

Chapter 4

World War II and Japanese-American Relocation

Japan's invasion of China began September 19, 1931. Japanese military planners pretended that they were simply responding to attacks on Japanese property by "bandits in Manchuria," a province in China. By 6:30 a.m., three battalions of Japanese troops had taken most of the city of Mukden. This incident began a 14-year-long attempt by Japan to conquer China.

Within a few days, the Japanese took control of all 693 miles of Manchuria's railroad and then the cities along the tracks. After six years of preparations in Manchuria and along China's northeast coast, the Japanese stood ready to move on Peking, China's old capital. In July 1937, the Chinese Nationalist Army under General Chiang Kai-shek retreated before the better-equipped Japanese. At Shanghai in November 1937, the Chinese fought a spirited but losing battle. This unexpected and united resistance provoked the Japanese into an all-out attack on the new Chinese capital, the infamous "rape of Nanking."

After driving Chinese soldiers out of the city in December 1937, Japanese armed forces killed an estimated 300,000 Nanking civilians. Japanese soldiers committed almost every atrocity imaginable. They bashed heads of babies against walls, used live children for bayonet practice, burned and buried men alive, strafed civilians from planes, and raped between 20,000 to 80,000 women. This massacre went on for about two weeks, ending shortly after Christmas day, 1937.

All of these events were reported in US newspapers. The Roosevelt administration protested Japanese aggression and gave financial assistance to China. Intent on forcing Chiang to agree to Japanese economic control of China, Japan paid scant attention to foreign scoldings. Moreover, America continued to sell aviation gas and scrap metal to Japan.

Internationalists and Isolationists

From 1937 to 1941, Japan advanced southward in China, attempting to cut Chiang's government off from foreign arms shipments. When the Japanese moved to cut off Chinese supply routes in north French Indochina in June 1940, President Roosevelt was faced with conflicting advice from members of his cabinet. Internationalists favored strong retaliation, which in this case meant depriving Japan of the scrap metal and aviation gasoline used to fuel its war machine. Other advisors, isolationists, believed that Japan would invade most of Asia if the US denied its supply of gas and metal. They advised no interruption of trade with Japan, continuing negotiations, and no threats.

While this debate transpired in Roosevelt's cabinet, a similar discussion took place within the Imperial government of Japan. One group, known as the *Joi* faction (expel the barbarians), had earned the support of the Japanese army and wanted to continue the conquest of southeast Asia. Another group, the *Kaikoku* (open the country) faction, wanted peaceful trade with the West. Backed by businessmen, the *Kaikoku* were willing to retreat from Indochina and China in order to continue trading with the United States.

"Things Are Automatically Going to Happen"

While the opposing factions in Japan fought for control over foreign policy, negotiations between the United States and Japan concerning China and Indochina continued. When Japanese troops took over airfields in southern Indochina, internationalist advisors persuaded President Roosevelt to halt all trade with Japan on July 26, 1941. Since this action deprived the Japanese of their main oil supply, they immediately began negotiations to restore US-Japanese trade. Japanese policy-makers, however, were unwilling to comply with America's demand that Japan stop its aggression against China. As the diplomats talked, a Japanese fleet of six aircraft carriers sped toward Hawaii. The deadline for the diplomats was set at November 29, 1941. After that, as a coded Japanese cable predicted, "things are automatically going to happen."

The secret date for launching the attack passed with no notable concessions from the United States. Skirting normal shipping lanes, the Japanese fleet continued to approach Hawaii from the northwest. To maintain the element of surprise, the fleet sailed in radio silence without lights, and no telltale garbage was dropped overboard.



USS. West Virginia and Tennessee at Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941

Eight American battleships in Pearl Harbor were docked one next to the other. None hung the protective netting used to deflect torpedoes. Warned of a possible Japanese attack, US commanders ordered planes lined up wing-tip to wing-tip and ammunition kept under lock and key to prevent sabotage. Blips reported by a radar operator were thought to be American B-17's coming in from California. A naval duty officer questioned the reported sighting of a miniature sub at the mouth of the harbor. Convinced that all necessary precautions had been taken, General Short and Admiral Kimmel were prepared for their regular Sunday morning golf game.

