

Longing to be Americans:

Pre-War Racism Against the Japanese Residing in the United States

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“All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”¹ These guaranteed constitutional protections to all Americans were not always guaranteed to all Americans.

Japanese immigration to the United States was shut down since 1907 due to the Gentlemen’s Agreement. The Immigration Act of 1924 led another sweeping anti-Asian immigration law. There were now low quotas on who could migrate to the United States. Because of the low migration to the states, most people residing in the country had been there for some time. The Japanese children born in the United States were all American citizens, but they became the enemy due to their skin color. Every Japanese American on the West Coast was affected. Barry Saiki was an American college student when the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred. He recalls, “Pearl harbor jolted us just a week before final exams. Nisei reactions ranged from stunned silence to uncertainty and frustration. We were Americans imbued with American concepts and ideals, yet we were also deeply conscious of and grateful to our alien parents. The attack had suddenly changed our parents into enemy aliens.”² Every person of Japanese descent in the United States felt this uncertainty. Regardless of their efforts and nationality, they could not remove this label of being the enemy.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, racist views of nativists had escalated further. People of Japanese descent were now considered the enemy. They were

¹ U.S. Constitution, amend. 14, sec. 1.

² Roger Daniels, *Japanese Americans: from Relocation to Redress* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 15.

Americans, raised with American traditions and only knew life in the United States. In a matter of months, over 110,000 Americans of Japanese descent were quickly rounded up and put into concentration camps. Due to years of racism against the Japanese, the white nationalists on West Coast could easily allow these American citizens to be seen as the enemy. This “relocation” of the Japanese Americans had been brewing for years and the war was a justification for doing so.

Anti-Japanese sentiment in the United States started in the early 1900s, during the first wave of Japanese immigration. In *Democracy on Trial*, Paige Smith explains that the anxiety around the Japanese was due to the increasing conflict between Japan and other Asian countries. Allies of the United States were at war with Japan. Due to this, the United States did not have the best relationship with Japan. Thomas James adds to this in *Exile Within: The Schooling of Japanese Americans*, explaining that the Nisei knew about the tensions between their birth country and their parents’ home country. He writes, “Recognizing that people in western states often perceived them as more Japanese than American, they [the Nisei] harbored a growing sense of foreboding as they saw the worsening condition of international tensions: Japan’s seizure of Manchuria and China, its rejection of the League of Nations, its repudiation of the agreement to limit naval armaments, its attack on the USS *Panay*...and the use of economic sanctions against Japan.”³ Smith argues that the government’s issues with Japan had expanded to the racism on the West Coast to all people of Japanese descent.⁴

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, people of Japanese descent were under even more scrutiny. Girdner and Loftis mention that even though the white Americans were afraid, the

³ Thomas James, *Exile Within: The Schooling of Japanese Americans 1942-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 19.

⁴ Paige Smith, *Democracy on Trial: The Japanese American Evacuation and Relocation in World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 13-15.

Japanese-Americans were too. Immediately after the bombing, the Japanese American Citizens League wrote a telegram to the President, pledging their absolute loyalty and devotion to the United States. Regardless of their efforts, they were still sent to internment camps. Edward Spicer in *Impounded People* compares the relocation of the Japanese Americans to the likes of the Trail of Tears and the uprooting of Native Americans. If the Japanese were not relocated, they would be beneficial to the war effort. By being stuck in the camps, they were seen as not doing their civil duty like every other American. Since the Japanese-Americans were forced to leave soon after the bombing, they had to sell all their property and items at bottom dollar. Practically giving their lives away, anti-Japanese groups took advantage of the situation and benefitted economically from the internment.⁵

Older scholarship concluded that the Japanese Americans were relocated due to fear of sabotage or espionage. Dillon Myer's book published in 1971 focuses on the fears of the people. In his book, *Uprooted Americans: The Japanese Americans and the War Relocation Authority during World War II*, Myers defends the United States government as he was the director of the War Relocation Authority. Even though there is an acknowledgement that the people of Japanese descent never committed any acts of espionage or sabotage, Myer wants to show that the relocation was completely legal and crucial to the security of the United States.⁶

