

# concentration camps American-style



Guard towers, barbed wire fences, military security, loss of civil and constitutional rights. . . all are evidence that American citizens were prisoners in their own country. There were no charges, no trials, no due process, and most im-

portantly, no guilt; nevertheless, innocent citizens were incarcerated in American style concentration camps. Tule Lake, California.

(Photo: National Archives, Washington, D.C.)

## RACISM, GREED AND HYSTERIA LED TO CONCENTRATION CAMPS

By **EDISON UNO**

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From various quarters within and without the Japanese American community there has been vocal opposition to any reference to the wartime incarceration in War Relocation Authority camps of 110,000 persons of Japanese ancestry. That opposition has often raised its ugly head in terms of critics who claim that the entire episode should be forgotten; that it is past history and of very little importance to the children of evacuees and internees during World War II.

Often the critics are second generation Japanese Americans, Nisei or their children called Sansei. It is not surprising that there are segments of the Japanese Ameri-

can community who protest any exposure or illumination of this tragic event in American history. They are probably the same Americans who would deny that America's history is a chain of repressive acts against ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged people. The cruel and inhumane treatment of the Native Americans is the most vivid example—a tragedy which exist to this very day.

The Evacuation and relocation experience is part of the Japanese American heritage. It is history which no one can deny. It is a legacy that will be etched in the annals of history, whether we like it or not. Therefore, it seems to me that we who survived the experience have a responsibility to make certain that our personal perspectives are documented in the many interpretations of this historic event in our lives.

Other critics have arrogantly challenged the personal interpretation of that experience because it conflicts with their biased views.

I suspect the possibilities of two motivations for this opposition as found from time to time in the vernacular press. It is my contention that these people are genuine super-racists and any reference to the Evacuation experience brings forth their true color, white supremacists of the worst kind. Secondly, if not super-racists, they belong to that school who suffer from a deep sense of guilt. A guilt that attempts to justify the great injustice, the violation

of basic constitutional rights, the denial of human decency and humanity, the wrongful imprisonment of American citizens and the gross mistreatment of innocent citizens. Their rationale usually attempts to glorify the "good food, the peaceful and protective atmosphere of the camps, the military necessity, and other factors" which they pro-

fess made the Evacuation and relocation a good experience.

Unfortunately, those who foster that rationale have access to public media and receive a great deal of exposure to perpetuate their distorted and racist ideas. Any person of Japanese ancestry who falls prey to this line commits the unpardonable sin. Non-Japanese who advocate this rationale are either poorly informed, ignorant, or intentionally bigoted.

### A key word

One of the key words which exposes the difference between those who can appreciate the traumatic experience versus those who always attempt to justify it, is the reference made to the camps or centers as "concentration camps."

That term with all of its emotional connotations is often sufficient to trigger the debate between the two schools of thought. No matter how one qualifies the term "concentration camp," the racists can-

## THE TEN WORLD WAR II "RELOCATION" CAMPS

(The maximum population is given for each camp along with the dates of its operation)

