The Enemy Alien Program

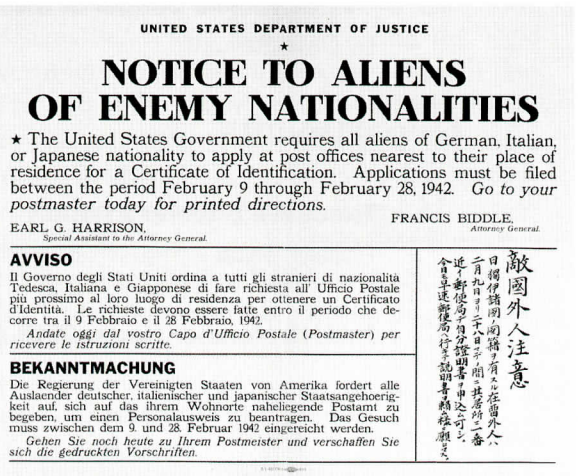
BY CATIE SAKURAI

While the vast majority of Japanese Americans on the West Coast were forced into civilian incarceration camps administered by the War Relocation Authority (WRA), certain immigrants from Japan, Germany, and Italy that the government had designated as "potentially dangerous" were the first to be arrested by the FBI and law enforcement prior to the mass removal. Many of these apprehended "enemy aliens" were jailed and held in U.S. Army facilities or internment camps run by the Department of Justice for days to years. These noncitizen residents, many of whom had lived peacefully in the United States for decades before the outbreak of the war, were treated as enemies despite never having been charged with wrongdoing.



Representatives of each nationality incarcerated at Fort Missoula, Montana, pose with security officers at the internment camp. (Photo courtesy of Goro and Nobi Asaki)

Although many have heard of the mass exclusion and wartime incarceration of Japanese Americans in ten WRA camps following the issuance of Executive Order 9066, a lesser known chapter in American history is the United States' Enemy Alien Program, which impacted Japanese, German, and Italian immigrants during the 1940s. While all immigrants from these communities were immediately labeled as "enemy aliens" after the attack on Pearl Harbor, tens of thousands were apprehended by the FBI; some were jailed, others held for longer periods in DOJ internment camps or Army facilities until as late as 1949. The treatment of these permanent residents was not determined by their actions nor character, but by their country of origin.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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NOTICE TO ALIENS OF ENEMY NATIONALITIES

★ The United States Government requires all aliens of German, Italian, or Japanese nationality to apply at post offices nearest to their place of residence for a Certificate of Identification. Applications must be filed between the period February 9 through February 28, 1942. *Go to your postmaster today for printed directions.*

EARL G. HARRISON, *Special Assistant to the Attorney General.*

FRANCIS BIDDLE, *Attorney General.*

AVVISO

Il Governo degli Stati Uniti ordina a tutti gli stranieri di nazionalità Tedesca, Italiana e Giapponese di fare richiesta all' Ufficio Postale più prossimo al loro luogo di residenza per ottenere un Certificato d'Identità. Le richieste devono essere fatte entro il periodo che decorre tra il 9 Febbraio e il 28 Febbraio, 1942.

Andate oggi dal vostro Capo d'Ufficio Postale (Postmaster) per ricevere le istruzioni scritte.

BEKANNTMACHUNG

Die Regierung der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika fordert alle Auslaender deutscher, italienischer und japanischer Staatsangehoerigkeit auf, sich auf das ihrem Wohnorte naheliegende Postamt zu begeben, um einen Personalausweis zu beantragen. Das Gesuch muss zwischen dem 9. und 28. Februar 1942 eingereicht werden.

Gehen Sie noch heute zu Ihrem Postmeister und verschaffen Sie sich die gedruckten Vorschriften.

敵國外人注意

This DOJ notice directed German, Italian, and Japanese noncitizens to apply for a Certificate of Identification by the deadline of February 28, 1942 (From the series Public Relations Records, 1940-1954; Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service Research, archives.gov)

The U.S. had previously laid the groundwork for treating immigrants as "enemy aliens" in the Alien Enemy Act of 1918. This act gave the government the authority in cases of war, invasion, or threatened invasion by a foreign power to apprehend, remove, secure, or restrain any citizens of that enemy nation who were aged 14 or older. Twenty years later, as relations between the United States and Japan strained, the Army and other departments planned for the probability of war. At this time, Germans and Italians made up a large part of the American immigrant community. Germans lived throughout the country, concentrating in northern cities and the Midwest, while Italians mostly settled in the Eastern United States, many working as laborers. Japanese immigration was concentrated on the West Coast and in Hawaii, where most Japanese Americans worked in agriculture. Unlike their European counterparts, Japanese immigrants were legally barred from obtaining citizenship.

Despite their fifty-year residency in America and the acculturation of their American-born children, the government subjected Japanese in America to close surveillance, beginning in 1936. Throughout this period, no evidence of espionage or sabotage among Japanese Americans was discovered. Instead, hostility against Japanese immigrant communities stemmed from racism and resentment of the success of Japanese farmers, who dominated the commercial truck farming industry in California.

As they scrutinized immigrant communities, the government established a growing list of noncitizens who would be subject to arrest in the event of war, noted not for their wrongdoing but for their national origin, positions in organizations, community

leadership, and hearsay. In 1940, Congress passed the Federal Alien Registration Act, allowing the government to keep tabs on noncitizens through required registration, fingerprinting, and other measures.

