

The Question of Loyalty: Japanese-American Student Relocation in World War II

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In 1942, Jerry Aikawa was many things: a baseball player, a first-year medical student at the University of California, an American citizen, and, according to the US government, a high-level security risk. Aikawa was a Nisei, a second-generation Japanese-American. Born in California, he spoke better English than Japanese, attended American schools, and had never visited Japan. Yet, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, he and many other Japanese-Americans were forced from their homes on the West Coast and sent to relocation camps in the interior states. Unlike many of his Japanese counterparts, Aikawa had a way out of relocation: he was eligible to leave the camps to continue his education. In April of 1942, before his family was relocated, Aikawa sent letters to several medical schools away from the restricted areas on the West Coast. Of the 30 medical schools he contacted, only two replied. The only positive response came from Wake Forest, which promised to look over his application.

While he waited to hear back, Aikawa and his family were sent to the Rohwer Relocation Center under armed guard. On September 25, he finally received a reply from Herbert M. Vann, the chair of the admissions committee at Wake Forest. Vann expressed interest in Aikawa's application, but detailed the roadblocks his committee faced. They were required by the government to get approval from a military authority before they could accept anyone deemed a "security risk." Several letters from the college to the FBI and military had been simply "passed from one authority to another." Aikawa sought the help of the Student Relocation Council, a group of volunteers who assisted Japanese-American students with finding new colleges. By March of 1943, Aikawa the citizen and security risk was across the country continuing medical school, almost a full year after being removed from his home and college.¹

Jerry Aikawa was lucky. Being a student at a highly-respected university gave him an advantage in finding a new institution. Yet, Aikawa lost a full year of schooling, sitting and

waiting to hear from colleges and the government. Of the 4,300 Japanese-American students relocated during World War II, about 3,000 waited between one and three years before finding new universities.² Many more never got the chance to continue their education, disheartened by the length of the process or compelled by family members to stay in the relocation camps.

Relocating Nisei students should have been a simple process. The War Relocation Authority (WRA) was established to run the Japanese relocation camps and keep watch over the Japanese population. Some of its members tried to help the Japanese find work or schooling outside the camps. Dillon Myer, the director of the WRA for most of the war, saw Japanese relocation as a method for dispersal of the Japanese population out of the ethnically-concentrated West Coast. Student relocation would be the beginning of this dispersal of Japanese-Americans throughout the country, which would “Americanize” them and protect the country against any Japanese insurrection.³ The program also received letters of support from President Roosevelt and John J. McCloy, the Assistant Secretary of War.⁴

While the government was interested in dispersing the Japanese as quickly as possible, colleges had powerful incentives to accept relocated students because of their declining enrollments. The draft would take almost entire classes of men from universities across the country. Many colleges opened their doors to women and other minority groups for the first time in order to avoid closing.⁵ Adding to the incentive to admit Japanese students was the fact that they came to school with full funding, a requirement of their release from the relocation centers. These Nisei students, many of whom were the top performers at West Coast colleges, waited anxiously to continue their education at colleges desperate to boost declining enrollments. Yet, the students were forced to wait because of a convoluted, flawed system set up by the

government and student relocation council. These groups have been blamed by scholars for the program's failures.

In the 1980s, scholars blamed Dillon Myer and the War Relocation Authority for the failures of relocation. In *Keeper of Concentration Camps*, Richard Drinnon argued that Myer and other government leaders were racist, and that they intentionally restrained the relocation process at every turn. However, in 1994 Jenness Hall demonstrated that Myer and the WRA worked hard to help Japanese students.⁶ She placed the blame on the National Japanese-American Student Relocation Council, the volunteer organization tasked with helping the students by the WRA. Hall claimed that conflicting goals and approaches to the process between the council members were the reasons behind the program's failures. Yet, recent scholarship, such as Allen Austin's *From Concentration Camp to Campus*, defended the student relocation council. He argued that the council did impressive work with limited resources and no precedent for its function.⁷ Austin shifted the blame to the FBI and the military. He painted these agencies as part of an unyielding bureaucracy that stifled the progress of the WRA and relocation council. Specifically, Austin blamed the Navy and Army, because of their slow responses to inquiries about potential students.⁸

Simply passing blame to the military and FBI is easy. However, these scholars have ignored the reasoning behind the decisions of the agencies involved. This article takes a more nuanced view of the actions of the government and military, accounting for the pressures they faced in the decisions they made. Before they could allow Nisei students to transfer, the loyalty of each student had to be established. To reassure a wary public, the WRA and the student relocation council introduced a convoluted process that they believed would prove a student's loyalty. They called on the FBI and the military to assume the responsibility for authorizing

student transfers. The military and FBI would screen prospective students through background checks, questionnaires, and interviews. Each student involved would have to be “certified as a loyal citizen.”⁹ However, the agencies involved were unable or unwilling to be the sole authority on a student’s loyalty. What they did do was create restrictive and contradictory guidelines, which caused the program to languish until the process was changed in 1943.