POSTON, ARIZONA (17,814)  
5/8/42 to 11/28/45

TULE LAKE, CALIFORNIA (18,789)  
5/27/42 to 3/20/46

MANZANAR, CALIFORNIA (10,046)  
6/1/42 to 11/21/45

GILA RIVER, ARIZONA (13,348)  
7/20/42 to 11/11/45

MINIDOKA, IDAHO (9,397)  
8/10/42 to 10/28/45

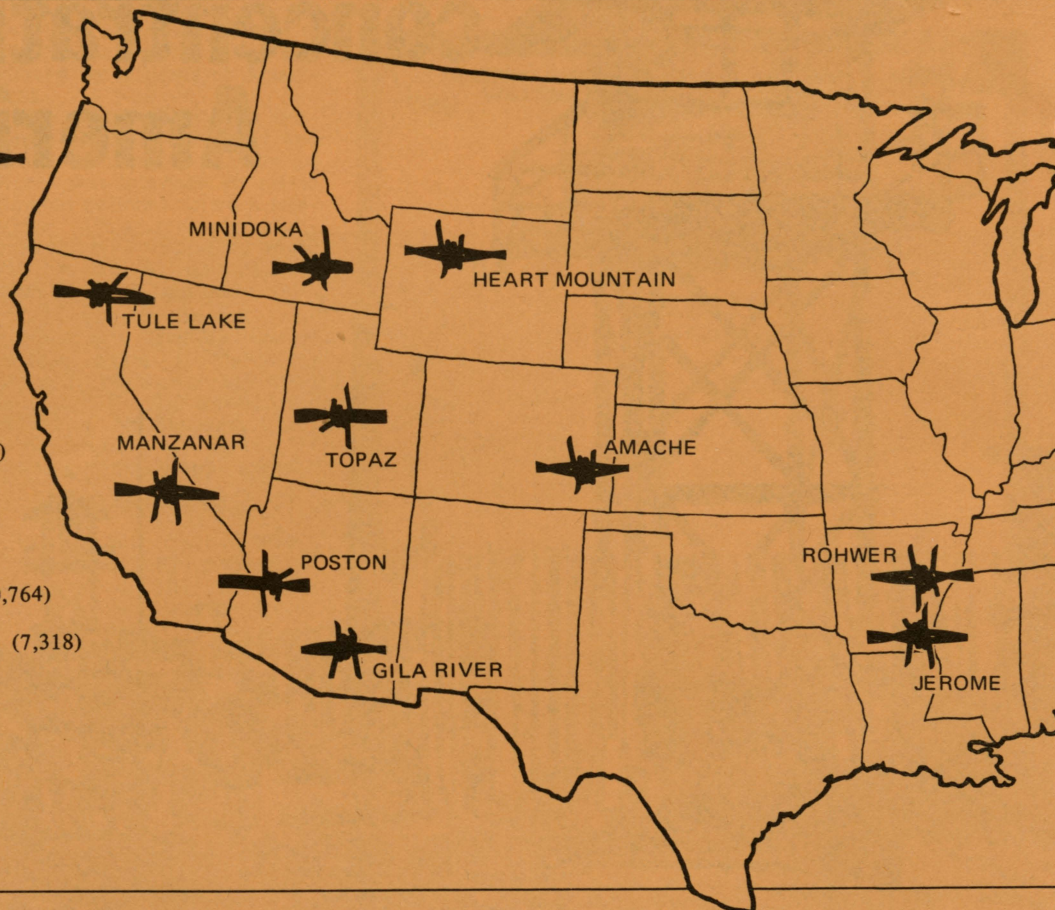
HEART MOUNTAIN, WYOMING (10,764)  
8/12/42 to 11/10/45

GRANADA, COLORADO (AMACHE) (7,318)  
8/27/42 to 10/15/45

TOPAZ, UTAH (8,350)  
9/11/42 to 10/31/45

ROHWER, ARKANSAS (9,475)  
9/18/42 to 11/30/45

JEROME, ARKANSAS (8,497)  
10/6/42 to 6/30/44



not accept its usage in connection with the Japanese American experience.

Many people have charged that the term was invented or created by the radical elements in our community, namely young Sansei students or outspoken Nisei. I have used the term many times myself; however, I usually qualify it by referring to my internment in an "American-style concentration camp."

From a purely academic point of view, the dictionary definition include: a camp where prisoners of war, enemy aliens, and political prisoners are confined. (The American Heritage Dictionary states: 1. a place where troops are massed, as before distribution. 2. a place in which enemy aliens or prisoners of war are kept under guard. 3. a place of confinement for those considered dangerous to the regime: used especially in Nazi Germany for antifascists, Jews, etc.)

If one wishes to become very technical, the camps can be defined in a generic sense as all being "concentration camps" although there were some specific differences in the jurisdiction, classification of inmates, treatment, and control.

