

West Coast Tensions: The Push for Internment in World War II

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On February 19th, 1942, an extreme measure was taken by the United States with the signing of Executive Order 9066, an order giving select officials the authority to designate areas within which the movements of any person would fall under military control.¹ The areas designated as exclusion zones included the majority of the West Coast of the United States. The primary intent of the order was to allow for the Japanese population of the United States to be interned in camps across the United States. The Executive Order was signed two and a half months after tensions between the U.S. and Japan had culminated in the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the United States' declaration of war against Japan. The movement of Japanese Americans along the Pacific coast was restricted on March 2nd and was quickly followed by the freezing of financial assets, with internment itself beginning on March 24th.² The stated justification for the internment of Japanese Americans was to reduce the threat of them collaborating with the Japanese. Although the perceived threat of Japanese American collaboration with Imperial Japan in WWII was an undeniable cause for the U.S. internment of the Japanese, a significant portion of the support for internment came from groups with pre-existing tensions against the Japanese Americans, particularly along the West Coast. These tensions led to support for Japanese internment in the hope that it would result in the appropriation of Japanese properties and reduce the Japanese American presence on the West Coast. From these facts, it is clear that the primary motivation for internment was the pre-existing resentment against Japanese Americans along the West Coast of the United States.

Anti-Japanese Sentiment From the 1900s to the 1920s

In the first place, ethnic discrimination against Japanese Americans was already prevalent on the West Coast prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the declaration of war against Japan. It had its roots in the anti-Chinese movements, with Japanese Americans being added to the list of undesirable aliens competing for jobs with white workers. As the Japanese presence along the West Coast expanded from around 18,629 in 1900 to 93,490 in 1920, Japanese Americans became the primary focus of much of the anti-Asian resentment in the United States.³

¹ Exec. Order. No. 9066, (February 19, 1942), <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5730250>.

² Roger Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trial: Japanese Americans in World War II* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 53.

³ The data provided here was originally found in the Japanese Immigration and Population table in Daniels' *Prisoners without Trial* which itself was sourced from U.S. census data. I took the leeway

One reason for the strength of the anti-Japanese movement was the American fear of Imperial Japan. The worldviews of many early 20th Century white westerners were predicated on the idea of a fundamental white supremacy, whereby whites as the race most inclined to success had the responsibility of taking charge over the lesser races. This concept of the "white man's burden" is aptly demonstrated by Rudyard Kipling's poem of the same name. The rapid rise of Japan and the defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese war threatened this supremacist perspective and brought about fears of Imperial Japan, ushering in the concept of a "yellow peril" whereby the "lesser races" would potentially rise up against the supremacy of the white race. The idea of the Japanese as the vanguard of a future race war spread across the Western world, and these views were prominently upheld in newspapers across the United States.⁴ These beliefs influenced the development of many anti-Japanese organizations on the West Coast.

In particular, this is demonstrated by the Asiatic Exclusion League, a particularly influential anti-Japanese organization during the period. It was founded on May 14, 1905 and was initially composed almost entirely of California labor unions such as the Building Trades Council and the Sailor's Union. Speeches at the League made clear the racial animosity that motivated the league, such as one which said that "an eternal law of nature has decreed that the white cannot assimilate the blood of another without corrupting the very springs of civilization."⁵ The League consistently pushed for boycotts of Japanese American products and services, as well as lobbying for legislation targeting the Japanese. The league eventually became defunct, but the league's anti-Japanese legacy continued on undiminished as the organizations constituting the league pursued their goals separately.

Equally important to the anti-Japanese movement was the Native Sons of the Golden West, a powerful fraternity with significant political influence whose membership was limited to Californians whose families had settled during the Gold Rush. The Native Sons of the Golden West frequently attacked Japanese Americans in speeches and with their monthly publication the *Grizzly Bear*. An example of the animosity espoused towards Japanese Americans would be this quote from an issue of the *Grizzly Bear* from 1913, "Would you like your daughter to marry a Japanese? If not, demand that your

of checking Daniels' table against the figures provided by the U.S. Census in their table "Color or Race and Nativity with Parentage and Sex for the Native White Population, by Divisions and States: 1920", and noted that Daniels had mistakenly labeled the West Coast Japanese population as 94,490 instead of 93,490. Considering how close the number was, and how the other numbers matched the census data, the presumption is that it was a simple typo or mistaken addition. Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trial*, 8.

⁴ Greg Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy: Japanese Confinement in North America* (Chichester, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 13.

