



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

TESTIMONY OF ^{DF} DAVID F. TRASK,
HISTORIAN OF THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
BEFORE
THE COMMISSION ON WARTIME RELOCATION AND INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS
JULY 14, 1981

THE STATE DEPARTMENT AND THE WARTIME RELOCATION OF CIVILIANS

Madame Chairman, Members of the Commission, I am here to report on the initial findings of the Department of State concerning its relation to the relocation of Americans of Japanese descent during the Second World War. Preliminary research, conducted by members of the Office of the Historian, is based on the retired files of the Department in the National Archives and published information, including books, articles, and Congressional Hearings.

The Department of State did not bear primary responsibility for the initiation of the relocation program, which came into being because of perceived military necessity. A division of the Department of the Interior administered the program.

Nonetheless, the State Department had an important interest in the program because it was the agency responsible for insuring the good treatment of some 10,000 American civilians captured in the Philippines, Wake Island, Guam, China, and Japan in the early stages of the war. It was also interested in obtaining the early release of the prisoners. The Japanese government knew of the relocation camps and objected to the treatment of their inmates. This circumstance posed the possibility of reprisals against Americans in Japanese hands. Then too, the moral and practical problems of relocation were as apparent to State Department officials as to other government personnel. During the course of the war most ranking Department officials had some contact with the issue --

Cordell Hull, Edward Stettinius, Sumner Welles, Joseph Grew, Breckinridge Long, Dean Acheson.

The role of the State Department in the drafting of E.O. 9066 appears to have been minimal. In October and November 1941, Curtis P. Munson, technically a State Department representative, prepared a report for President Roosevelt on the loyalty of Japanese Americans on the West Coast and in Hawaii. This study, which held that the Japanese were totally reliable, was circulated to Secretary of State Hull and certain other cabinet members, but it was never discussed in the Department and was probably unknown to its officials.

The Department had little to do with early activity in connection with the Order. On February 13, 1942, Maxwell M. Hamilton, Chief of the Division of Far Eastern Affairs, informed Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles of the soundness of restricting the Japanese element of the population on the West Coast and in Hawaii. He cited Walter Lippmann's Washington Post article of the previous day a "fifth column." No available evidence suggests that the State Department advanced this position or otherwise participated in the drafting of E.O. 9066.

The Department initiated action on behalf of Americans in Japanese custody from the onset of the war. Japanese diplomats were interned at the luxurious Homestead Hotel in hope of eliciting favorable reciprocal treatment of U.S. diplomats in Japan. By January 1942 State had extracted assent from Japan for mutual adherence to the principle that the provisions of the Geneva Convention on Prisoners

None recognition of divided interest and assurance all departments debate - nothing in reports - Mandatory Collaboration feasibility usefulness

of War would be applied to civilians even though Japan had never ratified the instrument. The two nations negotiated an exchange of official personnel, and it occurred at Lorenzo Marques, Mozambique, in July 1942.

Negotiations to exchange mainly non-official civilians proceeded with great difficulty. Japan requested the repatriation of a large number of specific individuals. Some didn't want to go. American intelligence and security organizations advised against the release of others. The State Department feared that if the United States was not more responsive Japan would not repatriate many influential Americans. There arose in this connection the question of forced repatriation. The State Department held that aliens could be deported against their will only as a last resort to free American citizens in Japan, and that American-born Japanese retaining American nationality could in no case be sent to Japan unless they so desired.

A second exchange occurred in October 1943, despite the obstacles presented by the relocation policy. Spain, the representative of Japanese interests in the United States, faithfully transmitted Tokyo's embarrassing protests regarding the treatment of Japanese nationals in relocation camps to the Department of State. Within a few days of the establishment of collection centers for Japanese Americans in California the Spanish Consul from San Francisco visited them. On a number of occasions in 1942 and 1943 representatives of the Spanish Embassy, accompanied by State Department officials of the Special War Problems Division, visited relocation camps in

California and other western states. The nature of Spain's reports to Tokyo could not be known, and American officials put the best possible face on the results of the visits, but additional protests from Japan usually followed. It is an interesting historical sidelight that recently declassified "Magic" intercepts indicate the United States believed that an espionage ring operating out of the Spanish Embassy provided Japan with information during the war.

One point of contention about the evacuees centered on the issue of forced labor. Should the Japanese inmates of the relocation camps be compelled to contribute to the war effort by working? No, said the Department of State. Although the United States consistently denied that the camp inmates were internees and thus subject to the Geneva Convention, State believed that any practice or regulation that fell short of the Geneva standards could provoke Japanese reprisals against its American civilian internees.

