \$200,000,000 in real, commercial and personal property, which was sold for much less value, resulting in significant financial loss.

While interned, Japanese detainees, including those who were U. S. citizens, were asked the following questions:

Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty wherever ordered?

Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, to any other foreign government, power or organization?

Those who answered “no” to both questions were called “No-No boys.”

Reports of Japanese atrocities perpetrated against American prisoners of war, such as the Bataan death march and the execution of

some of the American airmen who participated in the Doolittle raid, further enflamed the already rabid anti-Japanese feelings. In the popular media, the Japanese were portrayed as a menace that had to be eradicated.

On December 18, 1944, in the case *Korematsu v. United States*, the United States Supreme Court, by a 6 to 3 majority, upheld the constitutionality of the Japanese internment. Writing for the majority, Justice Hugo Black defended the internment on the ground that “it was impossible to bring about the immediate segregation of the loyal from the disloyal” and that within the Japanese community there were those who retained loyalty to Japan. According to the court,

Approximately five thousand American citizens of Japanese ancestry refused to swear unqualified allegiance to the United States and to renounce allegiance to the Japanese Emperor, and several thousand evacuees requested repatriation to Japan.

Justice Frank Murphy, dissenting from the majority opinion, wrote:

This exclusion of 'all persons of Japanese ancestry, both alien and non-alien,' from the Pacific Coast area on a plea of military necessity in the absence of martial law ought not to be approved. Such exclusion goes over 'the very brink of constitutional power' and falls into the ugly abyss of racism.

In a second case, *Ex parte Endo*, also decided on December 18, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the order detaining the plaintiff, a U. S. citizen of Japanese ancestry, was unauthorized. Delivering the opinion for the court, Justice William O. Douglas wrote:

A citizen who is concededly loyal presents no problem of espionage or sabotage. Loyalty is a matter of the heart and mind not of race, creed, or color. He who is loyal is by definition not a spy or a saboteur. When the power to detain is derived from the power to protect the war effort against espionage and sabotage, detention which has no relationship to that objective is unauthorized.

On December 17, 1944, pursuant to a public proclamation issued by U. S. Major General Henry C. Pratt, the internment was ended, and on February 2, 1945, the Japanese detainees were allowed to go home.

On August 6 the first atomic bomb ever used in combat was dropped on Hiroshima; three days later an atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.

On August 15, Japan surrendered and on September 2, 1945 the instrument of surrender was signed in Tokyo harbor officially ending the war.

In 1988, the U. S. Congress passed the "Restitution for World War II internment of Japanese-Americans and Aleuts" Act which made restitution to persons of Japanese ancestry and certain other groups who were interned and conveyed an apology on behalf of the people of the United States for having been interned.

The internment of the Japanese was neither the first nor last case of a forced population transfer in the United States. In 1838, the United States ordered thousands of Cherokee Indians to be forcibly removed from their homes in Georgia and transferred to land in what is today Oklahoma; about 4,000 Cherokees died along the way in what became known as "The Trail of Tears." On August 26, 2011, in response to an approaching hurricane, the City of New York ordered the mandatory evacuation of approximately 270,000 persons from certain areas of city. This was the first time in history that a mandatory evacuation order had ever been imposed. However, the Japanese internment was unique in that it was ordered under the rubric of

national security and, the subsequent restitution provided notwithstanding and given the *Korematsu* decision, set a precedent by which similar administrative measures in the future could be deemed legally permissible.

Sources:

Ex Parte Mitsuye Endo, 323 U.S. 283 (1944)

<http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=US&vol=323&invol=283>

Toyosaburo Korematsu v. United States, 323 U.S. 214 (1944)

<http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/cgi-bin/getcase.pl?court=us&vol=323&invol=214>

Japanese Internment, <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1679.html>

The Donnelly Collection of Presidential Executive Orders,

<http://www.conservativeusa.org/eo/1942/eo9066.htm>

This Day in History, Roosevelt Signs Executive Order 9066,

<http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/roosevelt-signs-executive-order-9066>

On This Day: Supreme Court Upholds Constitutionality of Japanese Internment

<http://www.findingdulcinea.com/news/on-this-day/On-this-Day--The-Supreme-Court-Upholds-WWII-Internment-of-Japanese-Americans-.html>

Quad City Times,

Q-C woman whose family was interned in WWII honors parents through exhibit

http://qctimes.com/news/local/article_8308529a-9387-11de-a6de-001cc4c03286.html

All Things Cherokee,

Andrew Jackson - The Worst President The Cherokee Ever Met

by Christina Berry

http://www.allthingscherokee.com/articles_culture_events_020201.html

Bloomberg News, *New York City Orders Mandatory Evacuation for Rockaway, Coney Island Areas* by Henry Goldman
<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-08-26/nyc-mayor-orders-mandatory-evacuation-from-low-lying-areas.html>

United States Government, Office of War Information, *Japanese Relocation* (documentary motion picture, undated)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v= OiPldKsM5w>

Brieal Wilson, *World War Two: Japanese Internment Camps in the U. S.* (documentary motion picture, undated)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PgmbOh9zJLY&feature=related>

George Takei in Japanese concentration camps (video)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUrplFp7EMA&feature=related>

Answers.com. *Who were the no-no boys?*
http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Who_were_the_no-no_boys

Pearl Harbor Extra – A Newspaper Account of the United States' Entry into World War II. 2001. Castle Books, New York.

Brooklyn Eagle, December 9, 1941.

The Honolulu Advertiser, December 8, 1941.

Honolulu Star-Bulletin 3rd Extra, December 7, 1941.

The Baltimore News-Post, December 9, 1941.

Lorraine B. Diehl, *Over Here! – New York City During World War II* (Smithsonian Books, New York), 2010.

Carroll V. Glines, *The Doolittle Raid – America's Daring First Strike Against Japan* (Schiffer Military/Aviation History, Atglen, PA), 1991.

Images of Anti-Japanese Propaganda
<http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=anti-japanese+propoganda&qpvt=anti-japanese+propoganda&FORM=IGRE>

Internment of Japanese Americans in Concentration Camps
<http://academic.udayton.edu/race/02rights/intern01.htm>