

# COMMISSION ON WARTIME RELOCATION AND INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS



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**Embargoed until February 24**

**For Release: 10:30 a.m.**

**RACE PREJUDICE, WAR HYSTERIA, FAILURE OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP  
SHAPED WW II DECISIONS TO EXCLUDE, DETAIN JAPANESE AMERICANS**

The exclusion of Japanese Americans from the West Coast of the United States and their detention under armed guard in isolated camps during World War II, was not justified by military necessity, and the decisions were shaped by race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians said in a report issued today.

The Commission was created by Congress in 1980 to review the facts and circumstances surrounding the Executive Order issued on February 19, 1942, by President Franklin D. Roosevelt which led to the exclusion and detention of Japanese American citizens and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry. To prepare its report the Commission conducted an exhaustive analysis of documentary evidence and 20 days of hearings at which more than 750 witnesses testified.

"A grave injustice was done to American citizens and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry, who without individual review or any probative evidence against them, were excluded, removed and detained by the United States during World War II," the Commission said.

The Commission's report also states that President Franklin D. Roosevelt was unwilling to end the exclusion of Japanese American citizens and resident aliens from the West Coast until after the presidential election in November of 1944 even though his Secretary of War had told him and his cabinet in May of 1944 that exclusion no longer had any military justification.

add 1 - Commission

The Commission said that, "The inescapable conclusion...is that the delay was motivated by political considerations.

"By the participants' own accounts, there is no rational explanation for maintaining the exclusion of loyal ethnic Japanese from the West Coast for the eighteen months after May 1943 -- except political pressure and fear," the Commission said. "Certainly there was no justification arising out of military necessity."

In examining the central decisions -- the decision to exclude, the decision to detain, the decision to release from detention, and the decision to end exclusion -- the Commission analyzed both how and why those decisions were made, and what their consequences were.

"This policy of exclusion, removal and detention was executed against 120,000 people without individual review, and exclusion was continued virtually without regard for their demonstrated loyalty to the United States," the Commission said. "All this was done despite the fact that not a single documented act of espionage, sabotage or fifth column activity was committed by an American citizen of Japanese ancestry or by a resident Japanese alien on the West Coast."

The exclusion, removal and detention inflicted tremendous human cost, including the obvious cost of homes and businesses sold or abandoned under circumstances of great distress, as well as injury to careers and professional advancement, the Commission said.

"But, most important, there was the loss of liberty and the personal stigma of suspected disloyalty for thousands of people who knew themselves to be devoted to their country's cause and to its ideals but whose repeated protestations of loyalty were discounted -- only to be demonstrated beyond any doubt by the record of Nisei [Japanese American] soldiers, who returned from the battlefields of Europe as the most decorated and distinguished combat unit of World War II, and by the thousands of other Nisei who served against the enemy in the Pacific, mostly in military intelligence."

add 2 - Commission

The Commission noted that the exclusion and removal were attacks on the ethnic Japanese which followed a long and ugly history of West Coast anti-Japanese agitation and legislation and observed that antipathy and hostility toward the ethnic Japanese was a major factor of the public life of West Coast states for more than forty years before Pearl Harbor.

"The ethnic Japanese, small in number and with no political voice -- the citizen generation was just reaching voting age in 1940 -- had become a convenient target for political demagogues, and over the years all the major parties indulged in anti-Japanese rhetoric and programs," the Commission said.

The Commission report also pointed out that, contrary to the facts, there was a widespread belief, supported by a statement by Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, that the Pearl Harbor attack had been aided by sabotage and fifth column activity by ethnic Japanese in Hawaii.

"Shortly after Pearl Harbor the government knew that this was not true, but took no effective measures to disabuse public belief that disloyalty had contributed to massive American losses on December 7, 1941. Thus the country was unfairly led to believe that both American citizens of Japanese descent and resident Japanese aliens threatened American security," the Commission said.

"In sum," the Commission said, "the record does not permit the conclusion that military necessity warranted the exclusion of ethnic Japanese from the West Coast."

In examining the conditions which permitted the decision to exclude Japanese Americans from the West Coast the Commission report pointed out that:

- Lt. General John L. DeWitt, Commanding General of the Western Defense Command, recommended the exclusion to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson on the ground that ethnicity determined loyalty.

- The FBI and members of Naval Intelligence who had relevant intelligence responsibility were ignored when they stated that nothing more than careful watching of suspicious individuals or individual reviews of loyalty were called for by

add 3 - Commission

existing circumstances, and the opinions of the Army General Staff that no sustained Japanese attack on the West Coast was possible were ignored.

- General DeWitt relied heavily on civilian politicians rather than informed military judgements in reaching his conclusions as to what actions were necessary, and civilian politicians largely repeated the prejudiced, unfounded themes of anti-Japanese factions and interest groups on the West Coast.

- No effective measures were taken by President Roosevelt to calm the West Coast public and refute the rumors of sabotage and fifth column activity at Pearl Harbor.

- General DeWitt was temperamentally disposed to exaggerate the measures necessary to maintain security and placed security far ahead of any concern for the liberty of citizens.

- Secretary Stimson and John J. McCloy, Assistant Secretary of War, both of whose views on race differed from those of General DeWitt, failed to insist on a clear military justification for the measures General DeWitt wished to undertake.

- Attorney General Francis Biddle, while contending that exclusion was unnecessary, did not argue to the President that failure to make out a case of military necessity on the facts would render the exclusion constitutionally impermissible or that the Constitution prohibited exclusion on the basis of ethnicity given the facts on the West Coast.

- Those representing the interests of civil rights and civil liberties in Congress, the press and other public forums were silent or indeed supported exclusion. Thus there was no effective opposition to the measures vociferously sought by numerous West Coast interest groups, politicians, and journalists.

- Finally, President Roosevelt, without raising the question to the level of Cabinet discussion or requiring careful or thorough review of the situation, and despite the Attorney General's arguments and other information before him, agreed with Secretary Stimson that the exclusion should be carried out.

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Regarding the decision to detain Japanese American citizens and alien residents of Japanese ancestry, the Commission pointed out that the War Relocation Authority, the civilian agency created by the President to supervise the relocation and initially directed by Milton Eisenhower, proceeded on the premise that the vast majority of evacuees were law-abiding and loyal, and that, once off the West Coast, they should be returned quickly to conditions approximating normal life.

However, the Commission noted that in April of 1942 Milton Eisenhower met with the governors and officials of the mountain states who objected to California using the interior states as a "dumping ground" for a California "problem."

"Again and again, detention camps for evacuees were urged," the Commission said. "The consensus was that a plan for reception centers was acceptable so long as the evacuees remained under guard within the centers.

"In the circumstances, Milton Eisenhower decided that the plan to move the evacuees into private employment would be abandoned, at least temporarily. The War Relocation Authority dropped resettlement and adopted confinement. Notwithstanding WRA's belief that evacuees should be returned to normal productive life, it had, in effect, become their jailer."

The Commission said, "For this course of action no military justification was proffered."

The history of the relocation camps and the assembly centers that preceded them, the Commission said, "is one of suffering and deprivation visited on people against whom no charges were, or could have been, brought."

The Commission also examined the evacuation of the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands in 1942.

"The evacuation of the Aleuts had a rational basis as a precaution to ensure their safety," the Commission said. "The Aleuts were evacuated from an active theatre of war; indeed, 42 were taken prisoner on Attu by the Japanese. It was clearly the military's belief that evacuation of non-military personnel was advisable. The