⁵ Roger Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966), 28.

representative in the Legislature vote for segregation of whites and Asiatics in the public schools."⁶ This exhortation for members to lobby for anti-Japanese legislation was a common occurrence for the Native Sons. One of the reasons for the significance of the organization's anti-Japanese bias was due to the prestige of the fraternity, with prominent members of the Native Sons including such powerful figures as U.S. President Richard M. Nixon and Chief Justice of the United States Earl Warren.⁷ This demonstrated the fraternity's substantial influence on the California Legislature, influence frequently wielded against the Japanese American population.

However, though the Asiatic Exclusion League and the Native Sons of the Golden West were two of the most important groups in the anti-Japanese movements of the early 20th Century, they were hardly the only organizations involved. Others included the California wing of the American Legion, the California State Federation of Labor, the California Farm Bureau Federation, and the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association, as well as other significant unions and farming associations.⁸ These organizations were primarily motivated by the Japanese success in agriculture, and the competition that this growth necessitated between Japanese and White farmers.⁹ The success of Japanese American farmers along the West Coast can be demonstrated by the fact that agricultural land owned or leased by Japanese Americans in California increased from 37,680 acres in 1904 to 458,056 acres in 1919.¹⁰ Also, Japanese American farming was extremely intensive, producing almost three times the production per acre over the average Californian farmer, and by 1919 Japanese American farmers produced approximately 10% of the total market share of California crops.¹¹ The anti-Japanese labor unions and farmers associations were composed primarily of white workers interested in reducing the competition they faced, and as such, they had a vested interest in seeing Japanese Americans dispossessed of their lands. It was this interest that frequently motivated their political lobbying.

As a result, due to the lobbying of anti-Japanese organizations along the West Coast, legislators from the West Coast were the primary anti-Japanese agitators in government. Prominent examples of anti-Japanese legislators during the period included California Governor and later Senator Hiram Johnson, as well as Washington

Congressman Albert Johnson.¹² The effect that the racial animus against Japanese Americans had on legislatures in the early 20th century can be demonstrated by the anti-Japanese actions and legislation passed during the period. These numerous legislative acts were heavily supported by the anti-Japanese groups and organizations on the West Coast. One important example of anti-Japanese actions during the period would be the San Francisco Board of Education's 1906 order to segregate Japanese American students to Oriental schools.¹³ This order, which was pushed heavily by the Asiatic Exclusion League, was merely the forerunner to a tide of anti-Japanese legislation.

For example, there were many laws passed with the intent to discriminate against the Japanese in the decades before World War II. Two of the most significant acts of legislation against Japanese Americans were the 1913 and 1920 Alien Land Law acts of California that prevented aliens ineligible for citizenship from owning agricultural land.¹⁴ The primary targets of the Alien Land Laws were *Issei*, first-generation Japanese immigrants to America who were ineligible for citizenship. Though the Asiatic Exclusion League and other supporters of anti-Japanese legislation would have preferred the laws to have a broader scope that included all Japanese Americans, it was far easier for the California legislature to craft legislation targeting non-citizens like the *Issei*. This was largely due to the tendency for legislation aimed at Japanese-American citizens to run afoul of constitutional concerns, with the threat of the courts overruling legislation targeting non-citizens like the *Issei*. The anti-Japanese motivation for the Alien Land Laws was made clear in a 1920 letter from Hiram Johnson, the Governor turned Senator from California who had pushed both laws, wherein he wrote that "The naturalization of Japanese would be most abhorrent to our people, and, of course, be vigorously resisted . . . It is an incontrovertible fact that the Japanese continue ever Japanese, that their allegiance is always to Tokio, and even in the event of Naturalization, they would continue alien, and their loyalty would ever be, not to the United States, but to Japan."¹⁵ The attitudes expressed in the aforementioned letter by Senator Johnson were widely held, particularly on the West Coast of the United States. The growth of anti-Japanese sentiment eventually resulted in the complete restriction of immigration from Japan, as the Japanese were added to the already existing exclusion acts targeting the Chinese via the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924.

⁶ *Grizzly Bear* (Los Angeles, CA) March, 1913, 6.

⁷ G. Edward White, *Earl Warren: A Public Life* (New York: Oxford Publishing Press, 1982), 29; Plaque, *Richard Nixon – A Native Son*, Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁸ James McDonald, "Democratic Failure and Emergencies: Myth or Reality?", *Virginia Law Review*, Vol. 93, (November 2007): 1800-1802.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1811.