Instead of simply blaming the policies of the military and the FBI, a larger question needs to be answered: Why were the military and FBI involved in student relocation in the first place? We must look beyond the actions and policies of these groups to the underlying logic for their decisions. Considering the fact that they were entrenched in the war effort, approving Nisei students for college was not a high military priority. Because loyalty was at the heart of the matter, the relocation council and WRA turned to government agencies who they thought could judge the students’ allegiance. In theory, this should have been a relatively simple process, but it was impeded by two important, underlying concerns: Could these students be trusted? And, who had the authority to make that determination? The “question of loyalty” was central to the relocation procedures and policies constructed by the WRA, the relocation council, and the government agencies involved. These procedures were meant to ensure both the safety of the country and support for the program. Yet, it was these very procedures, and each government and military agency involved, that impeded the student relocation process.

The Question of Loyalty before Relocation

In order to understand the reasoning behind relocation policies, it is necessary to address the debate over the “character” of the Japanese population. Years before the attack on Pearl Harbor, there was widespread concern about the loyalty of the Japanese-American population. Government officials, the mass media, and military officers all saw the surprise attack on Pearl

Harbor as the final proof of Japanese disloyalty within the United States. This overwhelming pressure and the uncertainty of Japanese intentions led to the decision to relocate the entire population from the West Coast. The student relocation process, which began soon after the government relocation, had to deal with these same pressures and concerns.

The loyalty of the Japanese was debated long before Pearl Harbor. In the 1920s, Colonel John Dewitt produced a report for the army entitled the “Project for the Defense of Oahu.” In it, Dewitt described how Hawaii would be placed under martial law in the event of a Japanese attack or invasion. Dewitt recommended suspending habeas corpus, registering Japanese aliens, and possibly interning those considered the most dangerous.¹⁰ These allegiances were studied again in a 1933 Army intelligence report entitled “Estimate of the Situation—The Japanese Population in Hawaii.” Similar to the earlier report by Dewitt and his committee, this study concluded that the Japanese exhibited “tendencies toward disloyalty,” as well as “racialized traits and moral inferiority.” During the decade before the war, the Navy and Army kept detailed lists of possible Japanese subversives, ready to be arrested in case of an attack.¹¹

Only one government organization seemed interested in debunking this view of Japanese-Americans. In November of 1940, the FBI produced its own report on the Japanese population in Hawaii. The FBI reported that the Japanese in Hawaii were “American in values and loyal to the United States.” Yet, the FBI supplemented the Army and Navy lists of possible subversives and would later use them to remove suspicious Japanese after the Pearl Harbor attack.¹² While the concerns highlighted are mostly focused on Hawaii, in the 1940s similar fears were voiced about the entire West Coast, which was vulnerable because of its large Japanese population. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the media took an extremely conservative and racialized view of Japanese-Americans. They were supported in this viewpoint by some members of the military

and government, as well as business leaders on the West Coast.¹³ These groups pressured the government to take drastic measures against what they saw as a disloyal, enemy minority.

Prior to Pearl Harbor, the media had begun reporting on the “Japanese problem.” An article in *Life* from 1940 reported the growing anti-Japanese sentiment on the West Coast and in Hawaii. The article, which included a call for citizens to be rational about their fears, also included a warning about subversive Japanese activity.¹⁴ On the West Coast, the *Los Angeles Times* became the leading source on rumors about the Japanese. In the event of a Japanese attack, they asked, who would the Japanese-Americans support? Would they come to the aid of their current home, or their ancestral homeland? In the weeks following the Pearl Harbor attack, the American media turned against the Japanese-American population. A December 8th editorial in the *LA Times* demonstrated the public’s fears of a possible invasion and Japanese uprising:

“We have thousands of Japanese here. Some, perhaps many, are good Americans. What the rest may be we do not know nor can we take a chance in light of yesterday’s demonstration that treachery and double-dealing are Japanese weapons.”¹⁵

The Japanese-Americans, who made up a large portion of the West Coast population, may have been loyal to the United States. However, in the opinion of this and many other writers, it was in the best interest of the country to not take any chances. Many members of the media had much harsher responses to the Japanese attack. On December 9, right-wing columnist Westbrook Pegler wrote that we “should kill 100 Japanese for every hostage murdered by our enemies.”¹⁶ The coverage of the *LA Times* and other papers fueled the fire of paranoia that swept through the country.

