

The Rooseveltian Concentration Camps For Japanese-Americans, 1942-46

By Austin J. App, Ph.D.¹

On June 30, 1946, twenty-one years ago, America's concentration camps for 112,985 Americans of Japanese descent (Nisei and Issei) were officially declared abolished. On February 19, 1942, when Japanese victories had created a panicky fear of a West Coast invasion, President Roosevelt, the professed champion of pure democracy and World brotherhood, signed Order No. 9066 and on March 18, Order No. 9102, ordering Japanese Americans evacuated from the West Coast and to be confined, without charge, hearing or trial, into inland concentration camps.

Roosevelt and his fellow New Dealers proved thereby that during a total war no government has ever been truly democratic or constitutionally fair to all its own inhabitants, let alone alien ones. National Socialist Germany was not, but neither was holier-than-thou Rooseveltian America. Executing Roosevelt's racist orders, General John L. DeWitt, Western Defense Commander on August 7, 1942, announced complacently that over 110,000 persons of Japanese blood had been successfully routed out of their homes into camps surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards.

Rights Abrogated in World War I and II

America at present is convulsed by hordes of protesters against our Vietnam intervention who claim the right to burn their draft cards, carry pro-enemy slogans, and even burn the American flag. At least they did until a few weeks ago when these same "doves" started clamoring for the U.S. to rush to support Israel. Had any German-American attempted the like in World War I or II, he would probably have been lynched and certainly been put in jail. In World War II the Japanese Americans of the West Coast, even though they could be accused of not one act of subversion or sabotage, were clamped in ten "Relocation Camps" for the duration only because the Rooseveltians considered all persons of Japanese blood "potentially dangerous."

Time Magazine in "The Right to Dissent and the Right to Answer" (May 12, 1967) marvels how brash today's protesters are when we are fighting

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communists, and how soft they are treated, compared to the harshness and real repression applied when we were fighting Germans and Japanese:

"During World War I's anti-German hysteria, the 1918 Sedition Act prescribed 20 years' imprisonment for war dissenters. Superpatriots banned the teaching of German in 25 states, cheered sweeping federal raids on 60,000 'radicals' in 1920, and even put over Prohibition as a 'war measure.' In World War II, the Supreme Court itself approved the most drastic invasion of constitutional rights in our history—the 1942 'relocation' in semi-concentration camps of 112,000 West Coast Japanese, two-thirds of them U.S. citizens by birth."

The Facts of the "Relocations" between February 19 and August 7, 1942

On April 1, 1942, people woke up to find all over California posters of "Instructions to all Persons of Japanese Ancestry" with this message:

"All Japanese persons, both alien and non-alien, will be evacuated from the above designated area by 12:00 o'clock noon Tuesday, April 7, 1942.

"No Japanese person will be permitted to enter or leave the above described area after 8:00 A.M., Thursday, April 2, 1942, without obtaining special permission from the Provost Marshal at the Civil Control Station . . ."

But there had been ominous warnings, injustices, and arrests before. The day after Pearl Harbor a Federal order froze the bank credits of all Japanese Americans. As a tragic result a great many Japanese American businesses were closed down, forced

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... early as January 29, 1942, the U.S. Army
... eral ordered enemy aliens to evacuate
... "strategic areas," touching off panic and
... February 2, without warning, FBI agents
... into Terminal Island, a fishing settlement
... arrested 336 Issei (non-naturalized Japa-
... grants) on presidential warrants as poten-
... agents." On February 10, the U.S. Justice
... ment informed the remnant of the first
... families of the island that they must evacuate
... in forty-eight hours. Allan R. Bosworth,
... America's Concentration Camps (Norton
... pages, \$5.95) describes how profiteers took
... the household possessions and merchandise of
... frightened people at ridiculous prices. One
... whose husband had already been arrested
... \$4000.00 for an inventory value at \$25,
... of their belongings had to be abandoned.

This of course was also the case during
... evacuation from February to August. A
... Time (February 17, 1967):

*"The loss to the internees, who
... allowed to take with them only
... could carry, was estimated at \$400
... figure that includes the farms, business
... personal possessions they were forced
... behind. After the war, this loss was
... at approximately 10 cents on the dollar."*

Partial Indemnity, But None for Loss

But it took twenty-five years before the
... Court in a rare unanimous decision ruled

*"4,100 Japanese Americans (who
... late) may sue the Government to recover
... ings deposits seized at the beginning of
... War II. A circuit court had ruled*

statute of limitations barred the suits" (Wall Street Journal, April 11, 1967).

Presumably they will now have prompt restitution of their confiscated funds. But all these years the unfortunate savers were deprived of the earning power of their money and saw inflation eat two-thirds of it away! Time Magazine estimates that

"The court ruling will return to the petitioners—without interest—some \$400,000 in savings that the Government confiscated from U.S. branches of Japanese banks."

The unjustly incarcerated internees not only lost the interest on their money and the income from their expropriated properties but also for at least four years the wages of their labor and the rewards of their careers. Even those who had passed civil service examinations were barred from those positions. Nobody so far has suggested that they be compensated for salaries so lost. In contrast, West Germany has sometimes paid back salaries for decades to those who had been deprived unjustly of special positions even though they may have earned far more elsewhere all the time.

