

Testimony of Milton S. Eisenhower, President Emeritus, The Johns Hopkins University, before the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, Russell Senate Office Building Caucus Room, Washington, D. C., ~~Thursday, October 29, 1981~~ November 2, 1981

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At the request of the Commission, I am here to give you such facts as I can about the evacuation of Japanese Americans from the Pacific Coast early in 1942 as authorized by Executive Order 9066 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and as amplified by military authorities in what then was deemed by them to be a possible war zone.

Let me first explain that I have no original papers or memoranda I can submit to you. When I left the War Relocation Authority after only ninety days as its Director, all official papers were naturally left with the Authority which came under the direction of Mr. Dillon Meyer; he continued as head of the agency until the evacuation tragedy was brought to a close at the end of the war. The official papers are no doubt in the Federal Archives.

I have never kept a diary or other personal statements or notes, and regrettably it was always my policy to review my files every fifth year and to throw away letters and documents for which I thought I had no further need. I regretted this greatly when I decided in 1972 to write a book on my work with eight Presidents of the United States. With respect to Executive Order 9066 and my participation in the work of the War Relocation Authority for three months, I did an enormous amount of research in 1973

to bring together in chronological order what I believed to be the relevant facts that led up to the issuance of Executive Order 9066, of my own obligations and actions in the War Relocation Authority from mid-March to mid-June, 1942, and to subsequent events as I came to understand them. That research took many months to complete. In my written testimony today I present detailed information based on the examination of official papers by principal Federal officers, including the Attorney General, the Secretary of War, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Assistant Secretary of War, the Commanding General of the Army's West Coast Forces, the Wartime Civil Control Organization, and others.

On March 9, 1942, I was in Tennessee on a task I was then handling for the President and two cabinet departments, namely, trying to eliminate serious conflicts between the land-use and conservation programs of the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, the Soil Conservation Service, the Farm Security Administration, the Forest Service, the Public Land Office and the National Park Service. I had just begun on a phase of the work in Tennessee when a telephone call from Major General Edwin M. Watson, President Roosevelt's appointment secretary, said that the President wanted me in his office "the soonest."

I was ill at the time but managed to arrive at the Oval Office in the White House on either March 10 or 11. Harold Smith, Director of the Bureau of the Budget, entered the President's office with me.

As we went in, I was startled by the change in the President. In all my previous work with him over an eight-year period, I had never seen him without his jaunty air. No matter how difficult the problem, he was always buoyant, smiling, and confident. Now, as he studied the papers before him, his face lacked color, his lips were a tight grim line, and, as he looked up at me, I saw his eyes were blood-shot.

Normally, he would have exchanged a pleasantry or two, perhaps passed along an amusing anecdote, before turning to the problem or chore he had in mind for me. It was understood, of course, that the President's request was in fact a command, but Franklin Roosevelt was always so considerate and charming that I found myself wanting to do what he asked without needing a directive. I was about to experience the first exception to that.

He was blunt. His first words were:

"Milton, your war job, starting immediately, is to set up a War Relocation Authority to move the Japanese-Americans off the Pacific coast. I have signed an executive order which will give you full authority to do what is essential. The Attorney General will give you the necessary legal assistance and the Secretary of War will help you with the physical arrangements. Harold"--he nodded at the budget director-- "will fill you in on details of the problem."

He looked back at the paper he had been reading, and I realized the interview was over. My mind full of half-formed questions, I turned to leave. The President looked up at me again and said;

"And, Milton...the greatest possible speed is imperative."

I seized the opportunity to ask the first question that had come to mind.

"Mr. President, may I move my staff from the Co-ordinating Office in Agriculture to the Relocation Authority?"

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"Just let me know who you want with you on this job," he replied, "and we will take care of it."

That was all.

Like most Americans at the time, I knew very little about the problem of the Japanese-Americans on the West Coast. As I walked with Harold Smith to his office, I tried to recollect what I had heard or read over the three months since Pearl Harbor.

I recalled that immediately after the Japanese attack newspapers and radio had reported a roundup of enemy aliens across the country by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. This included some Japanese aliens on the West Coast.

I also remembered reading that a General John DeWitt, who was in charge of the army on the Pacific coast, believed that an invasion of the United States was a real possibility and, in such an event, our armed forces and citizens would not be able to distinguish friend from foe. A few weeks earlier President Roosevelt had signed the executive order he'd referred to which, I mistakenly thought at the time, directed that all persons of Japanese descent, whether citizens or aliens, be removed from the West Coast. Finally, I was aware that a California congressman was holding hearings of some sort on the West Coast having to do with the evacuation of Japanese.

I knew no more than this.

In his office Harold Smith explained the situation. He told me that there were some 120,000 Japanese in California, Oregon, and Washington. Some were *Issei*, immigrants from Japan, many of whom had lived in the United States for a very long time but were not citizens; unlike German and Italian aliens who chose not to become citizens, the *Issei* had been prohibited by law from becoming naturalized United States citizens. A second and larger group of Japanese were *Nisei*, mostly the sons and daughters and grandchildren of the *Issei*, born in this country and therefore citizens by right of birth. A much smaller number were *Kibei*, persons born of Japanese parents in this country but educated in Japan and recently returned to the United States. Smith indicated that among the *Kibei* were people who probably posed the threats to our security.

According to Smith, Lieutenant General DeWitt, commander of the Western Defense Command, did not believe initially that one could tell the difference between a loyal and a disloyal Japanese-American, and

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the FBI and other intelligence units agreed. The army feared a "fifth column" on the West Coast that would be active in a Japanese attack on our mainland.

Smith said that there was great concern for the safety of the Japanese-Americans themselves. The mass media on the Coast were inflaming the people against the Japanese-Americans and several had been murdered in the fields where they worked. Greater turmoil and increasing vigilante action were threatened.

The budget director himself had not been much involved in the problem, having only read memos and correspondence and listened to some of the discussions in the White House. He offered helpful suggestions on space, organization, personnel, and other procedural questions. But on substantive matters he urged me to see Attorney General Francis Biddle and Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy. Biddle had been concerned with the Japanese-American situation even before the war and had studied all the legal aspects of the problem, including the President's war powers which later gave the War Relocation Authority its authority. McCloy had been in close touch with the military on the West Coast and was thoroughly familiar with all aspects of the situation. These men, Smith said, would give me whatever help I requested.

As he rose to end the meeting, Smith also stressed the need for speed and told me that the army was ready to move the Japanese-Americans into temporary camps on the West Coast and was anxiously waiting to see how the newly established War Relocation Authority would proceed. Smith told me the President would issue an executive order in about a week (it was signed on March 18) establishing WRA and naming me its director.

I asked about German and Italian aliens, and he replied that WRA would have the authority to deal with them also but that the German and Italian nationals were not expected to constitute a problem.

As I left the White House on that blustery March day it was clear to me that the question was not *whether* to evacuate the Japanese-Americans (since that process was already under way) but rather how to carry out their relocation to the interior.

Hurrying back to my office, I was deeply troubled. My instincts told me that the course we were embarked on was an extreme one. But I must confess that I spent little time pondering the moral implications of the President's decision. We were at war. Our nation had been vi-

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ciously attacked without warning. We had been badly mauled by the Japanese forces and the enemy had been rampaging almost without resistance in the Southwest Pacific. The Philippines and Malaya had fallen; Hong Kong and Singapore were in enemy hands. There was no effective Allied armed force between Cairo and San Francisco. President Roosevelt was the Commander-in-Chief and he had given me my war assignment. I was determined to carry it out as effectively and humanely as possible.