There were 15 official Assembly Centers operated by the War-time Civil Control Administration, an extension

of the U.S. Army. The camps were located at Puyallup, Washington; Portland, Oregon; Marysville, Sacramento, Tanforan, Stockton, Turlock, Salinas, Merced, Pinedale, Fresno, Tulare, Santa Anita, and Pomona, California; and Mayer, Arizona. These camps were all temporary quarters for evacuees while WRA camps were being constructed inland.

The War Relocation Authority built ten camps where American Japanese were concentrated. In some camps, the citizen population outnumbered the citizen population outside the barbed wire fences and theoretically if the Nisei could exercise their right to vote in that county or district, many evacuees could have been elected to public office because most of the camps were located in sparsely populated areas of the United States. The WRA camps included Topaz, Utah, Poston, Arizona; Gila, Arizona; Granada, Colorado; Heart Mountain, Wyoming; Jerome, Arkansas; Manzanar, California; Minidoka, Idaho; Rohwer, Arkansas; and Tule Lake, California.

Some of the lesser known camps were technically called internment camps and were operated by the U.S. Department of Justice. Many of the Issei arrested by the FBI were transferred to internment

## THE ASSEMBLY CENTERS

Name of Center	Dates	Peak Pop.
Puyallup, Washington (fairgrounds)	Apr. 28 to Sept. 12, 1942	7,390
Portland, Oregon (livestock expo. hall)	May 2 to Sept. 10, 1942	3,676
Marysville, California	May 8 to June 29, 1942	2,451
Sacramento, California	May 6 to June 26, 1942	4,739
Tanforan Racetrack (near San Francisco)	Apr. 28 to Oct. 13, 1942	7,816
Stockton, California	May 10 to Oct. 17, 1942	4,271
Turlock, California	Apr. 30 to Aug. 12, 1942	3,661
Salinas, California	Apr. 27 to July 4, 1942	3,586
Merced, California	May 6 to Sept. 15, 1942	4,508
Pinedale, California	May 7 to July 23, 1942	4,792
Fresno, California	May 6 to Oct. 30, 1942	5,120
Tulare, California	Apr. 30 to Sept. 4, 1942	4,978
Santa Anita Racetrack Los Angeles	May 7 to Oct. 27, 1942	18,719
Pomona, California	May 7 to Aug. 14, 1942	5,434
Mayer, Arizona	May 7 to June 2, 1942	245

## U.S. DEPT. OF JUSTICE INTERNMENT CAMPS

Fort Missoula, Montana	Santa Fe, New Mexico
Lordsburg, New Mexico	Livingston, Louisiana
Crystal City, Texas	Seagoville, Texas
Fort Lincoln, Bismark, North Dakota	

camps at Missoula, Montana; Bismarck, North Dakota; Santa Fe and Lordsburg, New Mexico; Livingston, Louisiana; and Crystal City, Texas.

The Crystal City Internment Camp was unique because it was the last camp to close in 1947. Internees at Crystal City included Germans, Italians, Peruvian-Japanese, Japanese from Hawaii, the last contingent of renunciants from Tule Lake, some 300 Indonesian sailors, as well as mainland Issei and Nisei who were reunited with the alien head of household arrested by the FBI.

A research of all pre-evacuation material discloses that no matter what Japanese Americans call their confinement, whether they were assembly centers, relocation camps, detention camps, internment camps, or concentration camps, the records clearly indicate that the most objectionable term, "concentration camp" was used extensively by government officials, military leaders, politicians, and writers, all incidentally being non-Japanese.

A chronology of official statements made by non-Japanese who used the term "concentration camp" extensively indicates that it was widely used and had common acceptance by the majority of people who urged the removal of American Japanese in 1942.

All of the following quotes are documented in the footnote references:

"all . . . enemy aliens be placed in concentration camps." American Legion, War Council, Jan. 5, 1942 (fn 1).