Up until 7:54 a.m., December 7, 1941, no one seriously suspected anything. One minute later, the entire American base was under attack as 360 Japanese planes swooped down from the skies

completely unopposed. Torpedo and dive bombers attacked eight US battleships and ten other vessels. Other Japanese planes bombed and strafed US aircraft on the ground as frantic US fliers tried to get airborne. When the day was done, over 2,400 Americans were dead, eight battleships were sunk or disabled, and 177 planes were destroyed. The Japanese lost only 29 planes and 100 men.

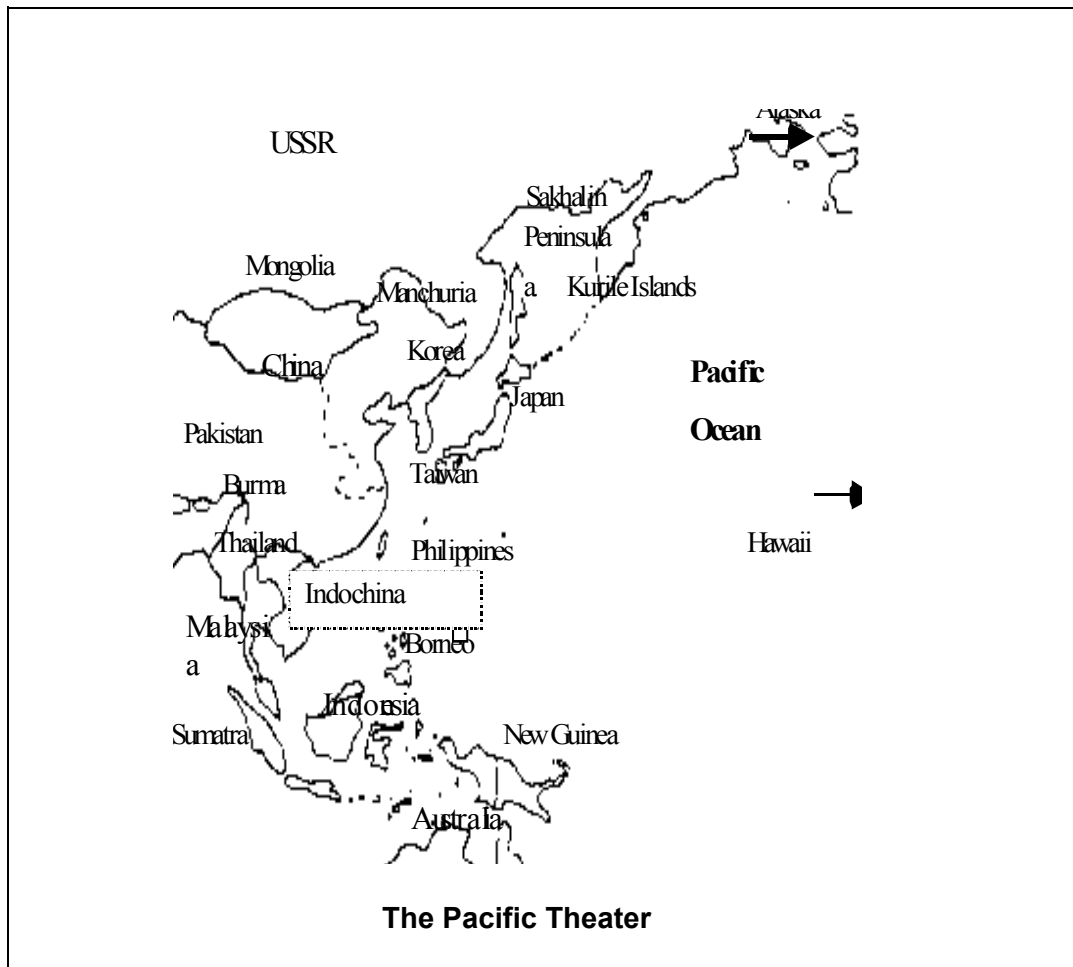
Follow-up Conquests

The attack on Pearl Harbor was part of a calculated risk. Britain was fighting for its life against Germany. The rest of Europe was in the hands of the Axis. In June, Hitler had invaded the Soviet Union, despite their previous agreement. The Soviet Union was now fighting Germany at the gates of Moscow. The Japanese gambled that they could knock out the US navy and so discourage Americans that they would not have the resolve to wage successful war against Japan. The Japanese, however, failed to destroy both the US aircraft carrier fleet, which had been out on maneuvers, and the American fighting spirit.

