

WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY

MANZANAR WAR RELOCATION AREA

Manzanar, California

In reply, please refer to:

OPA

January 2, 1943

MEMORANDUM TO: Mr. Ralph P. Merritt  
Project Director

SUBJECT: Events Leading up to the Riot of December 6, 1942

In interviewing the twenty-two men who were detained as the result of the Manzanar incident of December 6, 1942, I have reached certain general conclusions that might be of interest to you. The information upon which I base these observations is contained in my reports to you recounting the individual interviews with these persons.

I did not receive any valuable information as to the identity of the persons who assaulted Fred Tayama on December 5, 1942. The men whom I interviewed all disclaimed any knowledge of this affair although some of them guessed it was probably done by a group of young men. It is my opinion that this assault was intended to be nothing more than an isolated instance of revenge against a generally-disliked individual.

The arrest of Harry Uyeno, as a suspect in the Tayama case, was made by the Administration in good faith, as this man had been positively identified as an assailant by Fred Tayama and his wife. Furthermore, Uyeno's story as to where he was at the time of the attack was inconsistent with the story given by his family and neighbors. However, the people in general felt that Uyeno was completely innocent and had no connection with the Tayama beating. This is partly due to the fact that they heard only the testimony of Uyeno's family and neighbors to the effect that he had been home during the entire evening. Furthermore, it was generally believed through the Center, because of persistent rumors, that Ned Campbell and Joe Winchester had been stealing sugar from the people. Moreover, it was generally known that Uyeno had fostered this rumor, that he had had repeated disagreements with Campbell and Winchester, and that he had reported Campbell to the FBI because of the alleged irregularities with reference to the sugar situation. The arrest of Harry Uyeno by Ned Campbell was, accordingly, viewed by the residents of Manzanar as an unjustified arrest made solely because of personal malice. This feeling was substantiated by the fact that Uyeno was not left in the Manzanar Jail but was removed to Independence and was incarcerated there. This was the first time any resident had been jailed outside the Project and it naturally aroused suspicion.

With this general feeling in the Center with regard to Uyeno's



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arrest, it is not surprising that his friends met together to discuss this situation. At the 10:00 A.M. meeting on Sunday morning, December 6, 1942, the officers of the Kitchen Workers' Union, of which Uyeno was the leader, and most of the residents of Block 22, of which Uyeno was a resident, met in the Mess Hall in Block 22. Over three-quarters of the persons in attendance were residents of Block 22. Joe Kurihara and possibly a few others were asked to attend because of their friendship for Uyeno and possibly because they were agitators. It is significant, however, that this meeting was primarily called by Uyeno's friends for the purpose of discussing ways to right the grievous wrong and injustice that they felt had been done him.

At this ten o'clock meeting, it was decided that all the mess halls would go on strike at Monday noon, December 7, 1942, if Uyeno had not been returned by then. It was also decided that a larger meeting should be held at 1:00 P.M. in Block 22 further to discuss ways of bringing about Uyeno's release. It was decided that all members of the Kitchen Workers' Union, all Block Managers and all kibeis should be invited to attend. To me, it is significant that the kibeis were especially invited to attend as it is my opinion that this gives the first indication of an intention to use mob action.

The one o'clock meeting apparently went off according to plan. Inflammatory speeches were made insisting upon two lines of action: (1) the return of Harry Uyeno; and, (2) the removal from the Center of certain "dogs" and stool pigeons and certain members of the Administrative staff. A Committee of Five was chosen by the crowd which moved down to the Administration Building to treat with Mr. Merritt. At this time, Mr. Merritt agreed to return Uyeno to the Manzanar Jail when the Committee in turn agreed that there would be no attempt to release him, that there would be no further demonstrations, and that peace and order would be maintained in the Center. There was no misunderstanding as to the terms of this agreement.

The meeting at six o'clock in Block 22, according to the Committee of Five, was called solely for the purpose of informing the people that Uyeno had been returned to the Center; however, it is quite possible that those who called the meeting had a more ulterior purpose than this. The Committee members were of the opinion that the agreement with Mr. Merritt did not prohibit them from calling a meeting merely for the purpose of making such an announcement. One of the members of the Committee, Harry Hashimoto, addressed the crowd telling it that Uyeno had been returned and that the Committee had, therefore, fulfilled its function. He then stated that the Committee wanted to resign because its duty was done. It is significant, however, that he then continued to make the suggestion that, if the crowd wanted any further action with respect to Uyeno, it should appoint a new Committee. In my opinion, this suggestion should never have been made and could not have been made in good faith considering the terms of the agreement with Mr. Merritt. The crowd seized upon the thought that further action should be taken

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and it insisted that the same Committee continue to act and demand the return of Uyeno to his home.

At this point, Kurihara, and possibly some of the other members of the Committee, attempted to restrain the crowd but the situation had clearly gotten out of hand. From this point on, it is probable that the Committee of Five was forced to violate its agreement with Mr. Merritt by the insistence of the crowd which it had assembled and incited. At least, this is the feeling of the members of the Committee. Personally, it is difficult for me to appreciate this position as I believe any man of personal honor and integrity should have refused to continue to act, even at the insistence of a crowd, in violation of a solemn pledge such as was given to Mr. Merritt previously in the afternoon. However, the conduct of the Committee at the Police Station during the riot tends to show that, at that time, it was being led by the crowd and that it was not the master of the mob it had assembled.

Perhaps, the main significance of these comments is that they show that the primary reasons for the demonstration did not involve the question of loyalty or disloyalty or the fact that the anniversary of Pearl Harbor was at hand. The primary causes appear to be (1) those which led the people to believe that Uyeno had been unjustly arrested; and, (2) those which led them to hate Fred Tayama, other JACL leaders and certain members of the Administrative staff. There can be no mistake that the question of loyalty loomed large in the picture once the demonstration got under way. This is concretely evidenced by the attitude of the crowd toward the Military Police and, more particularly, by their singing the Japanese national anthem outside the Police Station Sunday night. It is also quite possible that pro-Axis leaders seized upon the unrest and bitterness caused by Uyeno's arrest and by the activities of Fred Tayama and his associates as an excuse for arousing anti-administration, anti-American and anti-Caucasian feeling among the residents of the Center. However, it is clear to me that the demonstration as such was not planned until the ten o'clock meeting on Sunday morning, December 6, 1942.

*A very reasonable statement. JHP*

*Robert B. Throckmorton*  
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Project Attorney