" . . . all Japanese, whether citizens or not . . . placed in inland concentration camps." Secretary of War, Henry L. Stinson, Jan. 6, 1942 (fn 2).

"A patriotic native-born Japanese, if he wants to make his contribution, will submit himself to a concentration camp." Los Angeles Congressman Leland Ford, Jan. 20, 1942 (fn 3).

" . . . immediate steps be taken to see that all enemy aliens be placed in concentration camps." Vice-Commander Tracy E. Hicks, Jan. 27, 1942 (fn 4).

"all Japanese who are known to hold dual citizenship . . . be placed in concentration camps." Joint Immigration Committee, Jan. 1942 (fn 5).

" . . . word of mouth discussions (continue) with a surprisingly large number of people expressing themselves as in favor of sending all Japanese to concentration camps." Government Intelligence Agency, Jan. 1942 (fn 6).

" . . . immediate transfer of all Japanese aliens to concentration camps established in the interior regions." Pasadena Chamber of Commerce, Feb. 3, 1942 (fn 7).

" . . . for catching every Japanese in America, Alaska, and Hawaii now and putting them in concentration camps and shipping them back to Asia as soon as possible." Congressman John Rankin of Mississippi, Feb. 1942 (fn 8).

"Japanese, irrespective of whether they were Nisei or not, were being subjected to much harsher treatment than Germans and Italians and huge numbers of them were being interned in concentration camps." Los Angeles Times, Feb. 21, 1942 (fn 9).

" . . . kept in concentration camps, not the reception centers Eisenhower had been talking about." Governor Nels Smith of Wyoming, March, 1942 (fn 10).

A resolution urging that all Japanese and their descendants be placed in a "concentration camp under the supervision of the federal government." County Supervisors Association of California, 1942 (fn 11).

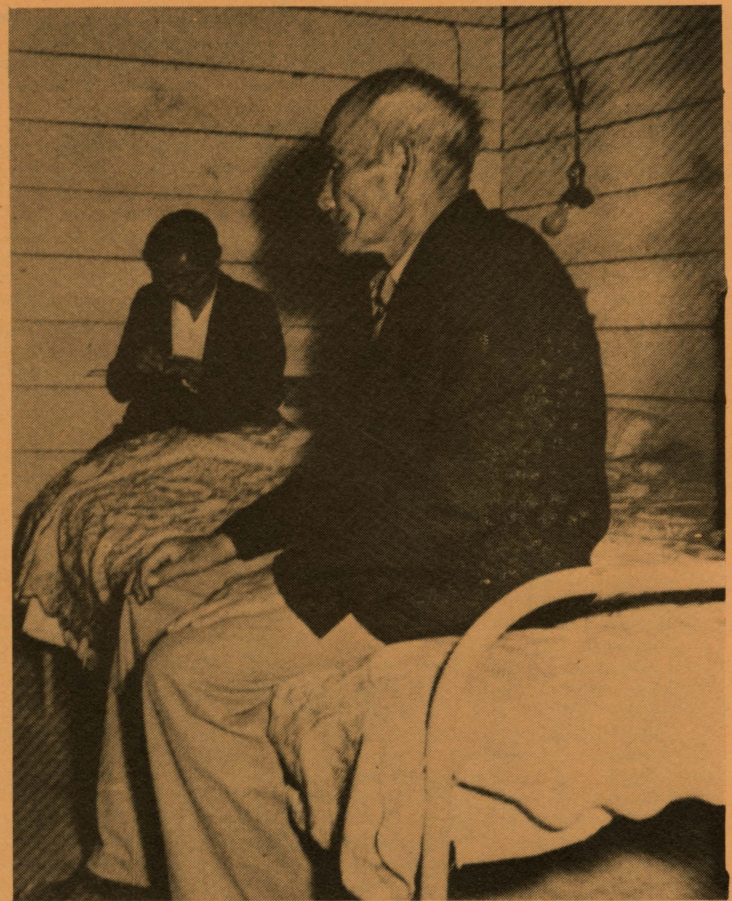
"It was rather, in Life magazine's words, 'a concentration camp' designed eventually to incarcerate . . ." Life Magazine, April 6, 1942 (fn 12).

