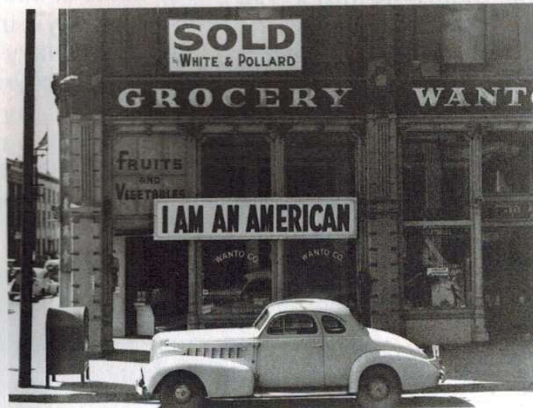


# 34 Forgetting the Constitution



The American citizen who owned this store put up the sign the day after Pearl Harbor was bombed. Like so many others, he had to sell his business at a sacrifice price and go to a camp.

Haruko Obata lived in a house in lovely, tree-shaded Berkeley, California. Her father was a professor at the University of California. Haruko was an American citizen. Like most Japanese Americans, she was proud of her Asian heritage, but she didn't approve of the ways of the warlords who ruled the Japanese empire. In school she studied the Constitution and its guarantees. She was happy to live in the land of liberty.

Then, one day, Haruko's world changed.

Her father came home and told the family they were moving. They had just a few days to get ready. They could take only as much as they could carry. They might never again see the things they would leave behind. They were going to live—against their wishes—in a prisonlike camp.

What had they done? Just a minute, and I'll get to that. But first, imagine that you are Haruko. You have some hard decisions to make, and you need to make them quickly. What will you choose to take with you? Sorry, your dog can't go. You'll have to give her away. Books? Games? Toys? Not if

One girl was seven when her family was taken to a camp in the California desert. "Someone tied a numbered tag to my collar and to the duffel bag," she wrote. Nobody explained why they suddenly had to move.



**All four** of the photographs on pages 148 and 149 are by Dorothea Lange, as are those on pages 85 and 200. What do you think Lange is saying in her work?

**The Japanese** internment camps on the West Coast, and the internment camp for Jews in Oswego, New York, were run by the same government agency. Even the food was the same.





The only places with enough room to house so many people are cold, hot, or windy—places no one wants to live in, like Manzanar (left) on a barren dried-up lake in California's Inyo County.

they are heavy. No one knows exactly where this camp is. It may be very cold. Or hot. You won't be able to take much besides clothes. Your parents must sell the car, the house, and almost all their possessions; because they do it so quickly, they will get hardly anything for them.

You and your family are going to a camp that is surrounded by a barbed-wire fence. Armed guards stand in watchtowers. If someone tries to walk out into the desert he will be shot. What have you done that is so terrible? Why are you and your family in this prison camp?

You have not done anything wrong. Yes, you read that right. The Obatas have done nothing at all. They have been fine citizens.

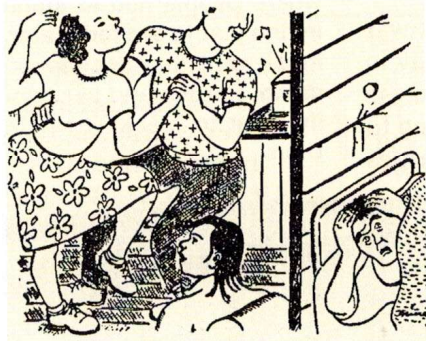
But they are of Japanese descent, and the United States is at war with Japan. There is anti-Japanese hysteria in America, especially in California. Some of it is understandable. War is terrible. The Japanese government is horrible. But the Japanese in America have nothing to do with that. Some people don't understand that. Many authorities expect the Japanese to attack the West Coast. A Japanese submarine fires shells that land—harmlessly—near Los Angeles. People are terrified. There are rumors that Japanese-American fishermen are sending signals to Japanese ships and planes. There is no evidence for this, but in wartime, how can anyone be sure?