When I assumed my new duties, I did not know what events had transpired between December 7, 1941, and mid-March 1942 which led President Roosevelt to make his evacuation decision. Indeed, it was not until years later, when historians reconstructed those events and wove them together into a coherent chronology, that I fully understood the situation I stepped into in March 1942.

I must rely upon these historians for background against which President Roosevelt's decision can be evaluated and my own role in the relocation of Japanese-Americans can be related. Stetson Conn, Yale-trained historian and general editor in the Office of the Chief of Military History, carefully documented the evacuation of Japanese-Americans in the U. S. Army's official history of World War II (*Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*).³ Bill Hosokawa, in his book *Nisei: The Quiet Americans*,⁴ records the history of the Japanese-Americans and the terrible tragedy of their evacuation in late 1941 and through the first half of 1942. Morton Grodzins' *Americans Betrayed*⁵ details the events of that period. And others, such as Attorney General Biddle⁶ and Secretary of War Stimson,⁷ contributed to the mosaic through their published memoirs. From these men and others, I have pieced together the story that I did not know on March 18, 1942, when I began what turned out to be the most difficult and traumatic task of my career.

Although the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor came without warning, our relations with Japan had steadily deteriorated in the preceding months, and war with Japan was increasingly likely. Some preparations, therefore, had been made, and on December 8, by 6:00 A.M., while broken ships still burned in Pearl Harbor, the FBI had taken some 733 Japanese nationals into custody. These were mostly aliens who had been under surveillance for many months. During the next four days, acting under presidential warrant, the FBI rounded up some 1,370 Japanese on the West Coast.

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Most of the Issei arrested during those dark days after Pearl Harbor had done nothing wrong. But the Department of Justice had received reports of sabotage by Japanese residents in Honolulu (later proved false) and was taking no chances. There was real fear that Japanese air forces might strike the West Coast of the United States. There was also concern that local citizens, frightened and outraged by the sneak attack, might take action against the Japanese population on the Pacific coast.

Attorney General Biddle issued a statement to reassure both the American people and the Japanese-Americans. "So long as the aliens in this country conduct themselves in accordance with the law," he stated, "they need fear no interference by the Department of Justice or by any other agency of the Federal Government." He indicated that the government had disloyal aliens and citizens under control, and he assured the Japanese-Americans and loyal Japanese nationals that every effort would be made "to protect them from any discrimination or abuse."⁶

The fear of discrimination and abuse was well founded. Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., wrote in his diary, *Years of War*:⁸ ". . . deep-rooted hostility to the Japanese generated frequent rumors about espionage and subversion and frightened demands for repressive treatment not only of local Japanese residents but also of Nisei, American citizens of Japanese descent."

Secretary Morgenthau also reported that three days after Pearl Harbor he was urged by some of the staff in the Foreign Funds Control Office to take over thousands of small businesses owned by Issei and Nisei in the area between the Pacific Ocean and Utah. Morgenthau immediately asked FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover for his opinion, and Hoover insisted that the FBI had matters well in hand and that no additional steps against the Japanese were required. The next morning Morgenthau rejected the proposal as "hysterical" and "impractical."

The Department of the Treasury's general counsel, Edward Foley, objected to Morgenthau's decision, declaring that civil liberties must yield to the security of the country. Morgenthau records his response in his diary: "Listen, when it comes to suddenly mopping up 150,000 Japanese and putting them behind barbed wire, irrespective of their status, and consider doing the same with the Germans, I want at some time to have caught my breath. . . . Anybody that wants to hurt this

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country or injure us, put him where he can't do it, but . . . indiscriminately, no."

Also a few days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, a federal intelligence agent told West Coast military officials that some 20,000 Japanese in the San Francisco area were "ready for organized action." In fact, there were only 13,000 Japanese in greater San Francisco (men, women, and children of all ages). Nonetheless, the IX Corps Area staff hastily drew up a plan to evacuate the Japanese, and the plan was approved by their commander. Fortunately the plan was abandoned because the FBI learned of it and dismissed the rumor as the ravings of a discharged former FBI agent. This illustrates the way in which panic and rumor swept the Pacific coast after the Japanese attack.

Newspaper and radio stations were filled with stories of the roundup of Japanese and there were sensational reports of mysterious activities in the Japanese community. The public's fears were greatly heightened when Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox reported on his hasty inspection of Pearl Harbor and Honolulu. The report was issued on December 15 and it made no mention of sabotage or subversion by Japanese residents. But Secretary Knox held a press conference in connection with the release of his report, and the newspapers quoted him as saying: "I think the most effective fifth column work of the entire war was done in Hawaii with the possible exception of Norway."⁴

It is interesting to note that in those fearful days following Pearl Harbor, when rumor and panic were rampant, two senior members of the President's Cabinet stood firm and acted with reason and judgment. The notion of interning Japanese-Americans or depriving them of their constitutional rights was rejected. Even Mrs. Roosevelt spoke out—in a statement she said was approved by the Departments of State and Justice—saying: "I see absolutely no reason why anyone who has had a good record—that is, who has no criminal or anti-American record—should have any anxiety about his position. This is equally applicable to the Japanese who cannot become citizens but have lived here for 30 or 40 years and to those newcomers who have not yet had time to become citizens."⁴

Military officials, however, were taking a different view. On December 19, General DeWitt had asked in a memo to his superiors "that action be initiated at the earliest possible date to collect all alien subjects fourteen years of age and over, of enemy nations and remove them

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to the Zone of the Interior."³ This may have been the first official call for evacuation, though General DeWitt was referring only to aliens, not citizens, and to all enemy aliens, not just Japanese.

General DeWitt was responsible for protecting the West Coast, and in those early days of the war, as the Japanese armed forces systematically crushed all opposition in the Southwest Pacific, the threat of an invasion of the United States mainland was viewed as very real. Half of the nation's military aircraft production was located on the West Coast; so were many naval facilities and oil fields. The military was understandably worried about the activities of enemy aliens should an invasion be launched.

General DeWitt rejected mass arrests and expressed the concern that such action would alienate loyal Japanese. He stated: "An American citizen, after all, is an American citizen. And while they all may not be loyal, I think we can weed the disloyal out of the loyal and lock them up if necessary."⁴ This was a position—shared with Hoover, Biddle, and Morgenthau—that he held during the month after Pearl Harbor.

The military, nonetheless, continued to worry about enemy aliens and an invasion. In San Francisco early in January a two-day meeting of representatives of the Departments of War and Justice was held. Its purpose was to work out arrangements for controlling enemy aliens.

Official reports of that meeting indicate that General DeWitt continued to oppose mass arrest or evacuation of citizens but expressed distrust of both Issei and Nisei. The representatives at the meeting finally agreed that the army should designate strategic areas on the Pacific coast from which enemy aliens would be barred. In addition, there was agreement on a new program to register enemy aliens and concurrence that the FBI should increase spot raids to round up those who constituted a threat to security.

One of the participants in the San Francisco meeting was Major Karl R. Bendetsen, chief of the Aliens Division of the Provost Marshal General's office. Historian Stetson Conn attributes to Bendetsen the proposals for the designation of strategic areas and a new alien registration program. Major Bendetsen was to play a most influential role in the months ahead.

During December the mass media on the West Coast continued to carry sensational stories of the roundup of some Japanese. Early in January a newspaper columnist and a radio commentator fired the first

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salvos in an inflammatory campaign to discredit Japanese-Americans. On January 4, Damon Runyon, popular writer for the Hearst papers, wrote: "It would be extremely foolish to doubt the continued existence of enemy agents among the large alien Japanese population. Only recently, city health inspectors looking over a Japanese rooming house came upon a powerful transmitter, and it is reasonable to assume that menace of a similar character must be constantly guarded against throughout the war."⁴ Official records show that no secret transmitter was ever found in Japanese-American hands.

