

Four Primary Source Documents: Japanese Internment

During World War II, thousands of Japanese Americans were forced to leave their homes and move to "relocation centers." Law abiding citizens were deprived of their freedom because there was a common fear that Japanese Americans' loyalty was to Japan rather than to the United States. Forty years later, the US government apologized to former internees and admitted that their actions were wrong. To understand how this violation of civil rights happened, we can examine primary source documents such as letters, government articles and news articles from the time. These documents give us information about the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, as well as the reasons so many Americans supported it.

Morton Grodzins, *Americans Betrayed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

Austin Anson, the managing secretary of the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association, a farm organization, is quoted as saying:

We're charged with wanting to get rid of the Japs for selfish reasons. We might as well be honest. We do. It's a question of whether the white man lives on the Pacific Coast or the brown men. They came to this valley to work, and they stayed to take over. They offer higher land prices and higher rents than the white man can pay for land. They undersell the white man in the markets. They can do this because they raise their own labor. They work their women and children while the white farmer has to pay wages for his help. If all the Japs were removed tomorrow, we'd never miss them in two weeks, because the white farmers can take over and produce everything the Jap grows. And we don't want them back when the war ends, either.

In May 1942, O. L. Scott, another member of the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association wrote to Congressman Anderson:

If it were not for the "white-skinned Japs" in this country there wouldn't be any Japanese question. What can you suggest I do and thousands of Californians be led to do, that may make it possible to get rid of all Japs, sending them back to Japan either before or after the war is won. I am convinced that if it is not done or at least the action completed before the war is over, it will be impossible to get rid of them.... The Japanese cannot be assimilated as the white race [and] we must do everything we can to stop them now as we have a golden opportunity now and may never have it again.

This is a portion of Lt. Gen. J.L. DeWitt's letter of transmittal to the Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, June 5, 1943, of his *Final Report; Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast 1942.*

1. I transmit herewith my final report on the evacuation of Japanese from the Pacific Coast.
2. The evacuation was impelled by military necessity. The security of the Pacific Coast continues to require the exclusion of Japanese from the area now prohibited to them and will so continue as long as that military necessity exists. The surprise attack at Pearl Harbor by the enemy crippled a major portion of the Pacific Fleet and exposed the West Coast to an attack which could not have been substantially impeded by defensive fleet operations. More than 115,000 persons of Japanese ancestry resided along the coast and were significantly concentrated near many highly sensitive installations essential to the war effort. . . . The continued presence of a large, unassimilated, tightly knit and racial group, bound to an enemy nation by strong ties of race, culture, custom and religion along a frontier vulnerable to attack constituted a menace which had to be dealt with. Their loyalties were unknown and time was of the essence. . . . It is better to have had this protection and not to have needed it than to have needed it and not to have had it – as we have learned to our sorrow.
3. On February 14, 1942, I recommended to the War Department that the military security of the Pacific Coast required the establishment of broad civil control, anti-sabotage and counter-espionage measures, including the evacuation, therefrom of all persons of Japanese ancestry. In recognition of this situation, the President issued Executive Order No. 9066 on February 19, 1942, authorizing the accomplishment of these and any other necessary security measures. . . . Among the steps taken was the evacuation of Japanese from western Washington and Oregon, California and southern Arizona. . . .
5. There was neither pattern nor precedent for an undertaking of this magnitude and character; and yet over a period of less than ninety operating days, 110,442 persons of Japanese ancestry were evacuated from the West Coast. This compulsory organized mass migration was conducted under complete military supervision. It was effected without major incident. . . . The task was, nevertheless, completed without any appreciable divergence of military personnel. Comparatively few were used, and there was no interruption in a training program.
6. In the orderly accomplishment of the program, emphasis was placed upon the making of due provision against social and economic dislocation. Agricultural production was not reduced by the evacuation. Over ninety-nine percent of all agricultural acreage in the affected area owned or operated by evacuees was successfully kept in production. . . .
7. So far as could be foreseen, everything essential was provided to minimize the impact of evacuation upon evacuees, as well as upon economy. Notwithstanding, exclusive of the costs of construction of facilities, the purchase of evacuee motor vehicles, the aggregate of agricultural crop loans made and the purchase of office equipment now in use for other government purposes, the entire cost was \$1.46 per evacuee day for the

period of evacuation, Assembly Center residence and transfer operations...