"The United States could raise (them) 100 victims selected, out of (our) concentration camps (for German Bundists, Italian Fascists, and) many Japanese." Westbrook Pegler, syndicated columnist, Dec. 9, 1941 (fn 13).

"The official conception by state officers of the type of program best suited to the situation was one on concentration camps with workers being farmed out to work under armed guards." The Relocation Program, Page 7, 1942 (fn 14).

" . . . the indisputable facts exhibit a clear violation of constitutional rights . . . it is the case of convicting a citizen as a punishment for not submitting to imprisonment in a concentration camp, based on his ancestry, and solely because of his ancestry, without evidence or inquiry concerning his loyalty and good disposition towards the United States." U.S. Supreme Court Justice Owen J. Roberts (Korematsu vs. U.S. 323 U.S. 214: 65 S. Ct. 193-198), 1944 (fn 15).

"A concentration camp is one in which innocent citizens are imprisoned without charge of crime being lodged against them and held without hearing of any sort before a com-



For many of the older evacuees, the internment shattered their hopes of the American dream. The majority lost all of their life savings, families were separated, as life became one of despair, hopelessness and uncertainty.

petent tribunal." American Civil Liberties Union lawyer, 1944 (fn 16).

" . . . whether or not a citizen of the United States, may because he is of Japanese ancestry, be confined in barbed-wire stockade euphemistically termed assembly centers or relocation centers actually concentration camps." ACLU (Korematsu vs. U.S.) Dec. 18, 1944 (fn 17).

"The logical implication of our present concentration camps is the deportation after the war of all Japanese — aliens and American citizens alike."—by Charles Ogletree. The Nation, June 6, 1942.

" . . . we must move the Japanese in this country into a concentration camp somewhere, some place, and do it damn quickly." Repr. A. J. Elliott, House of Representatives (fn 18).

The foregoing quotations are but a sample of the many, many references made in the public print using the term "concentration camp" to describe the living compounds of Japanese Americans during the evacuation periods of 1942 to 1946. All of these statements were made a quarter century before the emergence of the Asian American movement.

As much as anyone today among vocal Nisei or Sansei would like to take credit for coining the term, I'm afraid the over-whelming evidence indicates that the common use of the emotional term can be credited to non-Japanese long before it was revived in contemporary and popular usage.

Coincidentally, the term has been further promoted by non-Japanese authors who have published books with such titles as *America's Concentration Camps* by Allan R. Bosworth 1968; Roger Daniel's *Concentration Camps, U.S.A.* 1971; and Paul Bailey's paperback title, *Concentration Camp U.S.A.* Of the many Japanese American authors who have written about the experience, the term has not been used in any of the titles, to my knowledge.

One of my favorite quotes is from Yale Professor of Law, Eugene V. Rostow, an eminent constitutional law authority who wrote in Harper's Magazine in September, 1945:

"One hundred thousand persons were sent to concentration camps on a record which wouldn't support a conviction for stealing a dog."

Co-authors Audrie Girdner and Anne Loftis in *The Great Betrayal* state on page 237,

"Though Roosevelt called the centers concentration camps in an October 20, 1942, press conference, the WRA insisted they were not." It seems to me that the President of the United States who issued Executive Order 9066 has a right to call the camps whatever he wants and if a subordinate agency had a different semantic interpretation, the almighty power of the office of the President would and should prevail.

Quoting from *The Great Betrayal* again, on page 251 the authors write, "Perhaps the most inflammatory proposal, because it was more widely publicized, was the so-called 'concentration camp' bill, introduced by Senator Tom Stewart of Tennessee. Fortunately, the bill failed in Congress, but its provisions were publicized extensively and reflected the public attitude of that time.