The internees were put to work in the concentration camps but paid convict wages. While in civilian life, wages were skyhigh, unskilled internees got \$8 a month, skilled ones, \$12, and professional ones, like doctors and dentists from \$16 to a maximum of \$19 a month. They got for the work of a month what free Americans got for a day! Yet no one has ever suggested that their income lost through slave-labor be compensated for, as little as anyone has suggested that German prisoners of war farmed out as slave-laborers according to the Morgenthau Plan be compensated!

Conditions in the Relocation Camps

After the 112,985 West Coast Americans of Japanese blood had been rounded up, they were first herded for some six months into "assembly centers" or staging areas until the ten Relocation camps had been constructed. The sixteen Assembly Centers were race tracks, fairgrounds, livestock exposition facilities, an abandoned Civilian Conservation Corps Camp, an old mill site. Busses took the internees to them. Only what personal effects they could carry was allowed them. Military police searched all suitcases and boxes. The Centers had barbed wire fences, soldiers with machine guns watched the gates.

The Centers were equipped with community showers, toilets, laundries, a hospital, and post exchange. Interness were given nominal allowances in the form of coupon books: single adults, \$2.50 per month; children under sixteen, \$1.00; married couples, \$4.00. In addition, those capable had to work 44 hours a week for the normal wages specified above. The meals seem to have been supplied in the kind of soup kitchens President Roosevelt envisage for the vanquished German people, except that the food was more solid than soup, including for example pork and beans. One can say that, while everybody was cramped, and everything was primitive and full of hardships, nobody in the Assembly Centers starved or froze to death.

In March, 1942, Milton Eisenhower, youngest brother of General Dwight Eisenhower, was appointed director of the War Relocation Camps, a euphemism for what were America's concentration camps. If it is fair to call any German a war criminal who helped in the construction of concentration camps, then Milton Eisenhower would be a worse one for being the director of America's concentration camp complex.

By mid-June the Army had approved eleven such camps for 130,000 persons, of which ten were used. They were tar-paper barracks in desert locations, surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by armed military police. Conditions in general were like those in the assembly centers. *Time Magazine* (August 11, 1961) calls the "ten 'relocation centers' — a euphemism for concentration camps."

Time describes as follows:

"At the half-completed relocation centers, the evacuees were dismayed to find no inside plumbing, and in the frigid camps of Wyoming and Idaho, the only protection against the winter cold consisted of antique pot-bellied stoves.

Bachelors were jammed 30 to a tarpaper-covered barrack, and each one-room, 20-ft. by 25-ft 'apartment' was shared by two families."

One young Nisei mother, for example, wrote, "This being seven in one room makes privacy an unknown word." Superficially, these American concentration camps for the totally innocent Nisei looked far more grim and primitive than Dachau looked.

Insubordination was no more tolerated than in German concentration camps. When at the Camp Manzanar a Nisei who had accused a Caucasian Steward of stealing sugar was placed in jail, the internees gathered in protest and demanded his immediate release. The Military police was ordered to enforce martial law. Captain Bosworth reports:

"Soldiers pushed the crowd away from the police station, and lined up there with sub-machine guns, rifles and shotguns. The crowd jeered. The soldiers put on gas masks and threw tear gas bombs."

When one teen-ager started the engine of a parked automobile, "The troops opened fire, reportedly without orders to do so. One young Nisei — who had a brother serving in the U.S. Army — was instantly killed. A Nisei, nineteen, was so badly wounded that he died a few days later. Ten evacuees, all told, were treated for gunshot injuries" (Bosworth, *America's Concentration Camps*, p. 161).

Of another camp, *Time Magazine* (Aug. 11, 1961) reports as follows:

"... in November 1942, after a demonstration against the administration of the Tule Lake camp in California, the Army's Military Police took over the camp, manned the watch-towers and began patrolling the area with Jeeps and command cars. The transition to Nazi-type stalags was complete."

How Did This War-time Racial Crime Come About?

For honorable Americans, who heard our Morgenthauists demand, long before there were any imputations of "gassings" or murder in German concentration camps, that all Germans who tolerated concentration camps for Jews should be executed, our wartime concentration camps for the whole Japanese population on the West Coast are a great humiliation. How could the self-righteous Rooseveltians, even while crusading in Europe against national socialistic Germany fundamentally only because it discriminated racially against Jews, do in principle precisely the same thing to its Nisei?

In June, 1967, when the San Diego Union interviewed the retiring Supreme Court Justice Thomas Campbell Clark, he said that of his many blunders during his career he publically acknowledges only two, the Nuremberg Trial of the vanquished and the wartime internment of the Nisei. Specifically of the latter he said that it discriminated against

"is a sign that the blow is well organized." He continued:

"I understand fully and appreciate thoroughly the unwillingness of Washington to adopt a policy of mass evacuation and internment of all those who are technically enemy aliens. But I submit that Washington is not defining the problem on the coast correctly . . . The Pacific Coast is officially a combat zone: some part of it may at any moment be a battlefield. Nobody's constitutional rights include the right to reside and do business on a battlefield."