Historian Brian Hayashi cites Myers, explaining that his work was written in a time where "race" meant something different. New scholarship shows that race does not necessarily equal loyalty when it came to the Japanese Americans during World War II. In *Democratizing*

⁵ Audrie Girdner and Anne Loftis, *The Great Betrayal: The Evacuation of the Japanese-Americans During World War II* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1969), 10-15; Edward Spicer et al., *Impounded People: Japanese-Americans in the Relocation Centers* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1969), 5-10.

⁶ Dillon S. Myer, *Uprooted Americans: The Japanese Americans and the War Relocation Authority during World War II* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1971), xiii-xvi.

the Enemy, Hayashi expands on this idea and pulls from prior works to show that the wartime hysteria caused by the attack on Pearl Harbor had a more complex background. Wartime hysteria was caused by the revival of the Yellow Peril due to the attack on Pearl Harbor. Americans were not understanding of the culture that the Japanese Americans were adopting and the generations of Americans. These two factors are the most important when determining loyalty.⁷

Another scholar, Greg Robinson, believes that the internment of the Japanese Americans was never about the racism of the people living on the West Coast, but was determined by the racism of President Roosevelt. In *By Order of the President*, Robinson writes, “As FDR’s affection for these various individuals demonstrates, he did not share popular racist views of Asians as innately menacing or uncivilized. Still, despite his friendships with Japanese and his genuine interest in Japanese culture, Roosevelt adopted a wary position toward Japanese power during the first decade of the twentieth century...He favored China over Japan whenever the two countries were compared.”⁸ Prior scholars all understand and agree that there was not a constitutional basis for the internment of the Japanese American people. Despite their agreement on the issue, there is a dispute on the reasons for incarceration. Regardless of the reason for the incarceration, there is a matter of who was incarcerated. The Germans and Italians were part of the Axis Powers, yet there was little concern of them residing in the United States.

Even though there were more German and Italian-Americans than Japanese-Americans residing in the United States during World War II, the Japanese were the only ones interned due

⁷ Brian M. Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy: The Japanese American Internment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 1-11.

⁸ Greg Robinson, *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 11.

to years of deep-rooted racism. By interning the minority, the United States government had a quick solution that would be justified by issues of “national security” due to the attacks on Pearl Harbor. In reality, there had been growing agitations against Asians in the West Coast, starting with the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. The government was pressed to take actions against this problem. Once the United States declared war, it did so on all the Axis nations, yet only punished those of Asian ancestry. Questions facing the loyalty of American born Japanese were brought up, even more than that of the foreign-born Germans and Italians.

The cruel treatment of the Japanese Americans started long before the war, and it had only gotten worse during it. We put Japanese Americans into concentration camps due to decades of prior racism, fueled by wartime hysteria. Since the Japanese people had arrived in the United States, their work ethic was superior to the white Americans, allowing them to become successful quickly. Jealousy and rage caused many laws to be enacted to suppress the Japanese people- they were not allowed to have citizenry, own land, or participate in politics. This left them a minority without a voice. Only the second-generation, the Nisei, were allowed to have the rights of American citizens. Even with American citizenship, they were included in the relocation of Japanese people, since their loyalty was questioned. That reason, however, was based more on racism than of that regarding logic. Many reports were sent to President Roosevelt before the attack on Pearl Harbor, stating that they were loyal Americans. Since there were reports regarding their loyalty months before the attack shows that there was building tension against the Japanese people living in the United States. The relocation of people of Japanese ancestry was premeditated and fueled by racism. They were going to be put into concentration camps, regardless of the attack on Pearl Harbor- it just ended up being a good justification for the United States government.