Over the past 25 years I have attempted to read and collect all of the published materials on the Japanese American experience. I have taught a course entitled "Evacuation and Relocation" at San Francisco State University for the past six years.

I do not claim to be an expert on the subject; however I am a serious student of this facet of our history. If I can claim any credentials at all to my personal interest, perhaps the fact that I was one of the internees held for the longest duration.

When I was released in the fall of 1946, I remember the Officer-in-Charge of our camp telling me that I was the last American citizen released and I had the dubious distinction of being held four and a half years, a record for any Nisei.

Two years ago, I had an opportunity to review my government files in the National Archives and it confirmed the fact that I had been imprisoned a total of 1,647 days.

I have come to the conclusion that those who have strong objections to the current use of the term "concentration camps" are probably reacting from a deep sense of guilt or shame. In 1968 when Ray Okamura initiated the repeal of Title II of the Internal Security Act of 1950 (the Detention Camp Law), I was privileged to work with him as national JACL co-chairman.

During the three year campaign which followed, we realized how strong the latent racist feelings were still directed towards Japanese Americans.

Over the years, we have attempted to educate our community and the public as to the real reasons for our internment. The popular exhibit and book sponsored by the California Historical Society

entitled "Executive Order 9066" has been read and viewed by millions of Americans.

The documentary film produced by NBC two years ago called "Guilty By Reason of Race" was televised on prime time on national network television with an estimated audience of ten million or more viewers. In my opinion, the story must be told and retold.

Last year, the essence of our heritage was officially adopted by the State of California when it registered historical landmark No. 850 through the efforts of the Manzanar Committee and the JACL. The attractive bronze plaque reads:

#### MANZANAR

"In the early part of World War II, 110,000 persons of Japanese ancestry were interned in relocation centers by Executive Order No. 9066, issued on February 19, 1942.

"Manzanar, the first of ten such concentration camps, was bounded by barbed wire and guard towers, confining 10,000 persons, the majority being American citizens.

"May the injustices and humiliation suffered here as a result of hysteria, racism, and economic exploitation never emerge again."

With apologies to Gertrude Stein's famous quote, "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose." I would like to put to rest any controversy by concluding, "Concentration camp is a concentration camp is a concentration camp is a concentration camp."

#### FOOTNOTES

1—tenBroek, Jacobus, Barnhart, Edward N., & Matson, Floyd W., *Prejudice, War, and the Constitution*, University of California Press, 1954, p. 376, footnote 58.

2—Daniels, Roger, *Concentration Camps, U.S.A., Japanese Americans and World War II*, New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1971, p. 47.

3—tenBroek, Barnhart, and Matson, op. cit., p. 77.

4—Ibid, p. 79.

6—Daniels, op. cit., p. 62.

7—tenBroek, Barnhart, and Matson, op. cit., p. 375, footnote 46.

8—Ibid, p. 87.

9—Girdner, Audrie & Loftis, Anne, *The Great Betrayal*, Toronto: The Macmillan Co., 1969, p. 124.

10—Daniels, op. cit., p. 94.

11—Ibid, p. 77.

12—Girdner & Loftis, op. cit., p. 146.

13—Daniels, op. cit., p. 33.

14—tenBroek, Barnhart, and Matson, op. cit., p. 123.

15—Ibid, p. 385, footnote 47.

16—Petersen, William, *Japanese Americans*, New York: Random House, 1971, p. 98.

17—Daniels, op. cit., p. 137.

18—Leighton, Alexander, *The Governing of Men: General Principles and Recommendations Based on Experience at a Japanese Relocation Camp*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945, p. 30.