Thanks to the audacity of the attack on Hawaii, no rumor was too far-fetched to consider. Rumors were printed about Japanese planes over California and saboteurs sending messages to Tokyo. The *LA Times* called into question the loyalty of all Japanese-Americans, stating that ““A viper is a viper wherever the egg is hatched—so a Japanese American, born of Japanese parents,

grows up to be a Japanese, not an American.” The *Reader’s Digest* reported on an exposed plan of sabotage in January of 1942. Radio host John Hughes reported that the Japanese control of agriculture on the West Coast was “part of a larger, planned conspiracy.”¹⁷ The hysteria actually increased as more time passed without any Japanese uprising. The final blow from the press came from Walter Lippmann, a nationally-syndicated and respected columnist, when he argued that the lack of any disturbance was evidence of a future uprising. Lippmann commented that the lack of response from the Japanese population “is a sign that the blow is well organized and that it is held back until it can be struck with maximum effect.”¹⁸ The fact that Japanese-Americans were not acting disloyal only proved that they were, in fact, disloyal. In the eyes of the press, Japanese-Americans were sitting at home, waiting for the order from Tokyo to attack. Yet, the hysteria of the press was tame compared to the furor of some government officials and members of the military.

Government officials and members of the military immediately pressed for some action against the Japanese population in America. On December 15, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox reported that “fifth column work was done by the Japanese in Hawaii.”¹⁹ Knox’s report was seen as confirmation of the rumors of Japanese-American collusion. Knox’s comments and the findings of the Roberts Commission on Pearl Harbor fueled the fears of sabotage and uprising.²⁰ Government officials clamored for action. Even Winston Churchill got in on the debate, telling President Roosevelt that he should use military tribunals to examine the loyalty of the Japanese. Churchill commented that “we separated the goats from the sheep, interned the goats and used the sheep.”²¹ As the idea of relocation gained steam, it received support as the ultimate test of loyalty. Congressman Leland Ford stated that

“...if an American born Japanese, who is a citizen, is really patriotic and wishes to make his contribution to the safety and welfare of this country, ...by permitting himself to be placed in a concentration camp, he would be making his sacrifice, and he should be willing to do it if he is patriotic and working for us.”²²

By February, officials on the West Coast were publicly calling for the removal of the Japanese. Senator Tom Stewart of Tennessee even introduced a resolution to revoke citizenship of all American-born Japanese.”²³ Supported by the American Legion, farmer’s associations, labor unions, and other organizations, government officials put pressure on the military to make a decision.

The Military Decides

Within the military, the debate over relocation centered on the question of loyalty. The threat of subversion was real to Major Karl Bendesten and General John Dewitt of the Western Defense Command (WDC), who pushed for the immediate relocation of the Japanese. Dewitt famously told newspapers that “A Jap is a Jap” and would later tell Congress that “There is no way to determine their loyalty... It makes no difference whether he is an American citizen, he is still a Japanese. American citizenship does not necessarily determine loyalty.”²⁴ These men and their supporters were opposed by the State Department, the FBI, and other members of the military. Attorney General Francis Biddle argued that there was no legal precedent for the removal of the Japanese. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover also did not see the remaining Japanese-Americans as an immediate threat. Hoover knew that the FBI had already rounded up 2,000 suspicious Japanese in the hours and days after Pearl Harbor. Brigadier General Mark Clark of the Army’s General Staff also believed that the Japanese-Americans were not a threat. On February 2, Clark reported to a West Coast congressional delegation that the “Japanese were not ready to invade the country.” He also reported that Army surveillance had found “no evidence of suspicious Japanese activity or disloyalty.”²⁵