Beginning with the Alaska Gold Rush from 1897-1899, there was a shortage of workers on the West Coast. The Chinese could not take these jobs due to the Chinese Exclusion Act. With a high demand for cheap labor in the United States and a bad economy in Japan, the Japanese made the choice to uproot their lives in hopes for a better one.⁹ Others had resided in the Hawaiian Islands, as it was not yet part of the United States. They were brought there and lived in indentured servitude on the farms. Hawaii became part of the holdings of the United States in 1900, allowing around 12,000 Japanese people to move to the mainland.¹⁰ Since the Hawaiian Islands were now part of the United States, people could move freely through, without legal repercussions. Bailey compares this to people freely traveling between Oregon and Washington. There were not any checkpoints and nothing to say they could not enter another state.¹¹

In 1907, an informal agreement was made between Japan and the United States was made. Japan would no longer issue workers' permits, restricting immigration of Japanese to America. This was called the Gentlemen's Agreement and it lasted until 1924. California had perceived this agreement as an exclusion act, such as the Chinese one. Since it was informal, adherence to it was not so great. While it was in effect, 159,675 Japanese people had immigrated. This had angered the people of California and they believed that Japan were not following their end of the deal. The 1924 Immigration Act created quotas for immigrants to the United States. It heavily focused on Asians, further restricting Japanese migration. Despite the reduction of immigration, there were still Japanese people living in the United States and many were second-generation.¹² This generation, termed the Nisei, had rights that their parents could never have. In turn, this

⁹ United States, *Personal Justice Denied: Report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians* (Washington D.C., 1983), 30.

¹⁰ Edwin P. Hoyt, *Asians in the West* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1974), 45.

¹¹ Thomas Bailey, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese American Crises* (Stanford: University of California Press, 1934), 150-151.

¹² United States, *Personal Justice Denied*, 35-36.

created another level of hatred for the Japanese people. The first generation was “getting around” laws using their children. The government had little success with removing the rights of land ownership from the Nisei, as they had wanted to do all along. By having the rights to own land, the Nisei was one step closer to being equal with the white residents on the West Coast.

There were many reasons that people living on the West Coast would hate the Japanese people. Many myths and stereotypes driven by the media would float around society, painting a bad picture of the Japanese behavior. Since the Chinese Exclusion Act was in place, there were laws discriminating against the Chinese. Unfortunately, the white people could not tell the difference between a Chinese and a Japanese person- thus discriminating against all Asians. This was part of the “Yellow Peril” that had already existed before the Japanese people had arrived. There was a belief that the Asians were invading the United States. The Japanese were just unfortunate to have to arrive during this time of peril.¹³ Other anxieties influenced by this wave of “yellow peril” were caused by thoughts that Japanese immigrants were invading the United States.¹⁴ Their racism would lead into a segregation between white and Asian people. During his time on the West Coast, President Theodore Roosevelt noticed how the Japanese were being treated. Concerned about the issue growing, he wrote a letter in 1907 saying, “I hope that we can persuade our people on the one hand to act in a spirit of generous justice and genuine courtesy toward Japan, and on the other hand to keep the navy respectable in numbers and more than respectable in the efficiency of its units. If we act thus we need not fear the Japanese...In any event we can hold our own in the future.... only if we occupy the position of the just man armed....”¹⁵ He knew that the United States should keep on the good side of Japan, since their

¹³ United States, *Personal Justice Denied*, 37.

¹⁴ Robinson, *By Order of the President*, 15.

¹⁵ Bailey, *Theodore and the Japanese-American Crises*, 15-16.

power in the world was growing. Urging California's leaders to keep the agitation from growing any more, they refused to listen. President Theodore Roosevelt could not convince California to treat the Japanese like human beings, as he wanted the Japanese in America to remain loyal to the United States.