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Japan lost no time after Pearl Harbor in carrying out its plan of conquest. American forces in the Philippines and British bases in Hong Kong and Malaya were attacked the same day. Within weeks, the Japanese took Thailand, Burma, Singapore, the Dutch East Indies [Indonesia], Borneo, and parts of New Guinea. Many islands in the South Pacific, including Wake, Rabaul, and Guam, also fell into Japanese hands. Lacking the battleships and aircraft destroyed at Pearl Harbor, the United States could do little to prevent these conquests.



On December 8, 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt addressed the angry and shocked people of America. The President said that December 7 was a day that would "live in infamy" and concluded that a state of war already existed between the United States and Japan. The Senate and House quickly voted to declare war.

The Home Front

If Pearl Harbor helped Americans in any way, it taught them they could not avoid war by trying to remain neutral. The American people supported their president over the next three and one-half years when he asked them to make sacrifices in order to win the war. Eight million Americans contributed by serving in the armed forces; 322,000 died. Young men prepared to be drafted right after high school; many voluntarily left school before graduation to fight for their country. Women volunteered for the WACS (Women's Army Corps) and the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service).

Civilians helped by planting victory gardens, collecting paper and scrap metal for recycling, and working long hours in defense plants. Women volunteered their time at service organization and raised children without the help of their husbands; celebrities entertained the troops. All were limited by food and gasoline ration cards. Prices were strictly controlled by the OPA (Office of Price Administration).

For the American economy, the war meant a complete end of the Great Depression. By the time the war was over, the United States had produced 274,000 planes, 85,000 ships, and 100,000 tanks or armed vehicles. These products not only met needs for our armed forces, but served as an 'arsenal for democracy' for our allies.

Relocation of Japanese-Americans



Although all Americans had good reason to be proud of their country's war effort, there is one chapter in that story that has become very controversial. Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Congress passed a very unusual law. The law required the War Department to move some 112,000 Japanese-Americans who lived in the west coast states further inland. Pressure for this law came from whites living on the Pacific coast in areas with relatively large numbers of Japanese-Americans. Even before Pearl Harbor, these Japanese-Americans were discriminated against by whites who felt threatened by their Asian appearance, different culture, strange language, and economic success which was often attributed to their willingness to work harder and live on less than their white neighbors. After December 7, white fears were heightened by rumors, such as one printed in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in early 1942. In this article, Hawaii's Japanese-Americans were accused of intentionally blocking the roads to Pearl Harbor with their "wheezing jalopies"* during the air raid.

Between March and May, Japanese-Americans were told that they had to "relocate" to one of many camps throughout the United States. They were given a week to sell their cars, homes, and businesses and report to local detention centers for further orders:

Western Defense Command and 4th Army Wartime Civil Control Administration

INSTRUCTIONS TO ALL PERSONS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY

Pursuant to the provisions of Civilian Exclusion Order No. 27 - dated April 30, 1942, all persons of Japanese ancestry, both alien and non-alien, will be evacuated from the area by 12 o'clock noon, Thursday, May 7, 1942.

Japanese-Americans were ordered to take as much bedding, extra clothes, and household items as they could carry. Pets had to be left behind. Japanese-Americans were not allowed to bring such household items as refrigerators, washing machines, and stoves. These were to be stored by the

* Old and often broken-down cars.

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government at the owner's risk. Owners hurriedly sold other property, such as cars and trucks in the week between the removal order and the date to report. Houses and farms that could not be sold or rented stood idle until taken over for non-payment of taxes or mortgages.