Yet, the opinions of Biddle, Hoover, and other members of the military were overrun by the hysterical fears of the many. On February 8 and 9, General Dewitt ordered the establishment

of restrictive zones of the West Coast where “Japanese aliens” could not live. On February 11, President Roosevelt gave Secretary of War Henry Stimson the authority to do “whatever act he deemed necessary.” Stimson deferred to Dewitt, the man in charge of the West Coast whom Stimson believed would have a better understanding of the situation on the ground. Dewitt recommended that all persons of Japanese ancestry be removed from the West Coast, as there was no evidence a person born in the U.S. “will not turn against this nation when the final test of loyalty comes.”²⁶ On February 19, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which allowed for military commanders to designate “military areas” from which “any or all persons may be excluded.”²⁷ By May of 1942, every Japanese-American had moved or was forcibly relocated from the West Coast of the United States. For this group of people, 60% of which were American citizens, one-third of the country had become off-limits. Without being able to prove their loyalty, the government and the military decided that it was better to remove them for the security of the country.

This massive undertaking required the formation of new government and military bureaucracies. President Roosevelt created the War Relocation Authority (WRA) on March 18, 1942. The WRA was a civilian agency responsible for guarding the Japanese in the relocation centers. It was initially led by Milton Eisenhower, a director in the Department of Agriculture. The military took initial responsibility for the physical relocation process. General Dewitt named Major Bendesten the head of the newly formed Wartime Civilian Control Agency (WCCA), which would carry out the removal of the Japanese and would hold them in temporary “assembly centers,” while the WRA’s relocation camps were being built. So, the Japanese were first under military supervision for four months, before they were transferred to the WRA in September of 1942. The WCCA existed as an extension of the Western Defense Command, headed by General

Dewitt. The WRA, on the other hand, was an independent agency with no direct affiliation. However, the WRA did answer directly to Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy, who was Dewitt and Bendesten's superior. This was a very convoluted system. These brand new agencies were faced with many challenges, including the proposed relocation of students.

Student Relocation Begins

Student relocation began under this newly-invented bureaucratic system. University officials on the West Coast sent letters to the government, stating that their students could be "ambassadors of good will" to the rest of the country. A relocation council was started in San Francisco, with the intent of helping students find new schools before the military relocation began. These leaders called on the government to support the process by paying for students' travel expenses and helping assure college officials that they could accept Japanese-American students.²⁸

Pressured from West Coast university officials and initial members of the student relocation council, WRA Director Eisenhower decided to act. He called upon Clarence Pickett and other members of the American Friends Service Committee to establish a private, national group that could spearhead student relocation. Eisenhower told Pickett that "a government organization could not be seen helping Japanese students relocate into the general population."²⁹ A private council, however, could do so without raising concern from the public or other government officials. This group would have to be privately staffed, ran, and funded. Eisenhower's comments show how the government wanted to be publicly removed from the student relocation process.

Yet, the same concerns that plagued Eisenhower would plague the officials within the student relocation council. How could they persuade private donors to fund the relocation of

these “enemy” students? How could they convince colleges and local communities to accept the loyalty of a relocated student? The anti-Japanese anxiety displayed after Pearl Harbor did not simply subside after the relocation process began. Rumors spread after Pearl Harbor that some of the pilots shot down were wearing University of California class rings. Relocated students, with their knowledge of English, were seen as a threat possibly greater than their aging Japanese parents. How could a privately-run organization ensure the loyalty of a relocated student?

The student relocation council and the WRA did what other government officials had previously done in the weeks after Pearl Harbor; they deferred to the military and the FBI to make the final decisions. The relocation council left it to these groups to certify the loyalty of the students. However, that meant that members of the military who believed there was no way to determine Japanese-American loyalty were now asked to do just that.

Picking Students

When the government first became involved in the relocation process, the loyalty of students was not even considered important. On April 11, 1942, the WCCA and WRA met to discuss how they would handle the transfer of responsibility for the relocated Japanese between the two groups.³⁰ One of the topics discussed was responsibility for the relocation of students. Lieutenant Boekel from the WCCA made a very telling comment during this meeting when he stated that “Students who had already been allowed to resettle had to provide biographical data, demonstrate that the college requested them, show financial stability, and show that the local community was accepting.”³¹ This statement and the outcome of this meeting demonstrate the government’s true interest in the program. What was deemed important was that the college and local community would be accepting of the transferred students. The concern for safety and

loyalty had not yet been considered. These concerns did not come from the government, but from the student relocation council.

