



*Haglund*

# DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## INFORMATION SERVICE

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Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes issued the following statement in San Francisco today regarding the program of the War Relocation Authority:

"Immediately after the President, on his own motion, transferred the War Relocation Authority to the Department of the Interior, we began to study its policies and administration. I have recognized from the beginning the difficulty and complexity of the problems, and I realize that the manner of their treatment is of vital importance, not only to the thousands of Japanese Americans who are immediately involved, but to the American civilians who are interned by the Japanese and the families of these Americans. The character and reputation of our own democracy are also involved.

"The War Relocation Authority was given an unenviable job. It was not responsible for the evacuation of the Japanese Americans from the West Coast. That was a military decision. The War Relocation Authority was given the job of providing for the care and welfare of the people who were uprooted and transferred and of arranging for the restoration to normal life of those among them who are the blameless victims of a war-time program. I think that there can be no doubt that the program has, in general, been handled with discretion, humanity and wisdom. WRA did not persecute these people, and it made no attempt to punish those of a different race who were not responsible for what has been happening in the far Pacific. The War Relocation Authority -- make no mistake about it -- has been criticized for not engaging in this sort of a lynching party. Under my jurisdiction, it will not be stampeded into undemocratic, bestial, inhuman action. It will not be converted into an instrument of revenge or racial warfare.

"There is a place in this war for deserved anger and for punishment. I have on many occasions called for the punishment of the war criminals whether they have committed their outrages under Tojo and the fiendish military caste of Japan, or under Hitler. Let us see that the guilty are made to feel the heavy hand of justice; but let us not degrade ourselves by injuring innocent, defenseless people. To do this would be to lower ourselves to the level of the fanatical Nazis and Japanese war lords. Civilization expects more from us than from them.

"In resisting the onslaughts of those who would have the War Relocation Authority imitate the savageries of the ruling factions in the nations with which we are at war, I am sure that we have the support of virtually all Americans. I am particularly grateful to those groups and individuals on the West Coast who have been brave enough and Christian enough to speak out against the vindictive, blood-thirsty onslaughts of professional race mongers.

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"All of the Japanese Americans who were evacuated from the West Coast have undergone and are undergoing a most intensive investigation. Those concerning whom there is any basis whatever for a suspicion of disloyalty have been sent to internment camps or are being segregated at Tule Lake. This segregation process is virtually complete, and the thousands of Japanese Americans who remain at the other centers are, by all reasonable tests, loyal American citizens or law-abiding aliens. They are entitled to be treated as such. Those who do not believe in according these people the rights and privileges to which they are entitled under our laws do not believe in the Constitution of the United States.

"All of us recognize that, in time of war, we are subject to orders and restraints which would be intolerable in time of peace. All of us -- regardless of race or religion -- are subject to the overriding demands of military necessity in time of war. No one who is loyal to the United States objects to this. But when military necessity does not require it, no one of us who is an American citizen or a loyal alien can be deprived of his rights under the law. I believe that the only justifiable reason for confinement of a citizen in a democratic nation is the evidence that the individual might endanger the wartime security of the nation.

"The major emphasis in War Relocation Authority operations is now on restoring the people of all WRA centers except Tule Lake as rapidly as possible to private life. Over 20,000 people have already left the centers to make new homes and engage in new jobs in hundreds of communities stretched all of the way from Spokane, Washington, to Boston, Massachusetts. These relocated evacuees are establishing themselves in cities and on farms and many have indicated that they plan to remain in their new locations during the post-war period. Thus the relocation program is contributing to a more widespread dispersal of Japanese Americans throughout the country.

"We must all face the problem of the eventual status and treatment of those Americans of Japanese descent who were taken from their homes and transported to evacuation camps. Most of them, after a thorough investigation, the doubts being resolved in favor of segregating them, have been proved to be loyal and devoted to this Nation. It is intolerable to think that these people will be excluded from a normal life in this country for long. It is intolerable to think that merely because they resided on the West Coast -- in California, or Washington, or Oregon -- they must be wards of the Government for one moment longer than the necessities of war require. I know of no virus in these three States which has infected them so that they must be treated differently than the Japanese Americans who reside in other States. And it is intolerable to think that decent people would suggest that this Nation would for a moment consider sending loyal Americans of Japanese descent to a land which most of them have never seen and in which most of them have no interest.

"To a large extent this is a local problem. It is a problem of you people in California, in Washington and in Oregon. I hope that the clamor of those few among you who are screaming that this situation should be resolved on the basis of prejudice and hate will soon be overwhelmed by the stern remonstrances of those among you -- an overwhelming majority -- who believe in fair play and decency, in Christianity, in the principles of America, in the Constitution of the United States."