Reports of Japanese atrocities in Nanking, China, and elsewhere are horrible (and turn out to be true). But Japanese Americans have nothing to

The whole evacuation operation was so rushed that very few camps were ready when families arrived. Haruko Obata was sent to Tanforan (below), an assembly camp in California, where people had to stand in line just to get fed. Later, most went to a destination camp. Haruko and her family went to bleak Topaz in Utah.







A young woman named Miné Okubo was interned at Tanforan and then in Topaz, Utah. She drew pictures for a book about her life called *Citizen 13660*. The clothes the camps supplied never fit; the Utah mosquitoes were fierce; and the walls were so thin and badly built that quiet and privacy were impossible.

do with that, just as German Americans have nothing to do with the savagery in Nazi Germany.

Most Japanese Americans feel anguish. They love the United States, its opportunities and its inspiring vision. But they also take pride in their ancient Japanese heritage. For them, World War II is like a civil war.

In addition, the Japanese in America face a special problem. It is an old problem. It is racism. A racist law prevents Japanese immigrants from becoming citizens. However, anyone born here is automatically an American citizen. Two-thirds of the Japanese Americans are *Nisei*—the Japanese word for those born in America—and they are citizens. Racism has been part of America's history from the time of the first contact of Europeans and Native Americans. But so has the fight against racism. That clash—between bigotry and decency—is found in the human drama in every culture (and perhaps in every human heart).

Now the racists have something important on their side: it is the very real fear that war brings. There is something else here, too. It is greed. Japanese Americans have been industrious; their property is valuable. If they are put behind barbed wire, their property will have to be sold, and quickly, for much less than it is worth. Some people will profit mightily.

The first calls for internment (putting the Japanese in camps) come from newspaper columnists. Then a group of West Coast politicians join in. They include Earl Warren, who will later become chief justice of the Supreme Court. J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, says quietly that internment is unnecessary; the FBI can handle surveillance of suspects. But Norman Thomas, leader of the American Socialist Party, is a lonely political figure when he speaks out forcefully, opposing internment.

The attorney general reminds the secretary of war that the Fourth Amendment protects citizens from “unreasonable searches and seizures.” The 14th Amendment says “nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty or property without the due process of law.” But we are at war, and the War Department is worried about “national security.” The right of habeas corpus has been shelved in wartime before.

President Roosevelt issues Executive Order 9102. One hundred and twenty thousand Japanese Americans have a few days to get ready. They will be sent to 10 different internment camps.

Here is how Haruko Obata described her arrival at the Tanforan camp:



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## WAR, PEACE, AND ALL THAT JAZZ

*When we arrived at Tanforan it was raining; it was so sad and depressing. The roadway was all mud, thick mud and our shoes would get stuck in mud when you walked outside. They gave us a horse stable the size of our dining room with a divided door where the horse put his head out—that was our sleeping quarters. There were two twin beds made of wood, bunk beds, and another bed on the opposite wall. It was supposed to be a couch but it was made of wood too. There was nothing else. Nothing. That one time I cried so much. That was the only time I cried; it was awful.*

There is much more to this story—much, much more. Mostly it is of a people who—as soon as they got settled—didn't cry. They did their best in a bad situation. They planted seeds and grew crops. They raised farm animals. They fed themselves and sent their surplus to support the war effort. They fixed up their sleeping quarters. They established schools, churches, recreational centers, newspapers, scout troops, baseball teams, and their own camp governments.

Some were let out of the camps to work in war factories. Many became soldiers. A Nisei regiment fighting in Europe won more commendations than any other regiment in the whole United States Army. Infantryman Harry Takagi explained:

*We were fighting for the rights of all Japanese-Americans. We set out to break every record in the army. If we failed, it would reflect discredit on all Japanese-Americans. We could not let that happen.*

More than 16,000 Nisei served in the Pacific, most in military intelligence work as interpreters. Some went behind enemy lines as American spies. Japanese-American women volunteered and served in the **Japanese-American soldiers, in Europe, being reviewed by Secretary of Defense James V. Forrestal.**



Woman's Army Corps, as army nurses, and in the Red Cross.