On May 29, 1942, The National Japanese Student Relocation Council met for the first time in Chicago. Up until this point, support for Nisei students had come from a small, west-coast based relocation council and individual college administrators. Meeting with these groups was Clarence Pickett and the members of the American Friends Service Committee, who had been asked by Milton Eisenhower to formally begin a national volunteer organization running the relocation process. Interestingly, no branches of the government or military were invited to this meeting. Some members of the government would later take this as a slight, demonstrating the council's contempt for government authority.³² However, it seems that the council did not realize at the time how fundamentally important their relationship with the government would become. At this initial meeting, the many sides of this organization sat down to centralize their policies for the relocation process.

From this meeting, a *Digest of Points* was established to formalize the relocation process. The first point on their list of goals was telling: Loyalty of the students needed to be proven for their program to be successful.³³ The council's first priority was to assure the administrators, politicians, and the American public that the council put the country's safety first. The council also wanted to ensure that the relocation process would not be canceled by the government. If members of the government had been invited to their meeting, the council members would have realized that the government had already been overseeing student relocation and was not interested in stopping the process. In order to safeguard against government or public backlash, the council decided to take a cautious approach to the question of Nisei loyalty.

To ensure the support of each branch of the military and the government, each group would be consulted on the “question of loyalty.” Specifically, student applications were sent from the student to the council project director within their relocation camp. After reviewing the application, the director sent the application to the WRA camp director, who forwarded it to the regional WRA director, then to the FBI, the Office of Naval Intelligence, and the War Department. This was not a system required by the military, but suggested by the council. Obviously, this process was extremely time-consuming. Yet, it was not even successful in verifying loyalty.

No group was interested in helping confirm the loyalty of Nisei students. The WRA and WCCA, which had been feuding over control of the relocation process, were not willing to be solely responsible for this task. The WRA’s reasoning for not passing judgment on students was understandable: As a new organization (it had only been founded three months before), the WRA lacked the resources to investigate the Nisei students. On June 19, the WRA asked the WCCA to be responsible for proving loyalty. The WCCA, which had fought with the WRA for control of the Japanese-American population, passed on this position as well. The two civilian and military agencies that directly oversaw the “Japanese problem” were not interested in being responsible for judging the loyalty of the Nisei. Therefore, the job fell to the military and government organizations in Washington. Instead of being judged by local military organizations, the students would have to wait on the authority of the federal government. However, these groups were not willing to judge the students’ loyalty either.

In July of 1942, a nationwide process was established to check on the loyalty of the Nisei. The student’s questionnaires, transcripts, letters of recommendation, and WRA comments were sent to the FBI, the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), and the War Department (G-2). The ONI

and G-2 had no available resources to check on these students and were understandably busy with more pressing military concerns. So, they simply approved any recommendations provided by the FBI. The FBI had been the driving force in removing security threats in the days following Pearl Harbor, so the military deferred to the FBI's investigations. However, there was an unforeseen problem in this system. The FBI did not investigate any of the Nisei students whose applications were passed on to them either. J. Edgar Hoover wrote to Dillon Myer in December of 1942, confirming this position: The FBI "at no time expressed an opinion relative to the loyalty and patriotism of persons."³⁴ According to Hoover, the FBI had already investigated and arrested any security threats in the days following Pearl Harbor. Hoover simply forwarded any information about the students the bureau already had because of these earlier investigations. In all, the FBI only denied a dozen students out of 3,400.³⁵

While it is impossible to judge the intentions of the military agencies involved in this process, the intentions of the FBI are perhaps more clear. Hoover had come out in the months leading up to relocation as an opponent of the decision. He believed that his bureau had already removed any Japanese threat from the West Coast, and he argued vehemently with the pro-relocation members of the Roosevelt administration. It makes sense that a man so strongly against relocation would be less than willing to deny the opportunity for students to leave. The FBI's respected position within the government made it a possible authority on loyalty. Yet, the FBI refused to participate in this process.

Whatever Hoover's intentions, the FBI did no new investigations of Nisei students. So, the only government agency trusted with confirming or denying loyalty skipped on the responsibility as well. The reasons for such disinterest are varied and cannot be proven: Perhaps the individuals running these agencies were truly racist and did not want to help the Nisei

students. They could have been so busy with concerns of the war effort that they felt this project to be undeserving of their time. Maybe they did not feel capable of judging a citizen's loyalty.³⁶ Whichever was the case, the fact remains that no government or military agency took responsibility. Yet, the applications continued to be passed around between organizations for over a year.