(See Bosworth, op. cit., pp. 60-61)

In short, this great Jewish champion of human rights for everybody (except for the German Expellees, whom he wants cheated out of their Oder-Neisse and Sudeten homelands), in 1942 urged a policy which could literally be used by the National Socialists as the battlefront moved closer into Germany to justify their putting all Jews in concentration camps as dangerous potential enemies!

Even the Touchstone of Democracy, the Congress, Approved This War Crime

Of course, some Americans indeed protested the internment of the Japanese, among them for example Senator Taft and FBI Chief J. Edgar Hoover. But like Germans who opposed wartime Germany's treatment of Jews, such Americans were ignored. Time Magazine reports

"There was not one effective voice of U.S. protest. The Congress passed a bill supporting the move; only one Senator, Robert Taft, voiced strong opposition to the theory of evacuation."

That the very bastion of democracy, the Congress, could during wartime hysteria and fear of invasion sanction the racist violation of all constitutional rights of an innocent minority on grounds of "potential danger" is a frightening reminder that democracy is no guarantee against prejudice, injustice, and war!

The War Department, aware of the doubtful constitutionality of the mass evacuation, maneuvered Congress into approval by drafting a bill making it a misdemeanor, subject to a year's imprisonment and \$5,000 fine, for anyone to disobey the evacuation order. It was presented on March 9, 1942 and passed by March 19. Congress during the debate did not at all criticize the whole plan of mass evacuation and even expressed satisfaction with the power given the War Department. Worst of all, these solons of our great democracy allowed themselves to be tricked into arguing as if the evacuation affected only aliens, not also naturalized and native-born American citizens. Although Senator Taft called it "probably the 'stop-just-for-them' kind of law that has been passed in Germany," nevertheless both houses of Congress passed this Public Law 503 overwhelmingly, which in fact robbed a minority of its constitutional rights just as certainly and on the same grounds as any laws of Nazi Germany against Jews.

Also Frankfurter's Supreme Court Constitutionalized This Racism

Through this law the Supreme Court, normally the watchdog of a democracy, was perverted into declaring America's worst outburst of racist persecution constitutional. One Nisei resisted the curfew and another the evacuation, and their cases ultimately reached the Supreme Court. The Catholic Judge Frank Murphy called the mass evacua-

tion an "ugly abyss of racism" and the Court's upholding it a "legalization of racism." The Episcopal Justice Robert H. Jackson accused the majority of distorting "the Constitution to approve all that the military may deem expedient." The Court "may as well say that any military order will be constitutional and have done with it." (See Grodzins, *op. cit.*, pp. 355-6). In dissenting from the majority decision formulated by Justice Felix Frankfurter, Jackson wrote:

"... the Court for all time has validated the principle of racial discrimination in criminal procedure and of transplanting American citizens. The principle then lies about like a loaded weapon ready for the hand of any authority that can bring forward a plausible claim of an urgent need."

(See Bosworth, op. cit., p. 247)

It is ironic that Justice Felix Frankfurter, listed as born in Austria and Hebrew, not only legalized what Justice Jackson called "a loaded weapon" against minorities but rationalized it in a manner which the Nazis could use to justify anything they are alleged to have done to European Jews. He said that the Constitution means that in wartime anything the military considers necessary is constitutional!

"The Constitution," he said, explicitly granted the war power "for safeguarding the national life by prosecuting war effectively." Hence, if a military order . . . does not transcend the means appropriate for conducting war, such action by the military is . . . constitutional . . ."

(See ten Broeck, op. cit., p. 226)

In short, whatever during a war the government and the army consider expedient is constitutional in a democracy—and therefore presumably also allowable in a national socialistic regime! That this opinion should have been delivered by a rabid Morgenthauist who was for punishing the whole German people for what their wartime government did to the Jewish minority is significant and shocking.

The War Turned Victorious, and the Nisei Are Spared

Of course, when we Americans think of our wartime concentration camps for the Nisei and Issei, we derive much consolation from the circumstances that in the end these unfortunates were not executed. But this is considerably dimmed by the reflection that as long as we feared invasion we treated the Nisei worse and worse, just as the Nazis did the Jews. When the danger passed and we were spared invasion, we did not go on to kill them—but relaxed, and finally released them. Only literally the Holy Ghost can know what we would have done if bombs had fallen on our cities every night, if Japanese forces had landed and were pushing ruthlessly forward (raping and murdering as the Soviet armies did on invading Germany), if there had been a probability that as they released the Nisei they would turn on us as Ilya Ehrenberg made it probable that Jews released from the concentration camp would turn on the Germans! This is not to justify anything. What we did to the Nisei was a crime, what the Nazis did to the Jews is a worse crime. But both were the product of wartime hysteria and real or fancied danger. Had the danger for Germany subsided, perhaps the Nazis would have become sane again, too. And only God can know, literally, what our Rooseveltians would have done if they like the Nazis had been threatened with Unconditional Surrender and the genocidal Morgenthau Plan!