At first, people in the War Department objected to the idea of Nisei serving in the army. But, finally, President Roosevelt spoke up. He said:

*The principle on which this country was founded and by which it has always been governed is that Americanism is a matter of the mind and heart; Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry.*

*If you don't know what habeas corpus is, see book 3 of A History of US.*

**They issued us army mess kits, the round metal kind that fold over, and plopped in scoops of canned Vienna sausage, canned string beans, steamed rice that had been cooked too long, and on top of the rice a serving of canned apricots.... Among the Japanese, of course, rice is never eaten with sweet foods, only with salty or savory foods. Few of us could eat such a mixture. But at this point no one dared protest. It would have been impolite. I was horrified when I saw the apricot syrup seeping through my little mound of rice. I opened my mouth to complain. My mother jabbed me in the back to keep quiet. We moved on through the line and joined the others squatting in the lee of half-raised walls, dabbing courteously at what was, for almost everyone there, an inedible concoction.**

—JEANNE WAKATSUKI  
HOUSTON,  
FAREWELL TO MANZANAR

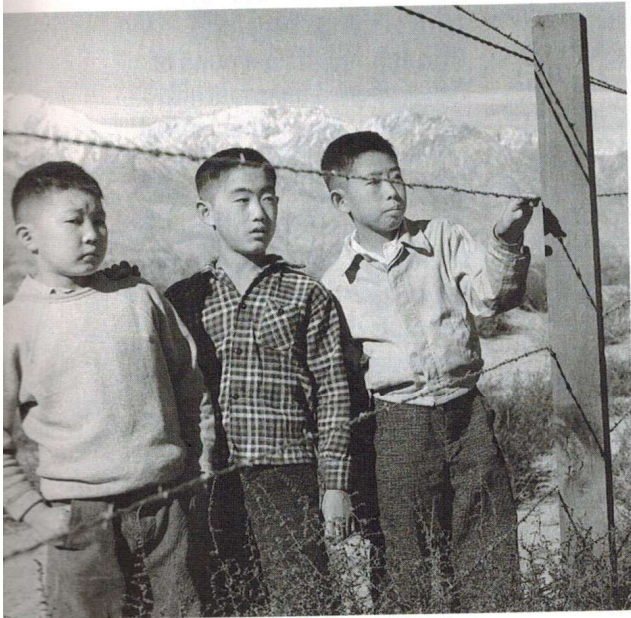


## A HISTORY OF US



The Hirano family with a photo of their other son in uniform. They were sent to Arizona.

Photographer Toyo Miyatake and his family were sent to Manzanar. He wasn't allowed a camera, so he made one and took secret pictures of life behind the barbed wire.



In the course of the war, 10 people were convicted of spying for Japan. All were white. Only one Japanese American was convicted of treason; she was Iva Ikuda Toguri, a graduate of UCLA, who was in Tokyo when the war began and couldn't get home. Toguri, known as Tokyo Rose, agreed to do propaganda broadcasting to avoid work in a munitions factory. She was paid \$6.60 a month.

Eventually, the camps were closed and people went out and did their best to build new lives. It wasn't easy; they had lost all their possessions. Many still faced racism when they tried to find jobs and new homes.

Now, you may be thinking that racism is terrible, but that, really, it is only a problem for the people who are made to suffer. Don't be fooled. Hatred is a contagious disease; it spreads quickly. It is like the poison gas that both sides used during the First World War; when the wind changed, it blew back on the gassers.

No people is immune to the virus of hate. It is how they handle it that decides the kind of people they are. This nation was founded on the idea that *all men are created equal*. A group of women at Seneca Falls, New York, changed that to *all men and women are created equal*. That is what we believe. That is what this nation is all about.

*We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.*

Remember George Washington's words:

*The government of the United States...gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.*

The more you read history, the more you will realize that the haters never win. Eventually, they get found out and put down. Often, unfortunately, it takes time.

Forty years after the end of the war, the American government officially apologized to the Japanese Americans for the terrible injustice done to them during World War II. Those who had been in the camps were given money in partial payment for their suffering. Today, when we Americans think back on the internment camps, we feel shame.