Newspapers in California were adamant about pushing their racist agenda amongst their white readers. *The San Francisco Chronicle* was one of the more notorious papers, with aggressive articles with titles such as: "The Japanese Invasion, the Problem of the Hour," "Japanese a Menace to American Women," and "Brown Asiatics Steal Brains of Whites."¹⁶ This helped fuel anti-Japanese groups. Most of these groups would be comprised of laborers who believed the Japanese were stealing their jobs. Their extensive lobbying via labor unions to the government had influenced politicians. Soon, they all united and created a five-point plan that would include: canceling the Gentlemen's Agreement, banning "picture brides," shutting down all immigration of Asians, loss of United States' citizenships to people of Asian descent, and not allowing children from the United States to become citizens unless their parents both qualified for citizenship. With a serious agenda such as this, they had incredible influence with politicians and their constituents.

The mayor of San Francisco, James Duval Phelan, once said in a public manner, "They [the Chinese and Japanese] are not the stuff of which American citizens can be made...Personally we have nothing against Japanese, but as they will not assimilate with us and their social life is so different from ours, let them keep at a respectful distance."¹⁷ Robinson writes further that later as a Senator, Phelan, "attacked Japanese Americans through undisguised

¹⁶ Hoyt, *Asians in the West*, 46.

¹⁷ United States, *Personal Justice Denied*, 32-35.

appeals to white supremacy.”¹⁸ The people who voted him in knew who he was and had similar ideology as the mayor of San Francisco and eventual Senator for California. They wanted a man that could fix their problem with the Japanese people. This racism, however, did not stop at the local level.

As early as 1905, both houses of the Californian legislature unanimously urged the United States Congress to address the “Japanese problem” and to exclude them in society.¹⁹ The Californian government was constantly pestered about the “Japanese situation.” Van Nuys writes:

At every session between 1907 and 1913, the California Legislature considered alien land laws. Finally, in 1913 the Heney-Webb Alien Land Act was passed. Ostensibly designed to prohibit the owning and leading of agricultural land by aliens who were not eligible to become naturalized American citizens, the land law was clearly aimed at Asians immigrants, above all, the Japanese...federal law at the time allowed the naturalization only of Caucasians and persons of Africans descent.²⁰

This would only affect the Issei, who would get around the laws by transferring their land into the possession of their children, the Nisei. To the white nativists, this was unfair. They had the Heney-Webb Act put into place to prohibit the Japanese people from owning land. In reality, this act only prohibited immigrants from owning land and could not stop American citizens to hold land for their immigrant parents. It was not just the citizens who were angry, but again, the leaders of the state.

¹⁸ Robinson, *By Order of the President*, 29.

¹⁹ Hoyt, *Asians in the West*, 46.

²⁰ Frank W. Van Nuys, “A Progressive Confronts the Race Question: Chester Rowell, the California Alien Land Act of 1913, and the Contradictions of Early Twentieth-Century Racial Thought.” *California History* 73, no.1 (1994): 2-3.

Government officials were vocal about their opinions on the Japanese situation. In February 1942, the Californian Governor, Culbert L. Olsen told some Japanese American editors, “You know, when I look out at a group of Americans of German or Italian descent, I can tell whether they’re loyal or not. I can tell how they think and even perhaps what they are thinking. But it is impossible for me to do this with the inscrutable Orientals, and particularly the Japanese.”²¹ Olsen, a mind reader of white men, was open about his feelings of Japanese people and it was not only him. Then Attorney General, Earl Warren, went to a committee investigating the National Defense and expressed, “We believe that when we are dealing with the Caucasian race, we have methods that will test the loyalty of them...But when we deal with the Japanese, we are in an entirely different and we cannot form any opinion that we believe to be sound.”²² The men could not describe how they could possibly know the intentions and loyalties of white people compared to those of other races. These high-ranking officials were reporting their beliefs to the public, showing that their status would not be affected by their racism. Their white constituents believed the same things, ensuring their incumbency. This sentiment spread to the masses by the media.

After the war had broken out, *Life Magazine* had published an article on how to tell a Chinese apart from a Japanese person. This was to protect our allies, the Chinese from discrimination against the alien enemies- “the Japs.” This was published on December 22, 1941, while America’s wounds were still fresh. In a bold title called, “How to Tell Japs from the Chinese: Angry Citizens Victimize Allies with Emotional Outburst at Enemy,” *Life Magazine* went all out. The writing was completely made up in its entirety, with no real evidence on how

²¹ Richard Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps: Dillon S. Myer and American Racism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 31-32.

²² Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps*, 32.

to tell a Chinese person from a Japanese person. They wanted to create a hateful article and did so. In part of the article, they write, “The modern Jap is the descendant of Mongoloids who invaded the Japanese archipelago back in the mists of prehistory.”²³ Wanting to emphasize that Japanese people are not even people, the magazine did well on dehumanizing the enemy. By dehumanizing the enemy, the government could pass radical policies to contain this “issue.” Reports were also published by the government to trick nativists that the Japanese were the real problem.

In another attack on Japanese people, a report published by the Californian government lied about the birthrates of people of different races. They reported that the birthrate of the Japanese people was three times higher than that of white women in the state. This was misleading due to the age of the people. Women of Japanese descent had children at the normal rate of other women in America. Since they were generally younger, they were having more children than white women at the time. By 1940, the birthrate had evened out and women of Japanese descent was actually lower than of women of other races.²⁴ The Californian government wanted white nativists to fear that their race was going to become the minority. If the Japanese were having double the number of children than that of the white people, it could incite fear that the white population would be quickly surpassed. Robinson explains, “If the Nordics did not begin to reproduce faster, the women of the “Great Race” would soon be forced to intermarry with members of other races.”²⁵ Reports like these only reinforced these beliefs

²³ “How to Tell Japs from the Chinese: Angry Citizens Victimize Allies with Emotional Outburst at Enemy,” *Life Magazine*, December 22, 1941.

²⁴ United States, *Personal Justice Denied*, 38.

²⁵ Robinson, *By Order of the President*, 30.

that white supremacists were having, such as anti-miscegenation. While there were more inflammatory reports about the Japanese people, there were still ones defending them.

In a report that was eventually sent to the Chief of Naval Operations, Lieutenant Commander K.D. Ringle explained the Japanese problem on the West Coast. His job was to summarize the issue of loyalty from the Japanese. Having studied the Japanese Americans and working with the Japanese American Citizens League for over three years, Ringle had the most authority when it came to knowledge on the loyalty of the Japanese Americans. Collaborating with C.B. Munson and his report to the president, he helped influence Munson's paper, as there were almost exact opinions in the two reports. He believed that there was a separation between race and loyalty. Hayashi explains that Ringle:

found it useful to correlate adherence to Japanese 'culture' with the number of years most recently spent in Japan to determine loyalty, and concluded that those of the Japan-born generation were 'passively loyal' to the United States because they had resided in the United States since at least 1924, and had been subjected to the Americanizing influence of their own American-born children, three-quarters of whom, he estimated, were loyal to the United States.²⁶

Most of the Japanese people residing in the United States were passively loyal, meaning that they love the United States and follow its laws. They would not immediately take up arms for the government if there was a war. It does not mean that they would never, just that they would probably not be the first ones to volunteer. The Japanese people living in the United States at the time were true Americans, regardless of their status, and participated in society. Most of the immigrants wanted to be Americans. The ones that did not were apparent to society.

²⁶ Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy*, 33-34.

In his report, Ringle explains that the dangerous Japanese in the United States had already been monitored for some time and are on the radars of the Naval Intelligence Service and the Federal Bureau of Investigations. If they were deemed dangerous enough, they were already rounded up.²⁷ Ringle was so sure of the loyalty of the Japanese in the United States, he had encouraged the government to take advantage of their workforce. Their contributions to the economy were going to be crucial, especially if the United States was going to be entering a war. Even though the United States' government was actively making laws and restrictions around the Japanese, the people remained loyal. Most of the Issei had lived their entire adult lives in the United States. They wanted to be Americans, but they were still not allowed citizenship and confined to certain lifestyles that the government restricted them to.²⁸ Part of wanting to be Americans would be shown by their eagerness to participate in the war efforts.