The next day John B. Hughes ("News and Views by John B. Hughes") of the Mutual Broadcasting Company began a series of radio broadcasts declaring that the great majority of Japanese-Americans were loyal to Japan and berating the Justice Department for not moving against them.

These malicious attacks touched off inflammatory columns by other writers. Westbrook Pegler of Scripps-Howard wrote: "The Japanese in California should be under guard to the last man and woman right now and to hell with *habeas corpus* until the danger is over."⁴

Columnist Henry McLemore wanted all Japanese-Americans taken into custody and packed off to the "badlands." He wrote: "Let us have no patience with the enemy or anyone whose veins carry his blood. . . . Personally, I hate the Japanese. And that goes for all of them."⁴

The message reached the man in the street loudly and clearly and prompted a flood of letters to West Coast congressmen and senators. In response, Congressman Leland Ford of Los Angeles County wrote to Cabinet members and other federal officials demanding that all Japanese be placed in inland concentration camps. On January 20 he spoke in the House of Representatives and on a radio broadcast urging the mass internment of Japanese aliens and Nisei alike.

On January 21, General DeWitt forwarded a recommendation to the War Department, as agreed at the San Francisco meeting of Justice and War representatives earlier in the month. He proposed the exclusion of enemy aliens from eighty-six Category A zones and control of enemy aliens by a pass and permit system in eight Category B zones. Secretary of War Henry Stimson forwarded the memo to Attorney General Biddle for implementation with a covering letter:

"In recent conferences with General DeWitt, he has expressed great apprehension because of the presence on the Pacific Coast of many

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thousand alien enemies. As late as yesterday, 24 January, he stated over the telephone that shore-to-ship and ship-to-shore communications, undoubtedly coordinated by intelligent enemy control were continually operating. A few days ago it was reported by military observers on the Pacific Coast that not a single ship had sailed from our Pacific ports without being subsequently attacked. General DeWitt's apprehensions have been confirmed by recent visits of military observers from the War Department to the Pacific Coast. The alarming and dangerous situation just described, in my opinion, calls for immediate and stringent action."³ Two interesting points about the Secretary's comments: first, Stetson Conn reports that there had been no Japanese submarine or surface vessels anywhere near the West Coast during the preceding months and that reports of hostile radio communications were completely without foundation; indeed, with the Japanese navy in complete control of the Pacific, it is not surprising that United States ships were consistently attacked. Second, the Secretary's letter was drafted in the Provost Marshal General's office.

General DeWitt had been in constant touch with Provost Marshal General Allen W. Gullion and Major Bendetsen. Late in January, General DeWitt, in a phone conversation with General Gullion, said: "The fact that nothing has happened so far is more or less . . . ominous in that I feel that in view of the fact that we have had no sporadic attempts at sabotage that there is a control being exercised and when we have it it will be on a mass basis."³ In other words, the Japanese-Americans and Japanese aliens on the Pacific coast were now suspect because they had *not* committed acts of sabotage.

The publication on January 25 of a report of the Roberts Commission which had investigated the attack on Pearl Harbor heaped fuel on the fire. The report charged that Japanese consular agents and Japanese residents in Oahu had committed acts of sabotage before Pearl Harbor. (After the war this charge too was proved false.)

By late January the pressure generated by the newspapers and radio and by California politicians was beginning to have its impact on the military. General DeWitt met with the governor of California, Culbert L. Olson, to discuss the "alien problem." Afterward DeWitt reported to Major Bendetsen by telephone:

"There's a tremendous volume of public opinion now developing against the Japanese of all classes, that is aliens and non-aliens, to get

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them off the land and . . . they are bringing pressure on the Government to move all the Japanese out. . . . It is being instigated . . . by the best people in California. Since the publication of the Roberts report they feel that they are living in the midst of a lot of enemies. They don't trust the Japanese, none of them."³

Just who the "best" people were, in DeWitt's judgment, he did not say. But the forces pressing for action against the Japanese population included the mayor of Los Angeles, the mayor of Seattle, the Native Sons of the Golden West, the American Legion, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, the California Joint Immigration Committee, and various agricultural associations. It is not too surprising that, when Governor Olson suggested that the Japanese population should be moved out of California, General DeWitt agreed and offered to accept responsibility for the enemy alien program if it were to be transferred to him.

At the end of January the California congressional delegation met to formulate recommendations for action. The congressmen approved a program calling for the evacuation of aliens and "dual" citizens from critical areas. Major Bendetsen attended their meeting and reported the next day to General Gullion that the congressmen were in fact demanding that all Japanese, including citizens, be removed from the West Coast. He said that they wanted an executive order authorizing the War Department to carry out the evacuation. The Justice Department had approved General DeWitt's earlier memorandum and announced publicly the designation of eighty-six Category A zones, stating that all aliens should be removed from these zones by February 24.

The growing public clamor, the hardening line of the War Department, and the recommendations of the California congressmen alarmed Attorney General Biddle. On Saturday, February 1, he called a meeting in his office and invited representatives from the War Department, including General Gullion, Colonel Bendetsen (he had just been promoted), and Assistant Secretary McCloy. Biddle distributed the draft of a press release which he proposed be issued jointly by the Department of Justice and the War Department. The release indicated that the two departments concurred on the alien control steps taken so far. The release also included the following, significant sentence:

"The Department of War and the Department of Justice are in

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agreement that the present military situation does not at this time require the removal of American citizens of Japanese race."³

It must have been clear to Biddle that the push for evacuation was gaining momentum, and this sentence was an obvious effort to head off a decision he felt would be wrong. He recalls the meeting in his diary and declares that he made very clear that his department would have nothing to do with interfering in the rights of citizens or with the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus.

Gullion, Bendetsen, and McCloy agreed with the wording of the draft release but took exception to the sentence quoted above. Biddle's release was withheld pending the approval of General DeWitt and the outcome of a meeting scheduled for the next day in Sacramento of DeWitt, Governor Olson, Tom Clark (who had been appointed coordinator of Alien Enemy Control Programs in the Western Defense Command a few days earlier), and various state and federal officials. After the meeting in Biddle's office, Colonel Bendetsen told the Chief of Staff's office that Biddle's release was being delayed because General DeWitt was ready to recommend the evacuation of the entire Japanese population from the West Coast. In fact, the Provost Marshal General's office had plans for mass evacuation well under way and had even located shelters to house most of the Japanese residents temporarily.

A few days later General DeWitt reported on the Sacramento meeting with Governor Olson and the others. The California officials had proposed a plan to move both Issei and Nisei from the coastal area to agricultural belts in eastern California where they could work on farms. He stressed that the movement of the Japanese would be voluntary, if possible with the collaboration of American-born Japanese leaders. He was confident that a plan could be worked out in about ten days.

Despite Colonel Bendetsen's remark about mass evacuation, John McCloy responded to DeWitt's report by warning him against advocating a position of mass evacuation. Assistant Secretary McCloy and Secretary Stimson were reported to be opposed to mass evacuation and any illegal interference with citizens.

By early February, then, the situation was confused, and it could have gone either way. Biddle was resisting mass evacuation; DeWitt was wavering and couldn't seem to make up his mind; McCloy and Stimson apparently were influenced by Biddle and were still opposed

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to relocating Nisei. Colonel Bendetsen appeared to favor mass evacuation. Under his direction, the registration of enemy aliens in California (worked out in early January) was under way. The Nisei and Issei affected by it were becoming increasingly apprehensive.