Manzanar Nice Place — It Better Than Hollywood'

This dispatch, passed by military authorities, is the first close-up report from a newspaperman who has visited one of the Japanese concentration centers in California.—The Editor.

BY HARRY FERGUSON
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MANZANAR, Cal., April 21.—This is the youngest, strangest city in the world—inhabited by Japanese who hoist American Flags, put up pictures of George Washington and pray to the Christian God for the defeat of Japan's armed forces.

It is a settlement that grew—in the magic time of three weeks—out of the sagebrush of the Mojave Desert. This is one of the places where the 118,000 Japanese who are being moved out of the strategic area of the Pacific Coast are being resettled.

Three weeks ago this was empty land between two mountain ranges.

Today it is a city of 3,303 population with a fire department, a hospital, a police force, an English-language newspaper, baseball teams and community recreation centers.

It probably is the fastest growing town in the world because soon its population will be doubled and eventually quadrupled.

Most of the inhabitants are Japanese who have tasted American democracy and found it good. Probably 95 per cent at least of the Japanese here are loyal to the United States. They are the ones like S. Akamatsu, who moved into Building No. 6 and immediately put up pictures of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and President Roosevelt.

Many of the loyal ones came here with fear and doubt in their hearts, expecting a Nazi-type concentration camp. Instead they found comfortable wooden buildings covered with tar paper, bathhouses and showers and plenty of wholesome food.

There is no fence around Manzanar now and while U.S. soldiers guard the main gate, there is nothing to prevent a Japanese from slipping away at night except the knowledge that he undoubtedly would be caught. Nobody has tried it. Emon Tatsui who was brought here from Los Angeles, looked around the camp a few days ago and decided to write a letter to his former employer, Murphy McHenry, Hollywood motion picture executive:

"Dear Sir: Kindly send my money to new address by U.S. Post Office money order. It may be too much trouble for you but we do not have bank open yet here. I like to tell you about this camp. Nice place to live. It better than Hollywood. Snow on mountains. Fresh air. Snow is bright. Every day is 80 to 85.

"No blackout in here. There are liberty, safe and build up new life. Hundreds of carpenter, hundreds plumber, Hundreds so and so working hard to build up. One thousand Japanese coming to this camp almost every day now. Good ball ground. Baseball field. Swimming pool. School building. Danceroom is about start building then movie is next.

*"Yours truly,
"EMON TATSUI.*

"P.S. Over 300 miles away from your city but still in Los Angeles city limit."

No attempts have been made to separate the loyal from the disloyal. Those whose sympathies lie with Japan are keeping quiet about it. Eventually there will be a police force of 75 Japanese and the camp management believes the loyal will maintain surveillance over the disloyal.

There are all types of Japanese here—rich, poor, old, young; *issei*, mostly old persons born in Japan; *nisei*, the younger group born in this country, and *kibei*, born in this country but sent back to Japan to be educated.

Democracy is at work among them. An election has been held to choose block leaders. Eventually from these block leaders will be chosen an advisory committee of five to work with the camp management in preserving order and arranging for the planting of crops. Manzanar hopes to become a self-sufficient community when irrigation is brought to the rich but arid land.

The lives of the inhabitants have fallen quickly into the normal pattern of living. The Japanese firemen play solitaire while waiting for an alarm. A baby has been born and named Kenji Ogawa. Howard Kumagai, a mechanical engineer, has fallen in love with Kimiki Wakamura, former beauty shop operator, has proposed and been accepted. Boys and girls make dates for dances and for the movies where James Cagney is extremely popular.

Some volunteered to evacuate their homes and come here. Among them is Miss Chiye Mori of Los Angeles, news editor of The Manzanar Free Press, the settlement's mimeographed newspaper.

She was asked if she could write a brief statement explaining the feelings of the Japanese who were loyal to the United States. She turned to her portable typewriter and tapped this out on a sheet of paper:

“If Japan wins this war we have the most to lose. We hope America wins and quickly. We voluntarily evacuated as the only means by which we could demonstrate our loyalty. We want to share in the ware effort. We want to share the gloom of temporary defeats and the joys of ultimate victory. We are deeply concerned with our American citizenship, which we prize above all else.”

San Francisco News

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