Suggesting that the United States government encouraged American born Japanese to participate in the war and agencies related to it, Ringle knew that the people would want to help. He advised the government to allow the Japanese Americans to join the Red Cross, the U.S.O., the civilian defense, and even help building parts for the war. In the interest of the protections of the Japanese Americans, Ringle urged the government to restrain the media from creating anti-Japanese propaganda.²⁹ Nevertheless, Hoyt shows that General DeWitt did not quite listen and testified before Congress, "A Jap's a Jap. They are a dangerous element, whether loyal or not. There is no way to determine their loyalty.... It makes no difference whether he is an American; theoretically he is still a Japanese.... You can't change him by giving him a piece of paper."³⁰

²⁷ Kenneth D. Ringle to The Chief of Naval Operations, Jan. 29, 1942, *Report on Japanese Question*, accessed via Naval History Heritage and Command, Washington D.C. (hereafter cited as NHHC)

²⁸ Ringle, *Report on Japanese Question*, NHHC.

²⁹ Ringle, *Report on Japanese Question*, NHHC.

³⁰ Hoyt, *Asians in the West*, 67.

General DeWitt, one of the most important actors in the internment, refused to acknowledge Ringle's report. There is not a reason that General DeWitt refused to listen to the reports except that of his racist beliefs against people of Japanese ancestry. But his personal sentiment did not stop there. He would disseminate this opinion to the general public with the help of the media.

Later, General DeWitt met with Walter Lippman, a journalist, who later wrote "The Fifth Column on the Coast." This article, which was posted in the *Los Angeles Times*, explained how the Japanese were fifth-column threats. A fifth-column threat would be a person that would engage in espionage or sabotage in their own country. His article tended shape how Americans thought of the Japanese people and the sole arguments for their internment today. He wrote:

For while the striking power of Japan from the sea and air might not in itself be overwhelming at any one point just now, Japan could strike a blow which might do irreparable damage if it were accompanied by the kind of organized sabotage to which this part of the country is specially vulnerable... I am sure I understand fully the unwillingness of Washington to adopt a policy of mass evacuation and mass internment of all those who are technically enemy aliens.... There is the assumption that if the rights of a citizen are abridged anywhere, they have been abridged everywhere. Forget for a moment all about enemy aliens, dual citizenship, naturalized citizens, native citizens of enemy alien parentage, and consider a warship in San Francisco harbor, an airplane plant in Los Angeles, a general's headquarters at Oshkosh, and an admiral's at Podunk.³¹

While it was a short article, it was harsh, inciting fear about a possible fifth-column threat. Lippman did an excellent job passing on General DeWitt's beliefs to the American people without it seeming like part of the government's agenda. This kind of propaganda posted in the newspapers made the public afraid of what their neighbors could potentially or were currently doing. By inciting fear, the government could enact more radical laws.

³¹ Walter Lippman, "The Fifth Column on the Coast," *Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 1942.

Regardless of Ringle and Munson's efforts, leaders widely dismissed their reports. The commission of these reports had been unfruitful, and the military had a different idea on how to handle the Japanese issue. Only 53 days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States government started to enforce exclusion acts. Hoyt recalls, "Difficult as the Japanese position was at the outbreak of the war, it soon became much worse. The West Coast was declared a theater of war, and on January 29, 1942, all enemy aliens were forbidden to enter such important places as harbors, airports, and the areas around power stations."³² This exclusion was not based on evidence, but from a mere remark by Walter Lippman that the harbors, airports, and power stations were all unprotected and vulnerable to sabotage. Relocation, to the government, was mandatory for the national security.