A navy report published in October 1942, several months after I had completed my work for WRA, gives some idea of what the Japanese on the West Coast were suffering, even as early as February 1942. The report found:

... loss of employment and income due to anti-Japanese agitation by and among Caucasian-Americans, continued personal attacks by Filipinos and other racial groups, denial of relief funds to desperately needy cases; cancellation of licenses for markets, produce houses, stores, etc., by California State authorities; discharges from jobs by the wholesale; unnecessarily harsh restrictions on travel including discriminatory regulations against all Nisei preventing them from engaging in commercial fishing.³

Despite the hardships and apprehensions, many Japanese-Americans on the West Coast continued to believe that the government would recognize their loyalty; they simply could not believe that they would be evacuated from their homes.

The movement which had begun immediately after Pearl Harbor as an effort to control and detain potentially dangerous aliens evolved during January into a sentiment for controlling and evacuating all Issei from certain restricted areas. Then, in February thinking escalated into evacuation and control of all Japanese aliens and Japanese-Americans on the Pacific coast.

Early in February 1942, Colonel Bendetsen wrote to Provost Marshal General Gullion, pointing out that the evacuation of Issei would accomplish little, since most Issei were elderly and virtually harmless. Indeed, he stated, their removal would arouse the Nisei—their sons, daughters, and grandchildren. Bendetsen proposed a three-step program: first, an executive order authorizing the War Department to designate military areas; second, the actual designation of such areas by General DeWitt; and, third, the prompt evacuation of all persons except those licensed to remain. Such a plan in his judgment provided a legal way to remove the Japanese.

At this point the Provost Marshal General's office lent impetus to the eventual evacuation. Colonel Archer L. Lerch, Deputy Provost

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Marshal General, supported Bendetsen's plan, while rejecting the voluntary movement of the Issei to eastern California farms, as suggested by Governor Olson. Lerch said the Olson scheme smacked "too much of the spirit of Rotary" and did not conform to the "necessary cold-bloodedness of war." His boss, General Gullion, took a similar stance and told John McCloy that the Olson voluntary relocation plan was "dangerous." He recommended to McCloy prompt action to eliminate the "great danger of Japanese-inspired sabotage on the West Coast." General Gullion wanted mandatory removal of all alien Japanese to areas east of the Sierras with as many Nisei members of their families as would voluntarily accompany them. The remaining Nisei would be excluded from restricted zones and resettled with the help of the federal government.

It is interesting to note that even as some military authorities were proposing evacuation to prevent widespread sabotage, General Mark Clark and Admiral Harold R. Stark, chief of naval operations, were dismissing the threat out of hand. They testified before a committee appointed by California's senior senator, Hiram Johnson, and chaired by ~~California~~ Senator Mon C. Wallgren to deal with the problems of aliens and sabotage in California. General Clark declared that the West Coast was unduly alarmed and that any chance of a sustained attack or invasion by the Japanese was "nil."

It is also well to remember that Colonel Bendetsen's military areas plan did not distinguish between Japanese aliens and German and Italian aliens. If the proposals for removing aliens from Category A zones had been carried out, some 90,000 aliens would have been removed—25,000 of whom would have been Japanese.

Attorney General Biddle did not want to evacuate Germans and Italians. Moreover, the scope of such an enterprise clearly exceeded the capacity of the Department of Justice. If it was to be done, he said, the military would have to do it. In fact, Biddle wanted nothing to do with the evacuation of citizens, as he had made clear all along.

Biddle's resistance resulted in the drafting of a memorandum by the War Department of the "questions to be determined re Japanese exclusion." Although it is reasonable to assume that some assessment had been provided to the President during the weeks following Pearl Harbor, it was this War Department memorandum drafted on February

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11, 1942, that was probably the first official acknowledgment of presidential involvement. The following questions were drafted:

(1) Is the President willing to authorize us [the War Department] to move Japanese citizens* as well as aliens from restricted areas?

(2) Should we undertake withdrawal from the entire strip DeWitt originally recommended, which involves over 100,000 people, if we include both aliens and Japanese citizens?

(3) Should we undertake the immediate step involving, say, 70,000 which includes large communities such as Los Angeles, San Diego, and Seattle?

(4) Should we take any lesser step such as the establishment of restricted areas around airplane plants and critical installations even though General DeWitt states that in several, at least, of the largest communities this would be wasteful, involve difficult administrative problems, and might be a source of more continuous irritation and trouble than 100 per cent withdrawal from the area?³

Secretary Stimson describes in his diary what happened at that point. After meeting with McCloy and General Clark, the Secretary tried to see the President. Roosevelt, confronted with global problems, was too busy and could not schedule an appointment. Shortly after lunch, however, the Secretary and the President talked by phone and, according to Stimson, the President was "very vigorous" in response to the situation as described by Stimson and "told me to go ahead on the line that I myself thought the best." Stimson acknowledged in his diary that the best course of action in his view was the immediate evacuation of citizens and alien Japanese from the most vital places of army and navy production.

McCloy called Colonel Bendetsen and reported, "We have carte blanche to do what we want as far as the President's concerned." President Roosevelt had specifically authorized the removal of citizens. The President was aware of possible repercussions but that military necessity had to dictate the course of action. "Be as reasonable as you can," President Roosevelt had cautioned his Secretary of War.

The President's reaction put wind in the sails. General DeWitt hastily submitted a new plan which called for the enforced evacuation of Japanese-Americans from the Category A areas already designated.

* The War Department phrase "Japanese citizens" really meant American citizens of Japanese ancestry.

The same day the new plan was submitted, the Wallgren committee recommended the immediate evacuation of all persons of Japanese lineage first from the specific vital areas, but eventually from the entire Pacific coast. President Roosevelt forwarded the committee's recommendation to Secretary Stimson for a reply.

On February 17, Provost Marshal General Gullion telegraphed the corps area commanders on the West Coast:

PROBABLE THAT ORDERS FOR VERY LARGE EVACUATION OF ENEMY ALIENS OF ALL NATIONALITIES PREDOMINANTLY JAPANESE FROM PACIFIC COAST WILL ISSUE WITHIN 48 HOURS. INTERNMENT FACILITIES WILL BE TAXED TO UTMOST. REPORT AT ONCE MAXIMUM YOU CAN CARE FOR, INCLUDING HOUSING, FEEDING, MEDICAL CARE, AND SUPPLY. YOUR BREAK-DOWN SHOULD INCLUDE NUMBER OF MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN. VERY IMPORTANT TO KEEP THIS A CLOSELY GUARDED SECRET.³

In a subsequent letter General Gullion explained that 100,000 enemy aliens would be evacuated and interned east of the Western Defense Command; 60,000 would be women and children.

The plan for a mass evacuation came into focus in a meeting on February 17 of Secretary Stimson, Assistant Secretary McCloy, General Gullion, General Clark, and Colonel Bendetsen. General Clark objected to mass evacuation (on the grounds that it would require the use of too many troops) but Secretary Stimson decided to instruct General DeWitt to move immediately.

That evening Bendetsen, McCloy, and Gullion met with representatives of the Justice Department at the home of Attorney General Biddle. General Gullion read a draft of an executive order that would be presented to the President for his signature. Morton Grodzins, in his book *Americans Betrayed*,⁵ describes that meeting. Edward Ennis, chief of the alien enemy control unit in the Department of Justice, was present as was James Rowe, Jr., Biddle's assistant. Both men were stunned by General Gullion's proposed draft. At first they thought it ludicrous, then they reacted with such biting criticism that General Gullion became angry. The two Justice Department representatives argued vigorously for the rights of citizens and pleaded for an examination and decision of loyalty in each individual case. The Attorney General remained silent, and draft of the executive order moved forward.