Japanese-Americans were transported from detention centers to relocation camps, where most of them remained until the war ended. Those who volunteered to fight for the United States were released. Some young men refused to enlist because they resented the way the government treated them. Others were allowed to move to the Midwest to work in defense plants. Most Japanese-Americans, however, were forced to stay in relocation camps. Entire families had to live in single rooms with thin partitions to separate family areas. They ate in cafeterias, like those used to feed soldiers. The relocation camps were surrounded by barbed wire with sentries standing in watch towers to prevent escapes. The camps themselves were in remote, semi-deserted areas far from the west coast, and were uncomfortably hot in the summers and freezing cold in the winters.



Japanese-Americans being relocated into internment camps, April 29, 1942

The US government tried to close these camps and resettle the inmates several times during the years between 1943 and 1945. Opposition was so strong, that it was not until January, 1945 that the last camp was closed. When finally released from relocation camps, many Japanese Americans found that they no longer owned the homes, businesses, and farms they had left behind. The estimated value of their lost property was \$350,000,000.

Arguments for and Against the Camps

Anyone speaking for the relocation camps of the 1940s remembered Nanking and Pearl Harbor. These advocates of relocation pointed out that ethnic ties had caused the Sudetenlanders to work with fellow Germans against their countrymen. Would not the Japanese-Americans behave the same way, as they allegedly already had acted at Pearl Harbor? Moreover, most Japanese-Americans lived in California, the region of the United States most vulnerable to Japanese invasion. Some commentators suggested that the very lack of sabotage so far indicated that Japanese-Americans were planning a major campaign of disruption later on.

Those who opposed detaining Japanese-Americans on the basis of race made analogies to Hitler's 'ethnic cleansing' of Jews and gypsies in Europe. They thought it was unfair and against the fundamental principles for which the US was fighting to force someone to go to a camp solely on the basis of his/her ancestry. Indeed, people of German and Italian ancestry were not being moved away from the equally menaced east coast. Perhaps it was jealousy and the desire for farms and businesses belonging to the Japanese and not national security which was behind the move to remove them. Moreover, no Japanese-Americans had, as yet, been convicted of sabotage or treason.

Immediate Removal

I am for immediate removal ... to a point deep in the interior. Sure, this would work an unjustified hardship on ... 90 percent of the California Japanese. But the remaining 10 percent have it in their power to do damage—great damage to the American people. They are a serious menace and you can't tell me that an individual's rights have any business being placed above a nation's safety. If making 1,000,000 innocent Japanese uncomfortable would pre-vent one scheming Japanese from costing the life of an American boy, then let 1,000,000 suffer.⁸

If We Care about Democracy

Every man who cares about freedom, about government by law, must fight for it for the other man with whom he disagrees with the same passion of insistence as he claims for his own rights. If we care about democracy, we must care about it as a reality for others as well as for ourselves; yes, for aliens, for Germans, for Italians, for Japanese. For the Bill of Rights protects not only American citizens but all human beings who live on our American soil, under our American flag.⁹

Suggested Student Exercises:

- Identify or define and briefly tell the importance to this chapter of each of the following:

a. Manchuria	f. Kimmel and Short	j. relocation camps
b. "rape of Nanking"	g. Pearl Harbor damages	k. what could and could
c. Indochina	k. attacks after Pearl Har-	be taken to camps
d. <i>Joi</i> and <i>Kaikoku</i>	bor.	l. Henry McLemore
e. "automatically going to	i. US war effort at home	o. Bill of Rights
happen."		
- Describe the attack upon Pearl Harbor and explain the reasons for it.
- Do you think that Japan's attacks on China and the United States and evidence of subversion by Japanese-Americans discussed in this chapter justified the internment of any Japanese-Americans in relocation camps?

⁸ Quoted in DeAnne Sobul, ed., *Encounters with American History* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1972), pp. 140-41.

⁹ Quoted in E.H. Spicer, *Impounded People: Japanese-Americans in the Relocation Centers* (Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, 1946), pp. 9-10.