While the first wave of relocation was enacted by the military, the executive, legislative, and judicial branches soon followed up with their own measures. Directly undermining civil liberties and freedoms, Congress was hard at work to fix the Japanese problem. Girdner and Loftis examine a Congressional event that is usually overshadowed by Executive Order 9066. During a hearing in D.C. before February 19, 1942, the authors explained:

Hiram Johnson recommended limiting the exclusion to the Japanese, Congressman Bertrand Gearhart is reported to have complained, 'We can't single out a special class for evacuation. The law has to apply to all enemy aliens.' In theory, the presidential order could apply to anyone, 'any person,' but those close to the scene understood that, as the Attorney General said, 'The problem is mainly a Japanese problem.'³³

Congress, knowing that they could consider all enemy aliens as the problem had no issue just making it a Japanese problem instead. Soon after, the Executive Order was issued, damning over

³² Hoyt, *Asians in the West*, 66.

³³ Girdner and Loftis, *The Great Betrayal*, 101-102.

110,000 people of Japanese ancestry. They were immediately all considered enemy aliens and were stripped of all their Constitutional rights.

Executive Order 9066, issued by President Roosevelt on February 19, 1942 did not specifically call out the Japanese people. It did, however, delegate powers to the Secretary of War and military commanders to create exclusion zones based on their discretion. They could do whatever was necessary in the name of national defense. Due to the nature of war, Roosevelt believed that any action could be taken against people that would commit sabotage or espionage. The only requirement was that, “all Executive Departments, independent establishments and other Federal Agencies, to assist the Secretary of War or the said Military Commanders in carrying out this Executive Order, including the furnishing of medical aid, hospitalization, food, clothing, transportation, use of land, shelter, and other supplies, equipment, utilities, facilities, and services.”³⁴ This order was vague to leave all discretion to the military commanders- all responsibility seemed to fall onto them in case of backlash. The Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, and military commanders such as General Dewitt succeeded in carrying out the Executive Order. This was a relative slow process, though, taking months to organize and prepare for an “evacuation” of enemy aliens.

While immediate actions were not taken, Hoyt writes, “Soon the military authorities on the West Coast of the United States were demanding the ouster of the Japanese, and by midsummer that year all Japanese—which meant persons of Japanese ancestry, not just Japanese citizens—were moved out of Washington, Oregon, California, and parts of Arizona. The reason given for their removal was fear of invasion.”³⁵ It only took months for the government to

³⁴ Exec. Order. No. 9066, 7 Fed. Ref. 1407 (February 25, 1942).

³⁵ Hoyt, *Asians in the West*, 66.

decide who they should round up. In the end, there was a sweeping exclusion of people of Japanese ancestry. Grodzins points out that it includes, “persons who were unaware of their Japanese ancestry, and American citizens with as little as one-sixteenth Japanese blood.”³⁶ Any and every person that had some tie to Japanese descent were considered for the relocation, to the point of overkill. A person that was one-sixteenth Japanese would not be recognizable as Japanese to anybody. They most likely did not have any ties whatsoever to Japan. A majority of the Japanese-Americans would do whatever they needed to do to show that they were true Americans - people that would not turn on their country.

In response to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the President of the Japanese American Citizens League sent a telegram to President Roosevelt immediately after the attack. This telegram promised the president that the Japanese Americans would pledge their loyalty to the country and cooperate in any measures to help the government during this time of crisis and sorrow. On January 11, 1942, the Japanese American Citizens League held a convention in Santa Ana, California. They wrote an oath of allegiance to the United States and required each of their members to sign it. Ringle records this oath in his report, “I,_____, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I hereby renounce any other allegiances which I may have knowingly or unknowingly held in the past; and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion. So help me God.”³⁷ Even though the Japanese Americans were not required to prove their loyalty, they tried to. Despite everything that the Japanese Americans did to prove their loyalty, it was never enough.

³⁶ Morton Grodzins, *Americans Betrayed: Politics and the Japanese Evacuation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 2.

³⁷ Ringle, *Report on Japanese Question*, NHHC.

As American citizens, their 14th amendment rights were taken from them. Some people resisted this order by the president.