Ironically, Biddle had sent President Roosevelt a memorandum

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that very day as background for a presidential press conference. He indicated that the FBI had no evidence of an imminent attack on the West Coast and no evidence of any planned sabotage. He outlined the way in which he had co-operated with the War Department in designating critical areas and in planning for selective evacuations of aliens. He pointedly referred to the legal limits on the Justice Department which prevented him from evacuating citizens. Much of Biddle's memo was a rebuke of columnists who were inflaming the public on the West Coast. Specifically, he mentioned Walter Lippmann, who had advocated mass evacuation of the Japanese population in a column on February 12. (Eight days later, on February 20, Lippmann would write another column echoing the peculiar charge of General DeWitt a month earlier that the absence of sabotage by Japanese-Americans on the West Coast was an indication that they were lying low and awaiting orders from Tokyo to commit sabotage on a massive scale.)

By mid-February the congressional delegation from the West Coast had closed ranks, finally overcoming the reluctance of some members like Senator Sheridan Downey and Congressman Jerry Voorhis. In their demands for the evacuation of Issei and Nisei, the Westerners had attracted support from many Southern senators and congressmen. On February 18, Mississippi Congressman John Rankin addressed the House of Representatives on the question.

"This is a race war," he proclaimed. ". . . The white man's civilization has come into conflict with Japanese barbarism. . . . I say it is of vital importance that we get rid of every Japanese, whether in Hawaii or on the mainland. . . . Damn them! Let us get rid of them now!"⁴

Senator Tom Stewart of Tennessee told his fellow senators: "They [the Japanese] are cowardly and immoral. They are different from Americans in every conceivable way, and no Japanese should have the right to claim American citizenship. . . . A Jap is a Jap anywhere you find him, and his taking the oath of allegiance to this country would not help, even if he should be permitted to do so."⁴

Executive Order 9066 was signed by President Roosevelt on February 19, 1942. It did not direct that the Japanese should be evacuated, as I thought when the President referred to it during our discussion in March. Rather, it gave Secretary Stimson the power to evacuate both citizens of Japanese descent and aliens from the Pacific coast by au-

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thorizing him to designate certain military areas and exclude "any or all" persons from them.

Even after the signing of Executive Order 9066, the Nisei and Issei hoped that the evacuation would not be carried out. Hearings held by Congressman John H. Tolan of California offered some hope. The hearings were to look into the problems of evacuation. Japanese-Americans looked forward to demonstrating their loyalty to the United States.

The hearings, which moved like a traveling road show along the West Coast, were essentially superfluous. Before they were half completed, General DeWitt had designated the western half of California, Oregon, and Washington, as well as the southern part of Arizona, as restricted military areas from which all persons of Japanese descent would be evacuated. Simultaneously with the close of the hearings, the general established the Wartime Civil Control Administration, with Colonel Bendetsen as its director, to implement the evacuation program.

Still, the hearings are revealing. Various officials and leaders of civic organizations argued for evacuation on the grounds that (1) there was a danger of invasion and sabotage; (2) that loyal and disloyal Japanese were indistinguishable; (3) that the economy of the Pacific States would not be adversely affected by the removal of the Japanese; and (4) that evacuation was necessary for the safety of the Nisei and Issei themselves.

Japanese-Americans pleaded their case with fervor, but it was soon apparent that the Tolan committee was building a justification for mass evacuation rather than looking for objective information. Some distinguished citizens helped to build that case. California Attorney General Earl Warren, later to become Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, fell victim to the same curious reasoning that afflicted DeWitt and Walter Lippmann. He testified that the absence of sabotage was "the most ominous sign in our whole situation," because "we are just being lulled into a false sense of security."⁴

On February 14 the navy had designated Terminal Island (across from San Pedro) a restricted zone and ordered all Japanese out by March 14. On February 25 the navy changed the deadline to February 27. The heartbreak of evacuation became suddenly evident in this forty-eight-hour period as families with no place to go hurriedly gathered the

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belongings they could carry and fled Terminal Island. Many left behind possessions of a lifetime, either abandoning them or selling them for virtually nothing.

The mass evacuation of Nisei and Issei was beginning.

At a Cabinet meeting on February 27, 1942, President Roosevelt asked for a report. Apparently he had thought little about the problem of transporting and resettling the Japanese population.

Secretary Stimson summarized the situation, pointing out that General DeWitt's proclamation of restricted zones in early February had not, as he had anticipated, resulted in substantial voluntary migration. Some 15,000 persons, including many Nisei, had already voluntarily left the prohibited zones designated by the Justice Department in January but had moved into zones subsequently restricted by the War Department. Despite DeWitt's assurance that if they moved again voluntarily they would not be disturbed any more, only about 2,000 persons did so. Their unwillingness to move a second time was surely caused by the failure of federal agencies to help solve the inevitable problems of abrupt dislocation.

Stimson pointed out that the task was enormous and that General DeWitt was hampered by the lack of manpower. At that point, Stimson says in his diary, "There was general confusion around the table arising from the fact that nobody had realized how big it was, nobody wanted to take care of the evacuees, and the general weight and complication of the project. Biddle suggested that a single head should be chosen to handle the resettlement instead of the pulling and hauling of all the different agencies, and the President seemed to accept this; the single person to be, of course, a civilian and not the Army. . . ."

And so, on or about March 10, President Roosevelt summoned me to his office and told me that I would be that "single head to handle the resettlement." Even as we talked, General DeWitt and Colonel Bendetsen on the West Coast were launching the Wartime Civil Control Administration to carry out a mass evacuation program.

Summarizing what happened during those three months after Pearl Harbor, I can hardly believe that at the time of the events I knew so little about them. But this, I feel sure, was equally true of most Americans. The newspapers and radio broadcasts of those opening months of the war were filled with news of bloody battles in Europe

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and Asia. The United States was rapidly mobilizing, and the war had already become a very personal matter for each of us. Like nearly everyone else in Washington, I was working day and night, and the task of conducting the information study for President Roosevelt during January was an added burden. The problem of the Japanese-Americans on the West Coast seemed remote and insignificant to the average American on the East Coast.

In any case, when I left Harold Smith on March 10, I knew only what he had told me during our brief conversation at the White House. Before seeing Assistant Secretary of War McCloy or Attorney General Biddle, as advised, I hurried to talk with my own staff. When I proposed that nearly all of them move directly to the new War Relocation Authority, the staff responded with enthusiasm. This was about the only heartening experience in those first few weeks of my new job. I knew their individual capacities; they were a well-knit team.

I met with Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy within the next two or three days. My recollection is that McCloy emphasized the need to relocate the Japanese population from the West Coast for their own safety, as well as to assure protection for vital industrial and military establishments. He also urged speed and said that the army was under orders to give me whatever assistance I required.

I took Philip Glick, attorney in the Co-ordinating Office of Agriculture, who had agreed to join me, with me to see Attorney General Biddle. We discussed the legal implications of moving Nisei into the interior. The Attorney General assured me that I could do almost anything I found necessary: I could transfer the evacuees into private employment if that proved feasible and, in doing so, I could specify the conditions which would have to be met in such employment. If private employment proved impossible, I could establish evacuation centers, set up schools, develop work programs, create courts and all the other facilities and procedures essential to making the relocation centers as nearly self-governing as possible.

Neither McCloy nor Biddle revealed in their conversations the interagency or individual conflicts and uncertainties that had preceded the President's decision. Their concern—and mine—was to carry out the evacuation as smoothly, quickly, and humanely as possible.

It was clear that I would have to maintain an office in Washington but I would also need an office, perhaps several, on the Pacific coast,

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where the actual movement of some 120,000 Issei and Nisei had to be carried out.

The next three months were a nightmare. In that period I seldom slept in my own home. I traveled from Washington to San Francisco and back on the average of once a week, always by night sleeper plane. The "night" description applied; the "sleeper" part did not—at least for me.