¹⁰ Daniels, *Politics of Prejudice*, 9.

¹¹ Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, *Personal Justice Denied: Report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982), 43.

¹² No known relation. Senator Hiram Johnson was well-known for pushing anti-Japanese laws such as the

¹³ Alien Land Law. Meanwhile, the 1924 Johnson-Reed Immigration act that restricted Japanese Immigration was named after Congressman Albert Johnson.

¹⁴ Daniels, *Politics of Prejudice*, 34.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 63, 88.

¹⁶ Hiram Johnson, *The Diary Letters of Hiram Johnson 1917-1945* v.3, ed. Robert E. Burke (New York: Garland, 1983), 11.

Nativist Groups and Farmer's Associations from the 1920s to Internment

Despite closing the doors to Japanese immigration into the United States, tensions on the West Coast were not diminished, as anti-Japanese sentiments remained strong. The desire to see the Japanese dispossessed of their land was still prominent after the 1920s, as laws such as the Alien Land Laws had largely failed to prevent the Japanese from continuing to purchase and own agricultural land on the West Coast. By 1940, Japanese American farmers produced about \$2.7 million worth of crops in Oregon, approximately \$4 million in Washington, and approximately \$32 million in California.¹⁶ This was less than they had produced in 1919, but this dip corresponded with the drop in crop prices during the Great Depression. In general, the Japanese still had a large presence in the agricultural sector. Due in large part to this economic success, nativist groups and farmers associations along the West Coast were still preoccupied with their racial animus against Japanese Americans by the time of the U.S. entry into World War II.

In particular, racial animus was demonstrated by the Native Sons of the Golden West, who remained staunch opponents of Japanese Americans during the period. That these negative views were still held by the Native Sons of the Golden West was demonstrated by a statement in the July 1942 issue of the *Grizzly Bear*, wherein it was proposed that "organizations and individuals actually desirous of preserving California as a paradise of the White Man for all time . . . Dispossess the Japanese of every foot of land, rural and urban, to which they now claim title. Challenge the citizenship of every Jap---his right to exercise in the United States the voting privilege."¹⁷ These views were used as the basis of a series of lobbying actions, lawsuits, and constitutional amendment proposals that the organization put forward, as exemplified by *Regan v. King*, wherein the Grand Secretary of the Native Sons sued the county registrar of San Francisco to have Japanese American citizens stripped of voting rights. Grand Secretary Regan alleged, "that his rights and privileges as an elector, secured to him by law, are impaired by permitting ineligible persons [Japanese] to exercise the rights and privileges of electors of the State of California."¹⁸ These anti-Japanese perspectives of the Native Sons were shared by other organizations, most notably Farming Associations.

Accordingly, during the 1940s, Farming Associations remained significant lobbyists in the anti-Japanese movement. The Western Growers Protective Association was an example of a farmer's organization that supported actions against Japanese Americans, as it made clear in letters and statements directed to significant political figures during the war. An example

of this is a 1942 letter directed to then Attorney General of California, Earl Warren, wherein the President of the Western Growers Protective Association wrote that "We trust that your office will make a sincere effort to eliminate as many of these undesirable aliens from the lands of California as is possible at this time. Let me assure you that our entire organization . . . is behind you squarely in any action you see fit to take in this matter, looking forward to the elimination of these alien enemies in our midst."¹⁹ Earl Warren ran for Governor of California later that year. As a candidate in the gubernatorial race, it was clear that the support of the anti-Japanese organizations would be highly advantageous, and in fact, Earl Warren won and became governor. From this, it becomes clear that there was significant political pressure from agricultural lobbyists to support internment, particularly on the West Coast.

To clarify, farming associations were motivated more by the desire to appropriate Japanese American property than they were by any worries about Japanese sabotage. This was made clear by a statement from the secretary of the Salinas Vegetable Grower-Shipper Association. The statement was made while he was actively lobbying for Japanese removal in Washington and read "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. . . . If all the Japanese were removed tomorrow, we'd never miss them in two weeks . . . And we don't want them back when the war ends, either."²⁰ The statements made by the Grower-Shipper Association were indicative of the attitudes held by other agricultural organizations along the West Coast.