One of these people would be Fred Korematsu. As a Japanese American, he was included in the Exclusion Act. Residing in San Leandro, California, he was caught and arrested on May 30, 1942 for not evacuating the region on May 9, 1942. Korematsu was a welder that was laid off by the Boiler Maker's Union because of his race. Before that, he tried to enlist in the Navy, but was rejected due to his race. Officially, though, it was recorded that he had stomach ulcers. Being engaged to a white woman, he wanted to stay with her. Korematsu had plans to alter his image, marry his fiancée, and move to the Midwest. These hopes may have been too ambitious for a Japanese man living on the West Coast. He was relatively quickly arrested. When questioned, he called himself Clyde Sarah, but shoddy papers led to suspicion. Fred had altered his appearance and tried to pass as Spanish-Hawaiian. This backstory fell through quickly, as he did not speak any Spanish. He knew his facial alterations would not make him appear white, but he wanted to pass as anything but Japanese. While in jail, a lawyer named Ernest Besig came to Korematsu to represent him. Korematsu was a different case, since he refused to plead guilty, as most others had done. In a letter to the ACLU, Besig emphasized:

Assembly Camps were for: Dangerous Enemy Aliens and Citizens; These camps had been definitely an imprisonment under armed guard with orders shoot to kill. In order to be imprisoned, these people should have been given a fair trial in order that they may defend their loyalty at court in a democratic war, but they were placed in imprisonment without any fair trial! Many Disloyal Germans and Italians were caught, but they were not all corralled under armed guard like the Japanese- is this a racial issue? If not, the Loyal Citizens want fair trial to prove their loyalty to America, and they must be given fair trial and treatment! Fred Korematsu's Test Case may help.³⁸

³⁸ Peter Irons, *Justice at War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 99.

This case would eventually reach the Supreme Court. *Korematsu v. United States* was settled in 1944. During the time, he was imprisoned. Fighting all the way to the top, Korematsu would eventually lose his case. The military orders surpassed civil liberties. Justice Hugo Black delivered the opinion of the court, explaining that it was not Korematsu's race that excluded him from the military area, but it was that the Japanese Empire was at war with the United States. The military had a good justification for believing there could be an invasion by the Japanese on the West Coast. Interning the Japanese-Americans was a good way to protect the national security interests of the United States. The Supreme Court sided with the government since national security during times of war and terror trumps all other Constitutional values. It took until the mid-1980s for the Supreme Court to overturn their ruling on *Korematsu v. United States* (1944).³⁹

The Japanese internment during World War II was a bit muddier than what is taught and remembered. With the bitter attitudes and anti-Japanese laws starting before 1900, there was tension for nearly half a century before the Japanese Americans were punished solely on ancestry. While most of the Japanese that were incarcerated were American citizens, it is easy to see that the racist views of the people living in the West Coast helped solidify an anti-Japanese culture. We can see that even the government had made decisions about the Japanese Americans long before the war, with the term "concentration camps" being used. While using the excuse that the Japanese people in the United States were not loyal, there was evidence on the contrary. This evidence was wholly ignored. Altogether, a situation that would lead to the internment of the Japanese Americans was brewing and the bombing of Pearl Harbor was an easy scapegoat

³⁹ Thomas Connell, *America's Japanese Hostages: The World War II Plan for a Japanese Free Latin America* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 222.

for the United States government to do so. Looking back almost 80 years, we can see that there have been significant changes in how we treat American citizens. The Japanese American Citizens League wants people to know that we should use the appropriate terms like “concentration camp” and “forceful relocation.” While it damages the reputation of the United States, history must be recorded by all parties. The truth must be uncovered and realized that what the government did to the Japanese Americans was unforgiveable. They stripped American citizens from their rights due to racism and fear. People lost their livelihoods and most of their possessions. They were forced to live in fear of their lives. Placed in crude camps, humans were forced to live in squalor. Never were there any recorded cases of sabotage or espionage between the Japanese Americans and the enemies. Never was there a reason to condemn Americans based solely on race, but we did. We did because of the racism of the white nativists on the West Coast. Their insecurities and prejudices against the Japanese people led to the removal of civil rights from American citizens.

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