My first trip to the West Coast as the new director of the War Relocation Authority came a few days after the March 18 announcement by the White House. I wanted to meet with General DeWitt and Colonel Bendetsen and see for myself what the situation was. I also wanted to talk to some of the leaders of an organization of Japanese-Americans that I had heard about—the Japanese-American Citizens League. I had to assemble a West Coast staff and find office space for them.

In San Francisco, I met with Colonel Bendetsen. Our first session lasted for four hours. Bendetsen was all military—straight, serious, grim, and completely confident of his own judgments. From him I got the most thorough and detailed briefing of the current situation I had so far received.

The colonel explained that General DeWitt had divided the West Coast states into two military zones: Military Area No. 1 included the western halves of Washington, Oregon, and California and southern Arizona. In early March residents of Japanese ancestry in Military Area No. 1 had been advised that they would shortly be removed from this zone and they were urged to move voluntarily into the interior. Military Area No. 2, the zone into which it was expected that many Nisei and Issei would voluntarily migrate, included the eastern halves of Washington, Oregon, and California and the northern half of Arizona. As head of the Wartime Civil Control Administration created by General DeWitt on March 11, Bendetsen had the responsibility of supervising the move.

He told me that the voluntary evacuation plan unfortunately was a failure. He insisted that the voluntary relocation program be terminated and that compulsory evacuation of the entire Japanese population in Military Area No. 1 be undertaken at once.

I expressed dismay. I strongly resisted the idea of complete evacuation, hoping some less drastic solution could be found—though at that

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moment I knew too little of the situation to offer an alternative and workable proposal. I insisted that WRA, having been established only a few days earlier, was unprepared to cope with an immediate mass evacuation.

Colonel Bendetsen said that he shared my dismay but he was convinced that total evacuation was the only possible course. As to WRA's unpreparedness, he explained that the army in early March had selected two sites for relocating as many as 30,000 Japanese. One of these was in Arizona, along the Colorado River, and the other was in the Owens Valley of California. Within hours, the colonel said, he could have a group of Nisei volunteers recruited from the Los Angeles area on their way to one of these camps to make preparations.

Bendetsen went on to say that his agency had developed a plan for mass evacuation which would divide the coastal zone into 108 exclusion areas, each containing roughly 1,000 Japanese. The plan called for the systematic transfer of Japanese from these areas into temporary assembly centers, where they would be housed until WRA could relocate them. The army was building some fifteen such assembly areas, in addition to the two camps he had mentioned (Manzanar in Owens Valley and Poston in Arizona).

Deeply troubled, I replied that I wanted a few hours to consider the colonel's recommendation and to consult with others.

Before our meeting ended, Colonel Bendetsen suggested that Tom Clark was familiar with the problem, had been of some help to him and General DeWitt, and might be available to serve as my legal counsel on the Pacific coast. Later I spoke with Tom Clark and, to my everlasting thankfulness, he agreed to serve.

The next days were hectic. I became a one-man raiding party of government agencies in a search for staff for the West Coast offices of the WRA. Taking President Roosevelt's assurance as a mandate, I drafted experienced administrators from several offices, beginning with the Department of Agriculture, where I knew several well-qualified persons. Especially helpful were officials from the Department of Interior's Indian Service, Irrigation Service, and the Public Land Office.

Then I rented an entire floor in the Whitcomb Hotel and delegated the task of prying out of the federal bureaucracy telephones, typewriters, file cabinets.

It did not take me long to conclude that Colonel Bendetsen was

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correct about one thing: the voluntary evacuation program was a failure. Even if the Issei and Nisei had wanted to comply, they were virtually unable to. Families heading for Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and other Western states were met with hostility. Signs greeted them with the blunt message: "No Japs wanted here." They could not get hotel accommodations or service in restaurants. There was no work for people considered by their government to be potential saboteurs.

I first met with General DeWitt at the Presidio on March 25, and we agreed to terminate the voluntary evacuation program. He said he would issue a proclamation within a few days prohibiting movement in or out of Military Area No. 1. The general was an austere man, rather forbidding, and, like Colonel Bendetsen, supremely confident in his own judgment. He talked like a machine gun—fast, incisive, and seemingly without stopping to breathe. In our first conversation he covered much the same ground that McCloy and Bendetsen had, except he put greater emphasis on the military risks. He feared an invasion (though by late March that was an extremely remote possibility), and he was sure that there would be chaos in the coastal states should the enemy invade. He believed that a high percentage of both the Issei and the Nisei would support Japanese forces should they attack the West Coast, and he was adamant that one could not tell the difference between a loyal and a disloyal Japanese-American.

I sensed that General DeWitt had somehow blocked out the human implications of evacuation. He wanted the area cleared at once, so that he could make all feasible preparations for a possible invasion. I got the distinct impression that he intended to evacuate German and Italian aliens as well, though we did not discuss this. (Six weeks later General DeWitt formally recommended a limited collective evacuation of German and Italian aliens from Military Area No. 1. Secretary Stimson and Assistant Secretary McCloy rejected the recommendation, and General DeWitt insisted that he receive written instructions so that he would be exempt from all responsibility for the consequences of overruling his recommendation.)

Although I agreed that the voluntary relocation program should be terminated, I struggled against going ahead with a complete evacuation. I hoped that the people of California would accept a plan in which only men were evacuated, the women and children remaining in their homes and carrying on business enterprises as best they could, especially

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such businesses as florist shops, grocery stores, drugstores, and similar establishments where closing would involve serious economic losses. Colonel Bendetsen was certain that this would not be acceptable, and in a host of hurriedly called conferences I reluctantly became convinced that this was so.

I next wired the governors of the intermountain states and asked them to meet me within a week in Salt Lake City, Utah. My hope was that the governors would co-operate in a program to move the maximum number of evacuees directly into private employment. If mass evacuation were essential, at the very least it should be undertaken in a way that would permit families to stay together and the heads of these families to provide for their needs through gainful employment. The meeting was arranged for April 7.

I completed two other very important tasks during that first visit to San Francisco in late March.

I met with a group of Japanese-Americans and we established an advisory council to represent those who were affected by the President's executive order. This was the wisest thing I did in that whole traumatic experience.

The advisory council was headed by an attractive twenty-one-year-old Japanese-American, a Nisei, Mike Masaoka. He was secretary of the Japanese-American Citizens League, a graduate of the University of Utah, a man of great perception and heart. He was deeply respected by Japanese-Americans of all ages. After the establishment of the advisory council, I did not make a single major decision without first conferring with this young man and, when necessary, with the advisory council.

The other important action I took at that time was to meet with officers of the Federal Reserve Bank in California. I obtained their agreement that the bank would do all it could to protect the physical assets of the evacuees. It would protect property, try to rent properties and deposit the income to the credit of the right person or family, and give any other assistance in this area that it could. (Unfortunately, at this writing, some thirty years after those tragic events, two million dollars in claims by the Japanese-Americans have not been resolved.)

The governors (or their representatives in some cases) of the ten Western states met with me in Salt Lake City on April 7. I explained that the hysteria on the Pacific coast need not prevail in the intermountain states. None of the evacuees had been charged with disloyalty. In

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my judgment, there was no evidence to indicate that these people would indeed be disloyal in any event. I emphasized that they were being evacuated at the insistence of the military as a precautionary defense measure. Finally I suggested that the labor shortages in the intermountain states, especially in sugar beet production and other agricultural enterprises, was a problem that could be partially solved if the governors would co-operate in moving as many evacuees as possible into private employment. They would have to explain to their people that there would be no danger and they would also have to provide protective services in the event that misguided or uninformed persons attacked or harassed Japanese-Americans.

