IN THE NAME OF NATIONAL SECURITY
Exclusion of Japanese Americans from the West Coast During World War II

Under the guise of national security, all West Coast residents of Japanese ancestry, including the citizen Nisei, were ordered by the military to “evacuate” their homes and submit to government custody. This unjustifiable denial of civil liberties occurred despite the fact that there was no evidence of Japanese American involvement in any activities that endangered the safety of the West Coast. On May 20, 1942, the last of the City’s 5,280 Japanese American residents boarded buses, leaving their homes, community and friends for an uncertain exile.

Shock, Anger, & Anxiety
Like other Americans, the Japanese community responded with shock, anger and disbelief to the bombing of Pearl Harbor. As the FBI arrested Japanese community and religious leaders in the days following the attack, concern grew for the long-term, often-heard fears of evacuation and relocation. Many were families who had been born in the United States and had no connection to or knowledge of the parents and grandparents who had immigrated to the United States. This was the first time in American history that a citizens’ group had been targeted for evacuation and relocation. The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), led by then-Nisei president, argued that the JACL’s leadership, advocating for the rights of all, would work to extend the JACL’s leadership. The JACL was forced to resign in the fall of 1942, leaving the majority of citizens’ groups without a voice in policy-making and the government.

How Do You Prepare For Internment?
With virtually no alternative, Japanese American residents cooperated with the Internment orders. The JACL, the American Friends Service Committee, and a handful of local churches, organizations and individuals provided what assistance they could to aid these orders issued by the FBI. Although some voices were raised against these orders, many were silenced by the threat of violence. Allowed to bring only what they could carry, they were instructed to bring bedding, blankets, eating utensils, clothing and personal articles, as well as supplies for infants and invalids. Not knowing where or for how long they would be going, they packed what they could; others were forced to leave without warning.

What Can We Do?
Although the Internment orders were silent and often unreported, most Japanese Americans complied with the orders imposed upon them. Eagerly identified, long the subject of discrimination, and politically voiceless, they had few options. The FBI’s point of view to the community and its members was that the evacuation and relocation orders were issued in defense of the community’s best interests. Some members of the community believed that the orders were necessary to protect the community from the perceived dangers of Japanese American involvement in the war effort. Others believed that the orders were motivated by anti-Japanese sentiment and racism. The Internment orders were controversial and generated widespread opposition from the community and its members.

Assembly Centers
Assembly Centers served as temporary detention facilities for Japanese Americans while permanent camps were being constructed. Most Japanese Americans were imprisoned for two to six months before being transferred to the hastily constructed former concentration camps or internment centers. The Japanese Americans of the West Coast were selected for internment because of their loyalty to the United States and their contribution to the war effort.

Life at the Centers
Life in the Assembly Centers was a mixture of regimentation, boredom and efforts to normalize the face of uncertainty. Internists sought to make their homes and barbershops, mess halls, laundries and laundry facilities, barbershops, and mailrooms completely self-sufficient. Internists also served as chefs and food managers in the camps. Eventually, schools, medical clinics and recreational programs were established. Governing councils were elected and internment tasks were delegated to the community, administration and special projects. After 3 months, Tulelake Assembly Center closed and its residents were sent to permanent Internment camps.

SIGN 10A

The story of the Japanese American Internment continues on Sign 11A.

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*Sign 10A was authored by John L. Maloy, Assistant Director for the Department of Justice, After Evacuation Center Utilization.*