By the end of 1942 disillusionment and factional strife developed in the relocation camps. During hearings by a Senate subcommittee in January 1943, Joseph Grew, the former Ambassador to Japan who had been interned for six months, told a panel that was inclined toward sterner control, "we should make every effort not to alienate the many thousands of good, loyal Nisei American citizens of Japanese origin just because they were born of Japanese blood. I believe that the very vast majority are loyal American citizens who would fight for us. . . . They have been reared in our democracy, they had no contact with Japan, they have their families here; their whole outlook

is American." Grew, who later became Under Secretary of State, urged that the disloyal and the troublemakers be segregated from the pro-American majority.

Discontent erupted into violence at the Tule Lake camp in November 1943. Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long expressed concern to Senate investigators that the situation threatened Americans held by Japan. Indeed, Radio Tokyo had already broadcast ominous veiled threats regarding the 10,000 American civilians in its custody. Long had reservations regarding the transfer of "disloyal" Japanese Americans to U.S. Army control; he feared the impact on Japan's American prisoners. He also revealed that Japan had demanded clarification of U.S. relocation policy prior to the continuation of exchange negotiations. Shortly thereafter Japan totally lost interest in the exchange negotiations; many Americans remained interned for the duration of the war.

By 1944 it was obvious to almost all in official Washington that any national security justification for the relocation program had ceased to exist. Secretary of State Hull wrote President Roosevelt to second the position of Interior Secretary Harold Ickes: the West Coast exclusion decree should be lifted and the relocation camps should be closed. On December 17, 1944, the mass exclusion orders were rescinded.

During the last years of the war Congress gave serious consideration to legislation providing for the postwar deportation of Japanese Americans on the grounds of "disloyalty." On December 18,

1945, Acting Secretary Dean Acheson conveyed the views of the State Department to Representative Samuel Dickstein, Chairman of the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, concerning H.R. 1444, a bill aimed at the deportation of all Japanese nationals not closely related to persons serving in the U.S. armed forces. Acheson described the bill as an injustice to long-time residents of established loyalty. "I cannot refrain," he said, "from expressing grave doubts in regard to the moral aspects of a proposal to eject from our community, solely on racial grounds, an element in our population which can rightfully claim an enviable record during the war. . . . I fear that the bill would violate long established and valuable principles which have guided the people of this country since the founding of the republic." H.R. 1444 was not reported out of committee.

To summarize, the responsibilities of the Department of State in connection with Americans in Japanese hands caused the agency to exercise a moderating influence upon the relocation policy. Officials such as Ambassador Grew spoke out on behalf of Japanese Americans when to do so represented an act of moral courage.

There is another side to the story. A memorandum from Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long to Secretary Hull regarding possible deportation of so-called "disloyal" Japanese Americans reveals an obvious callousness regarding "these people." Also, Bernard Gufler of the Special Division told a Senate Subcommittee that the Geneva Convention should not be applied to relocation centers because

"we can get a little more out of them" otherwise. Concerning camp administration, he said: "maybe they need a little more steel inside the glove."

The State Department's role in a related operation -- the deportation of citizens of Japanese descent from their homelands in Latin America -- is another aspect of the story. With State Department encouragement and assistance in selection of individuals, the government of Peru deported approximately 1,000 of its Japanese residents to relocation camps in the United States. The deportation programs in Latin America were conducted pursuant to commonly agreed measures for hemispheric defense concluded at the Rio Conference of 1942. It is clear, however, that the State Department actively sought the deportation and incarceration of individuals of Japanese ancestry from Latin America and later from liberated Europe in order to use them as bargaining chips in its struggle to secure the release of Americans held by Japan.

Years later, a Foreign Service Officer involved in the Peruvian affair provided an evaluation that pertains to his particular experience and the larger question of State Department participation in the treatment of innocent individuals of Japanese ancestry during World War II:

"The forcible detention of Japanese from Peru, arising out of a wartime collaboration among the governments of Peru, the United States, and the American republics, was clearly a

violation of human rights and was not justified by any plausible threat to the security of the western hemisphere. To try to understand it, one must put oneself back into the atmosphere of the times. The war against Japan was a total war. After the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, the enemy was deemed capable of any act, no matter how unreasonable or unlikely. The enthusiastic exploitation of prejudice, hatred, emotion, and covetousness became respectable and acceptable."