The Military Threat of Japanese Americans

Prior to World War II, rising tensions with Japan across the Pacific were already exacerbating anti-Japanese sentiment across the West Coast. Though the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act prevented immigration from Japan, anti-Japanese activists still felt threatened by the Japanese presence in the United States. The expansionist tendencies of Imperial Japan were used to demonize Japanese Americans, as prophets preaching the dangers of the Yellow Peril claimed that war with Japan was nigh inevitable and that in the event of such a war, the Japanese in America would naturally side with Japan.²¹ This belief in the inherent danger that Japanese Americans posed to the United States was echoed at the highest echelons

¹⁹ S.V. Christerson to Earl Warren, 7 January 1942, Folder A16.201 (1/2), Barnhart research on "Americans Betrayed" by Morton Grodzins, The Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement: A Digital Archive, Bancroft Library. http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/jarda/ucb/text/reduced/cubanc6714_b012a16_0201_1.pdf

²⁰ Frank J. Taylor "The People Nobody Wants: The Plight of Japanese Americans in 1942" *Saturday Evening Post*, May 2017. <http://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2017/05/31/in-the-magazine/people-nobody-wants.html>.

²¹ Roger Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966), 71.

¹⁶ *Personal Justice Denied*, 43.

¹⁷ Clarence M. Hunt, "Do We?" *Grizzly Bear* (Los Angeles, CA) July, 1942, 16.

¹⁸ *Regan v. King*, 49 F. Supp. 222 (N.D. Cal. 1942)

of power, as demonstrated by a 1934 memorandum from the State Department claiming that during a war between the United States and Japan, the entire Japanese Population on the West Coast would rise in support of Tokyo.²² This atmosphere of distrust towards Japanese Americans prepared the way for wartime allegations of collaboration during World War II.

Finally, animosity towards Japanese Americans reached a crescendo after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The pre-existing fears of Japanese American untrustworthiness were magnified by the crisis, and these tensions were not aided by an event known as the Ni'ihau Incident that occurred directly after the bombing. Though not particularly well known by the public, information about the incident was available to the government. The Ni'ihau Incident was the crash-landing of Imperial Japanese pilot Shigenori Nishikaichi on the Hawaiian island of Ni'ihau.²³ Though the pilot had his pistol and papers taken from him by a local Hawaiian named Hawila Kaleohano, he was otherwise well-treated.²⁴ The pilot, who was desperate to retrieve his papers, was aided in his efforts by three local Japanese, Ishimatsu Shintani, Yoshio Harada, and Harada's wife, Irene. The incident culminated in Harada and Nishikaichi taking a hostage at gunpoint and burning down the house containing the papers. In the end, locals mustered a desperate resistance that ended with Nishikaichi dead, and Harada having committed suicide with his shotgun.²⁵ To some government and military officials, this incident seemed an example of the racial loyalty of Japanese Americans, as demonstrated by Naval Lt. C.B. Baldwin's report, wherein he wrote that "The fact that the two Niihau Japanese who had previously shown no anti-American tendencies went to the aid of the pilot when Japanese domination of the island seemed possible, indicates likelihood that Japanese residents previously believed loyal to the United States may aid Japan if further Japanese attacks appear successful."²⁶ This incident may have motivated the later, ill-founded statements of government officials about the threats posed to the West Coast by Japanese American collaborators.

The Role of Racial Prejudice in Influencing Government Officials

It is important to realize that although there were examples, such as the Ni'ihau Incident, to support the idea that Japanese Americans might be a security threat, the role that racial prejudice played in motivating government officials to support internment is

undeniable. Though the argument of military necessity may have seemed reasonable after events such as the Ni'ihau Incident, the government possessed a significant amount of evidence that the internment of Japanese Americans was not necessary. This is demonstrated by the 1941 Munson Report. Curtis B. Munson, a wealthy Midwestern businessman, investigated the issue of Japanese American loyalty on behalf of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Munson spoke with FBI and Office of Naval Intelligence investigators, as well as Japanese Americans and people acquainted with them. In his report, Munson wrote that "We do not want to throw a lot of American citizens into a concentration camp of course, and especially as the almost unanimous verdict is that in case of war they will be quiet, very quiet. . . . There will probably be some sabotage by paid Japanese agents and the odd fanatical Jap, but the bulk of these people will be quiet because, in addition to being quite contented with the American way of life, they know they are 'in a spot.'"²⁷ High-ranking officials should certainly have been aware of the report, as well as those corroborating it.

In addition, Munson's Report was corroborated by the 1942 report of Naval Lt. Cmdr. K.D. Ringle of the Office of Naval Intelligence on the threat that Japanese Americans posed. In his report, Ringle wrote "That of the Japanese-born alien residents, the large majority are at least passively loyal to the United States. That is, they would knowingly do nothing what ever to the injury of the United States," and also "that, in short, the entire 'Japanese Problem' has been magnified out of its true proportion, largely because of the physical characteristics of the people."²⁸ The views of Ringle and Munson constituted the majority of informed views on the subject of Japanese American loyalty in the intelligence services.