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## WESTERN DEFENSE COMMAND AND FOURTH ARMY WARTIME CIVIL CONTROL ADMINISTRATION

Presidio of San Francisco, California

May 3, 1942

# INSTRUCTIONS TO ALL PERSONS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY

Living in the Following Area:

All of that portion of the County of Alameda, State of California, within the boundary beginning at the point where the southern limits of the City of Oakland meet San Francisco Bay; thence easterly and following the southerly limits of said city to U. S. Highway No. 20; thence southerly and westerly on said Highway No. 20 to its intersection with California State Highway No. 21; thence southerly on said Highway No. 21 to its intersection at or near Warm Springs with California State Highway No. 17; thence southerly on said Highway No. 17 to the Alameda Santa Clara County line; thence westerly and following said county line to San Francisco Bay; thence southerly and following the shoreline of San Francisco Bay to the point of beginning.

Pursuant to the provisions of Civilian Exclusion Order No. 43, this Headquarters, dated May 3, 1942, all persons of Japanese ancestry, both alien and non-alien, will be evacuated from the above area by 12 o'clock noon, P. M., Saturday, May 9, 1942.

No Japanese person living in the above area will be permitted to change residence after 12 o'clock noon, P. M., Sunday, May 3, 1942, without obtaining special permission from the representative of the Commanding General, Northern California Sector, at the Civil Control Station located at:

920 - 47 Street  
Hayward, California

Such permits will only be granted for the purpose of visiting members of a family, or in case of grave emergency.

The Civil Control Station is equipped to assist the Japanese population affected by this evacuation in the following ways:

1. Give advice and instructions on the evacuation.
2. Provide services with respect to the management, leasing, sale, storage or other disposition of most kinds of property, such as real estate, business and professional equipment, household goods, boats, automobiles and livestock.
3. Provide temporary residence elsewhere for all Japanese in family groups.
4. Transport persons and a limited amount of clothing and equipment to their new residence.

#### The Following Instructions Must Be Observed:

1. A responsible member of each family, preferably the head of the family, or the person in whose name most of the property is held, and each individual living alone, will report to the Civil Control Station to receive further instructions. This must be done between 8:00 A. M. and 5:00 P. M. on Monday, May 4, 1942, or between 8:00 A. M. and 5:00 P. M. on Tuesday, May 5, 1942.
2. Evacuees must carry with them on departure for the Assembly Center, the following property:
  - (a) Bedding and linens (no mattress) for each member of the family.
  - (b) Toilet articles for each member of the family.
  - (c) Extra clothing for each member of the family.
  - (d) Sufficient knives, forks, spoons, plates, bowls and cups for each member of the family.
  - (e) Essential personal effects for each member of the family.
3. All items carried will be securely packaged, tied and plainly marked with the name of the owner and numbered in accordance with instructions obtained at the Civil Control Station. The size and number of packages is limited to that which can be carried by the individual or family group.
4. No pets of any kind will be permitted.
5. No personal items and no household goods will be shipped to the Assembly Center.
6. The United States Government through its agencies will provide for the storage, at the sole risk of the owner, of the more substantial household items, such as iceboxes, washing machines, pianos and other heavy furniture. Cooking utensils and other small items will be accepted for storage if crated, packed and plainly marked with the name and address of the owner. Only one name and address will be used by a given family.
7. Each family and individual living alone will be furnished transportation to the Assembly Center or will be authorized to travel by private automobile in a supervised group. All instructions pertaining to the movement will be obtained at the Civil Control Station.

Go to the Civil Control Station between the hours of 8:00 A. M. and 5:00 P. M., Monday, May 4, 1942, or between the hours of 8:00 A. M. and 5:00 P. M., Tuesday, May 5, 1942, to receive further instructions.

J. L. DeWITT  
Lieutenant General, U.S. Army  
Commanding

18 CIVILIAN EXCLUSION ORDER NO. 43

Civilian Exclusion Order posted in West Coast locations early in 1942 to instruct persons of Japanese ancestry.

For further information or for speakers, contact:

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