I was prepared to outline my idea for establishing small inland camps on the model of Civilian Conservation Corps camps which would serve as staging areas for the evacuees as they were moved into private jobs as soon as possible and could resume something like a normal life away from the Western Defense zone. I was prepared to discuss policies about prevailing wages, health care, and other factors. But I could get no further. The governors literally began shouting at me. They had been deaf to my opening assurances.

One governor shouted: "If these people are dangerous on the Pacific coast they will be dangerous here! We have important defense establishments, too, you know." Another governor walked close to me, shook his fist in my face, and growled through clenched teeth: "If you bring the Japanese into my state, I promise you they will be hanging from every tree!" Some governors demanded that the evacuees be kept under armed guard.

Only Ralph Carr of Colorado took a moderate and reasonable position. He said he had no objection to having loyal Japanese-Americans moving into his state and that co-operation with the relocation project was a citizen's responsibility. He was the single exception. The others were angry and hostile. That meeting was probably the most frustrating experience I ever had. During two weeks on the West Coast I had met many Japanese-Americans and had become convinced that the overwhelming majority were loyal and would remain so. I had hoped against hope that the governors would make it possible for us to resettle these people with the very least pain and to give them the maximum opportunity to live normally and contribute to their communities as they desperately longed to.

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There was no doubt in my mind as I left Salt Lake City that the plan to move the evacuees into private employment had to be abandoned—at least temporarily.

Time was getting short. The longer WRA took to develop relocation centers, the longer the evacuees would be kept in the assembly centers along the coast. And the assembly centers were makeshift quarters of tar-paper shacks thrown up at racetracks and fairgrounds. There was virtually no privacy; conditions were primitive, with overcrowding and minimal facilities.

I hurried to Washington and held a meeting of the chiefs of the National Forest Service, Irrigation Service, Public Land Office, and National Park Service. I asked them to prepare for me at once a map which showed publicly owned lands that were destined for subsequent development, preferably as irrigation projects which would involve an enormous amount of work. I also asked for a list of the best people in these agencies who might be drafted for service in the War Relocation Authority.

I told Assistant Secretary of War McCloy of meeting with the governors and explained that there seemed no alternative to the unhappy one of creating evacuation camps where the people could live in modest comfort, do useful work, have schools for their small children, and thus retain as much self-respect as the horrible circumstances permitted. McCloy said that as soon as I gave him a map of the locations for the evacuation camps, and some direction regarding the facilities I wanted, the army would move in and construct barracklike buildings which could be subdivided into family apartments. Schools, churches, and other essential buildings would be erected.

I had decided that the fifty or seventy-five smaller CCC-type camps were not feasible and that larger, semipermanent centers were needed. I anticipated recruiting the evacuees as a kind of work corps, who could help in clearing and developing the land, who could plant crops and manufacture products for the war effort, such as tents, camouflage nets, and cartridge belts. These items could be sold to the government and the evacuees could share in the profits.

The search for the relocation centers proceeded during April and into May. It was not an easy task. The sites had to be on government property and had to be large enough to accommodate five thousand

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or more persons. They had to be located away from strategic installations. They had to provide useful work opportunities.

The various agencies compiled a list of three hundred sites. Two thirds of these were eliminated for various considerations and the remaining one hundred were visited and studied by teams of WRA and staff officials from other federal agencies.

In late April 1942, a very special problem arose. Some 3,500 Japanese-Americans were enrolled in colleges and universities in the three Pacific coast states. Evacuation made it necessary for them to either withdraw from college or transfer to another institution away from the West Coast. I felt deeply about the necessity of finding a way for these young men and women to complete their education. If they could be widely distributed throughout the nation's colleges and universities they would be accepted in a friendly spirit. So I set out to establish a committee of leading educators.

I must confess that I am still distressed by the excuses I received from the educators I approached. All declined. Then someone suggested that I telephone Clarence Pickett, the prominent Quaker leader. He accepted. All Americans should have undying gratitude for the work he did. He obtained complete information about the Japanese-American students on the Pacific coast, traveled to hundreds of colleges and universities seeking admission for a few of these in each place, finally induced a prestigious group of educators and industrialists and cultural leaders to form the National Student Relocation Council, and succeeded in moving the students to other institutions. I should emphasize that many of these Japanese-Americans were graduate and professional students in the arts and sciences, law, medicine, public health, dentistry, and engineering.

Shortly after I had recruited Clarence Pickett to help relocate the students, President Roosevelt received a letter from California's Governor Olson, expressing the concern of the Western College Association that the evacuation would interrupt the education of many loyal Japanese-American young people. The President spoke to me about the letter. I told him that we had already made progress on the problem, but I also related the trying experience I had had trying to find help in getting the students placed in other institutions. By then I had had many dealings with Japanese-Americans and was now personally and painfully aware of the tragedy of the relocation.

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The President replied to Governor Olson, saying: "I am deeply concerned that the American-born Japanese college students shall be impressed with the ability of the American people to distinguish between enemy aliens and staunch supporters of the American system." I felt that the President had gained an insight into the human problem that, had it come in February rather than May, might have prompted him to decide against mass evacuation.

During the month of May, as the site selection was under way, we tried the "work corps" idea on an experimental basis at Colonel Bendtson's Assembly Center in Portland, Oregon. The experiment was a failure. Only about fifteen men out of several hundred signed up. I suspect that the men feared their participation in the work program would somehow result in permanent confinement in the Assembly Center. Then, too, there was considerable and understandable bitterness among those in the centers—particularly among the men in the age group from which most of the volunteer workers could be expected to come.

But even as the experiment in Portland was failing, an even more hopeful development was taking place. Government officials, particularly agricultural officials, from the intermountain states began to request relocation centers in their states. Having rejected the Japanese-Americans so forcefully in early April, they were now petitioning WRA for workers. Why? To rescue farm lands that were going to ruin from lack of manpower.

We decided to try another experiment, this time allowing a small group of workers from the Portland Assembly Center to become agricultural workers in Malheur County in southeastern Oregon. The reports of the first participants encouraged many more to apply for such work, and WRA drew up "seasonal leave" procedures to allow the men to leave the camps for temporary work and return when the job was finished.

Now, however, we were calling the tune. We insisted that the local officials guarantee the safety of the Japanese workers, pay them the prevailing wage, and provide adequate housing and transportation. The program was a success. A few incidents of harassment of the Japanese workers were called to my attention, and I threatened to withdraw all workers. The local officials soon put an end to the bullying. By the time I left WRA in mid-June hundreds of evacuees were working in the intermountain states and the demand was growing. By autumn half of

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the males between twenty and fifty years of age—some ten thousand Japanese-Americans—were on seasonal leaves and officials were complaining because we could not meet the demand for more workers.

By June 5 we had selected ten sites for our relocation centers: Manzanar and Poston (both had begun as assembly centers and were transferred to WRA), Tule Lake in northeastern California, Heart Mountain in Wyoming, Minidoka in Idaho, Topas in Utah, Gila River in Arizona, and Granada, Rohwer, and Jerome in Arkansas.

Now I found myself signing orders which created schools, police forces, courts, stores, and recreation centers. Positions in the evacuation centers were filled by evacuees themselves where possible. The troublesome problem of pay came up. In a press conference I said we were considering prevailing wages for all positions. This brought a storm of protest from members of Congress, who demanded that pay not exceed that provided for privates in the army. Politically, we had to accept this. So the evacuees were provided free living quarters, food, and education, and army pay to cover incidentals from toothpaste to toilet paper.

We called the relocation camps "evacuation centers." Never did we think of them as concentration camps. Technically, the Japanese-Americans were not restricted to the camps, although in fact they could not return to the Pacific coast and movement without safeguards to any other location would probably have endangered their lives, at least in the beginning.