Despite the information provided by the FBI and Office of Naval Intelligence, the government proceeded to intern the Japanese on the West Coast of the United States. The intelligence reports on the matter were purposefully disregarded, and in fact were purposefully kept from the attention of the U.S. Supreme Court during *Hirabayashi v. United States*, *Yasui v. United States*, and *Korematsu v. United States*.²⁹ This purposeful withholding of evidence that would have undermined the government's position on the military necessity of internment was in large part due to the political pressures being placed on federal officials by West Coast organizations and legislators. One example was that of February of 1942, Attorney General Earl Warren

²² Robinson, *Tragedy of Democracy*, 34.

²³ Allan Beekman, *The Niihau Incident: The True Story of the Japanese Fighter Pilot who, After the Pearl Harbor Attack, Crashlanded on the Hawaiian island of Niihau and Terrorized the Residents* (Honolulu: Heritage Press of Pacific, 1982), 29.

²⁴ The name utilized in Beekman's *Niihau Incident* was Howard Kaleohano, but as this simply was a Romanized version of Kaleohano's name, his Hawaiian name Hawila has been used.

²⁵ Beekman, *Niihau Incident*, 83.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

²⁷ *Personal Justice Denied*, 52.

²⁸ Kenneth D. Ringle, *Ringle Report on Japanese Internment* (Jan 1942), <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/r/ringle-report-on-japanese-internment.html>.

²⁹ The evidence provided was eventually used to successfully pursue writs of *Coram Nobis* and overturn the Supreme Court rulings. Peter Irons, *Justice Delayed: The Record of the Japanese American Internment Cases* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 125, 250.

was already actively working on persuading the federal government to remove Japanese Americans from the West Coast.³⁰ Warren was far from the only West Coast official pushing for internment, as many other officials from the West Coast also lent their voices in support of internment. This was most aptly demonstrated by the case of a letter to President Roosevelt from California Congressman, Clarence Lea, on behalf of representatives from California, Oregon, and Washington, wherein Lea endorsed internment and recommended that the removal zones be expanded to the entirety of the three states.³¹ These examples were indicative of the general political atmosphere on the West Coast, an atmosphere that was filled with anti-Japanese resentment.

Furthermore, that this atmosphere propelled the cause of internment is evidenced by the statements of leading figures of the U.S. government. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover notably stated in a Feb. 3rd memo to Attorney General Francis Biddle that "The necessity for mass evacuation is based primarily upon public and political pressure rather than on factual data. Public hysteria . . . resulted in a tremendous amount of pressure being brought to bear on Governor Olson and Earl Warren,"³² The same pressures motivating West Coast legislators were faced by members of the War Department. Provost Marshal Gullion described a meeting about the evacuation of Japanese Americans on Feb. 1st between leading figures of the War Department and the Justice Department as particularly heated, with the War Department backing internment and the Justice Department against it. In his description, Gullion claimed that "[The Justice officials] said there is too much hysteria about this thing; said these Western Congressmen are just nuts about it and the people getting hysterical and there is no evidence whatsoever of any reason for disturbing citizens,"³³ In the end, the hysteria and immense political pressure carried the day and the pro-internment voices won out, with the result being that the government carried out a policy of mass evacuation and internment of Japanese Americans.

Tying the Threads Together

In conclusion, it is clear that the legacies of the anti-Japanese organizations from the start of the 20th century continued into the 1940s. The same West Coast nativist groups and labor organizations that had protested Japanese migration to the United States clamored for internment. That anti-Japanese resentment motivated these organizations is clear from the numerous racially charged statements that were made, as well as the numerous acts of legislation passed on the West Coast that targeted Japanese-Americans specifically. The racial motivations for internment were also demonstrated by the holes in the arguments for military necessity, holes of which officials in the government and military were

well aware. The government's willingness to cling to flawed arguments demonstrated the political pressure being brought to bear on Washington by a vocal group of anti-Japanese agitators. Thus, it is apparent that the internment of Japanese Americans was driven primarily by West Coast organizations and individuals with an anti-Japanese bias that exploited the war with Japan to achieve long-held goals of Japanese removal.

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³⁰ *Personal Justice Denied*, 199-200.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

³² *Ibid.*, 73.

³³ *Personal Justice Denied*, 74.