With the bombing of Pearl Harbor by Japan's Imperial Forces on December 7, 1941, wartime hysteria and underlying prejudices against immigrants from enemy nations amplified. Within two days of the attack and prior to declaring war on their respective countries, President Franklin D. Roosevelt authorized the arrests of Japanese, German, and Italian noncitizens. FBI and law enforcement officers used the lists of "potentially dangerous" individuals developed in the prior years to sweep up and arrest these permanent residents, apprehending 3,846 people within a three-day span. In the chaos that followed, homes were raided without warrant, papers confiscated, and bank assets frozen. Community leaders, including Buddhist and Shinto priests, newspaper editors, language school teachers, and martial arts instructors, were rounded up, tearing families apart. Many of those arrested were then sent to DOJ internment camps and Army facilities for longer periods of detention. Some "enemy aliens" faced deportation and were exchanged with prisoners in Europe or Japan. Only German and Japanese internees that the U.S. government deemed "harmless" were exchanged, with some ultimately losing their lives as civilian casualties in zones of war. Other deported internees were drafted into the Japanese army, or further imprisoned in Germany.



Young internees such as these Japanese Peruvians in Crystal City Internment Camp, Texas, continued to attend school behind barbed wire. (Violet (Nozaki) Tsujimoto photo, Kanji Nishijima collection)

In addition to U.S. permanent residents, over 6,000 Latin American Japanese, German, and Italian nationals and citizens were forced from their home countries and into the camps for the supposed purpose of safeguarding American national security. Many of these individuals were used as pawns in U.S. hostage exchanges with the Axis Powers and traded into countries ravaged by war. Although many Latin American countries were participants in this roundup and deportation, Peru played a major role, deporting almost 1,800 Japanese. These Japanese, German, and Italian Latin Americans were victims of multiple breeches of international law, including indefinite detention, forced labor, hostage-taking, and forcing civilians out of their countries or into war zones. Individuals were targeted out of suspicion alone, or occasionally for American economic motives.

With the arrest of "enemy aliens," communities flew into panic. Family members were taken, their loved ones often left with no knowledge of their whereabouts. In Latin America, families avoiding separation would sometimes opt to leave their homes for internment camp alongside their arrested family member. In contrast to those incarcerated in WRA civilian concentration camps, apprehended "enemy aliens" residing in the U.S. were heard by an Alien Enemy Hearing Board, but were not provided with legal representation or told what they were being charged with. Ultimately, 31,899 persons labeled as "enemy aliens" were interned, their human rights overlooked as a "casualty" of the war.



After being separated from their father, who was classified as an "enemy alien," these children were sent to a civilian concentration camp. (Dorothea Lange photo, National Archives)

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Between DOJ camps and Army facilities, internees were held at over 48 different locations in the U.S. Conditions varied by camp and whether the internment site was operated by the DOJ's Immigration and Naturalization Service or the Army. Communication between internees and their friends and family outside the camps was subject to many restraints, including heavy censorship and harsh limits

on visitation. Despite the barbed wire surrounding them, many of the internees organized or participated in activities such as sports or arts, and children attended school. Still, the internment took a heavy psychological toll on many who were interned, lasting long after the last camp was closed.

The fates of the "enemy aliens" varied by individual. Some noncitizens were paroled to civilian WRA camps or took jobs in hard labor to escape camp conditions, while others were repatriated and deported from the U.S. The authority of the government to intern immigrants from enemy nations supposedly ended with the war; however, the last camp remained active until 1948, and the last of the internees left custody on Ellis Island in 1949. Many of the remaining internees were forced from the country or fought deportation in the years after the war's conclusion. Many innocent, law abiding immigrants were impacted by the wartime Enemy Alien Program not because of their actions or intent but simply because of their country of origin.

Catie Sakurai is a recent graduate of the University of California, San Diego, and former Nikkei Community Intern now working for NJAHS.

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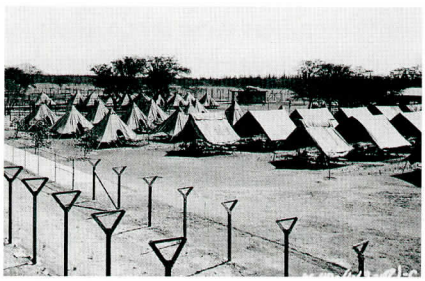
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SURVEILLANCE AND LISTS

BY GRACE MORIZAWA, ED.D.

For decades before World War II, the FBI, Office of Naval Intelligence, and U.S. Army's Military Intelligence Division had been secretly spying and keeping lists on German, Italian, and Japanese noncitizens. A network of informants identified potentially dangerous individuals and organizations. According to Mike Masaoka, the leader of the Japanese American Citizens League during World War II, the JACL passed on facts and rumors to the FBI. Other informants included jealous business rivals. During the 1930s, the FBI conducted raids on Japanese community organizations such as the Los Angeles Japanese Chamber of Commerce, seizing membership lists and other materials. Through information obtained from their informant network, government agencies classified organizations based on how "dangerous" they were. For example, the Black Dragon Society, the Buddhist Mission of North America, and the Japanese Chamber of Commerce were among the many organizations watched by the FBI.



Sand Island in Honolulu, Hawaii, became a detention camp immediately after the declaration of martial law on Dec. 7, 1941. (Photo courtesy of Col. David Dingeman)

In 1939, the FBI and military intelligence agencies approached the U.S. Census Bureau for individual data on all people of Japanese ancestry in the 1930 and subsequent 1940 census. Government papers confirm at least one document with individual information as well as others detailing population numbers and tract locations were released. Through these activities, the FBI created a Custodial Detention List prioritizing those deemed most dangerous in an A, B, C list. In Hawaii, the FBI designated 338 Issei and nine Nisei as candidates for custodial detention on December 4, 1941. Almost all designated Hawaiians were arrested on December 7, 1941. Throughout the U.S., numerous arrests and searches were conducted without any warrants at all.

Grace Morizawa is NJAHS's Education Coordinator and holds a doctorate degree from the Leadership in Education and Equity Program at UC Berkeley.

SOURCE

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