Although much of the building of the centers was completed after I left WRA, the construction had begun in June. The army was eager to get the evacuees out of the assembly centers and, despite our protests that the WRA centers were not ready, the movement of Japanese-Americans began in June.

On the ninetieth day of this grueling assignment I flew to Washington to handle ever pressing legal details. I never carried out those intentions. I was met at the airport by a White House employee who said a car would take me at once to see President Roosevelt.

The President had a new war task for me. He asked whether someone was prepared to take my place as director of the War Relocation Authority. I asked him for a few days to think this over and make a recommendation.

A day or so later I received an invitation to a party at the home of

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Mr. and Mrs. Dillon S. Meyer. I had known Dillon in the Department of Agriculture and he had helped me select staff for WRA back in March. Although he had not been involved in any of the work of WRA, Dillon Meyer struck me as an excellent choice for the difficult job I was about to leave.

I enjoyed the party, for most of the guests were friends and acquaintances from the Department of Agriculture. The Meyers had a piano, and I was a self-taught key thumper, so I sat down and played for an hour or so late in the evening. When the other guests had gone, I spoke to Dillon about taking over WRA. I pulled no punches. The past three months had been the toughest of my career and I had lost a year's sleep in ninety days. I also stressed that we had turned the corner and a good strong leader could do a great deal to ensure that the Japanese-Americans could maintain some dignity, contribute to their own and the country's well-being, and eventually be brought back into society.

Meyer agreed to take the position if the President approved.

I spoke with President Roosevelt on Tuesday, June 16, and recommended that he appoint Meyer to head the War Relocation Authority. The next day the President made the appointment official.

In departing from WRA, I wrote a memorandum to President Roosevelt which summarized my feelings about the relocation program and suggested a future course of action. This was also my legacy to my successor. I wrote:

The future of the program (WRA) will doubtless be governed largely by the temper of American public opinion. Already public attitudes have exerted a strong influence in shaping the program and charting its direction. In a democracy this is unquestionably sound and proper. Yet in leaving the War Relocation Authority after a few extremely crowded weeks, I cannot help expressing the hope that the American people will grow toward a broader appreciation of the essential Americanism of a great majority of the evacuees and of the difficult sacrifice they are making. Only when the prevailing attitudes of unreasoning bitterness have been replaced by tolerance and understanding will it be possible to carry forward a genuinely satisfactory relocation program and to plan intelligently for the reassimilation of the evacuees into American life when the war is over. I wish to give you my considered judgment that fully 80 to 85 per cent of the Nisei are loyal to the United

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States, perhaps 50 per cent of the Issei are passively loyal; but a large portion of the Kibei (American citizens educated in Japan) feel a strong cultural attachment to Japan.

I then recommended four steps to the President:

1. Recommend to Congress a program of repatriation for those who preferred the Japanese way of life.
2. Issue a strong public statement in behalf of loyal American citizens who were now bewildered and wondered what was in store for them.
3. Call for a more liberal wage policy for evacuees.
4. Ask Congress to enact a special program of rehabilitation after the war to help the evacuees find their place in American life.

Dillon Meyer remained with WRA throughout the war. He performed even beyond my high expectations. He was often abused, but he never lost his composure.

Meyer and all our evacuees were greatly helped when citizens of Japanese descent formed the Nisei 442nd Regimental Combat Team. The Nisei soldiers fought on our behalf in some of the bloodiest battles of North Africa and Europe and took incredibly heavy casualties. The 442nd suffered some 9,500 casualties in seven major battles and won 18,000 individual decorations for heroism. It became one of the most decorated units in the war and opened the eyes of the American people to the loyalty and dedication of our Japanese-Americans.

The only pleasant memory I have of three agonizing months with the War Relocation Authority involves a gift from the Japanese-American Advisory Committee when I made a hasty trip to San Francisco before leaving for my next task. Mike Masaoka gave me a fifty-year-old bonsai, a beautifully sculptured dwarf pine tree, a form of art mastered only by the Japanese. In making the presentation, Mr. Masaoka said that the bonsai was to indicate the conviction of the Japanese-Americans that I had done all I could in their interest in view of the executive order for evacuation and the hostile attitudes then prevailing in the western half of the country.

I believe to this day that most of the evacuation could have been avoided had not false and flaming statements been dinned into the people of the West Coast by irresponsible commentators and politicians. There was surely some underlying and latent dislike for Japanese in that

pattern that was emerging or how his actions contributed to that pattern.

Misunderstanding, rumor, fear, misinformation, prejudice, and ignorance were dark winds that blew across the land. An incident here, a rumor there, a political move, a military decision, an official memorandum—all fell like pieces into a mosaic that no single individual could perceive or had created. And as the days passed and the pressures mounted, the ultimate decision began to take shape.

Those who hold a conspiratorial view of history will find a plot behind the evacuation of the Japanese-Americans. Those who subscribe to a "good guys and bad guys" interpretation of history will find a scapegoat to blame for the tragic events. Such simplistic views are certainly more reassuring than the reality, for the reality is that in such major movements the decision is not *made*, it happens.

By the time the situation was presented to President Roosevelt in February of 1942 the decision was all but inevitable. The pattern was largely formed; the course was nearly set. The alternative courses of action at that point were limited and generally all undesirable. And so, as often happens, the President's action was less a decision than a validation. This might be said of President Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb, or President Kennedy's Bay of Pigs decision, or President Johnson's decision to bomb North Vietnam.

In all of these instances the President's final decision was influenced by a variety of factors—by events over which he had little control, by inaccurate or incomplete information, by bad counsel, by strong political pressures, and by his own training, background, and personality.

The evacuation of the Japanese-Americans need not have happened. If public officials had provided strong and positive leadership at the outset they might have calmed the public. If the media had been responsible they could have cooled instead of incited passions. If the military had been more effective, it might have assessed the situation more objectively and, thus, not have pressed for evacuation. If the political leaders had resisted the pressures of the misguided public opinion perhaps they could have influenced it rather than succumbing to it. If those closest to the President had given him better advice, perhaps he would have decided differently. If the President had asked harder questions, demanded better information, been more skeptical, perhaps he would have overruled those who counseled mass evacuation.

~~TOP SECRET~~

THE PRESIDENT IS CALLING

Two decades afterward, Attorney General Biddle also played the "what if" game. He wrote:

"If Stimson had stood firm, had insisted, as apparently he suspected, that this wholesale evacuation was needless, the President would have followed his advice. And if, instead of dealing almost exclusively with McCloy and Bendetsen, I had urged the Secretary to resist the pressure of his subordinates, the result might have been different. But I was new to the cabinet, and disinclined to insist on my view to an elder statesman whose wisdom and integrity I greatly respected."⁶

Again, Attorney General Biddle contributes an insight in his memoirs. He said of President Roosevelt: "I do not think he was much concerned with the gravity or implications of this step. He was never theoretical about things. What must be done to defend the country must be done. The decision was for his Secretary of War, not for the Attorney General, not even for J. Edgar Hoover, whose judgment as to the appropriateness of defense measures he greatly respected. The military might be wrong. But they were fighting the war. Public opinion was on their side, so that there was no question of any substantial opposition, which might tend toward the disunity that at all costs he must avoid. Nor do I think that constitutional difficulty plagued him—the Constitution has never greatly bothered any wartime President. . . . Once he emphasized to me, when I was expressing my belief that the evacuation was unnecessary, that this must be a military decision."⁶

When the war was over a special court was established to cover a major portion of the economic losses of the Japanese-Americans and in time a test case was taken to the Supreme Court which ruled that the President had acted legally under the war-power provisions of the Constitution in doing what he did. Some cases, as I have said, are still pending. Monetary awards by the special court cannot, of course, cover more than a fraction of the true losses suffered by people needlessly uprooted and subjected to indignities of historic proportions.