The slow approval of students had an obvious impact on the speed of the relocation process. Between December of 1941 and April 1942, 630 students were able to relocate independently before the government became involved. Once the government became involved, the process ground to a halt. By October of 1942, only 75 more students had been relocated to start the new semester. For the next year, only 295 more students would relocate.³⁷ By the end of 1943, twice as many students relocated on their own compared to those with government assistance. The end of 1943 would be a turning point for the relocation program. A new military agency was assigned the responsibility for the entire program, which streamlined the process and finally assigned responsibility for the question of loyalty.

A Central Authority

The convoluted process of student relocation did not improve until the end of 1943. The process remained slow because of the background checks and interviews still taking place. Finally recognizing the unnecessary work done by many different groups, government officials decided to streamline the process at the end of 1943 by assigning one group, the Office of the Provost Marshall General, control over clearing students. After 1942, the war in the Pacific had turned in favor of the Americans, and the threat of attack on the West Coast lessened considerably. As a result, outside pressure on the program also lessened. With less pressure and one military group in charge, the relocation process began to speed up.

The Office of the Provost Marshall General (OPMG) became involved in student relocation in the summer of 1942. The OPMG, which was a military office within the War Department, had been in charge of security checks for citizens under government watch. As the war progressed, the military became less interested in the relocation process as whole. By the summer of 1943, Army and Naval intelligence decided that they did not need to be part of the student relocation process.

In October, the OPMG took over as the main processing center for Nisei students. All applications were sent directly from the WRA to the OPMG. Thanks to the expedited process, 1,500 students relocated in 1944.³⁸ The program's late success could be explained in many ways. Public pressure about Japanese students had subsided as more time passed and no sabotage or spying was discovered on the West Coast. The relocation itself also had a calming effect, because most Japanese citizens were under armed guard and only allowed to leave with the approval of the military. During the war, the military expanded its presence throughout the country, and citizens trusted the decisions of military leaders. The WRA and student relocation council, which were "thrown into the fire" during the summer of 1942, also streamlined their own processes. The early successes of relocated students also legitimized relocation, demonstrating that the students were "model ambassadors" for the Japanese population.

However, none of these reasons are sufficient to explain the abrupt change in the program's progress. The shift of control from multiple military groups and the FBI to the OPMG in 1943 coincides directly with the improved process. Moving to one centralized authority put the responsibility for student loyalty on one group, which was designed specifically for this type of work. The OPMG, which started as a military group in charge of security clearances, was

made for this type of assignment. Giving one group responsibility for determining loyalty, more than any other reason, led to the late successes of student relocation.

By August of 1944, the OPMG lifted all restrictions on Japanese students.³⁹ No background check, loyalty questionnaire, or interview was required. The WRA and relocation council continued to work with students, many of whom graduated high school in the camps and wanted to leave for college. While schools on the West Coast were still off limits, students had many more options and applied to schools like “regular Americans.” By the end of the war, 4,300 Japanese-American students relocated to new universities. This process had far reaching consequences. Many universities that had never had a Japanese student opened their doors to them during the war. The Nisei student population, which before the war was confined mostly to the West Coast, spread out across the country. These “student ambassadors” did help pave the way for a national migration of Japanese-Americans after the war. Many families who were afraid to return to the West Coast followed their college-aged children to new cities and opportunities. Families and students, who were held captive and questioned because of their unproven loyalty, were free to live once again.

The Legacy of Loyalty

There is no doubt that deep-seated racism and wartime hysteria played a significant role in the relocation of Japanese-Americans during World War II. The attack on Pearl Harbor and the war in the Pacific not only fueled existing suspicions about where Japanese-American loyalty truly lied, but added credence to arguments made by members of the media, the legislature, and the military in support of total relocation. For college students of Japanese descent, the process of relocation was all the more complicated. The WRA and student relocation council were justifiably concerned about the public’s reaction to the program, as well as how certain members

of the military might influence their efforts. In order to assuage these concerns, they requested the assistance of the FBI and the military to certify the loyalty of the Japanese-American transfer students. It became quickly apparent, however, that instead of creating an efficient and streamlined system by which to transfer these students, the policies and procedures that were implemented had actually been impeding the program from the outset. Whether this was due to indifference, racism, bureaucracy, or some other reason, at the crux of their failure was their inability to truly answer the “question of loyalty.”

The difficulty posed by assessing the loyalty of transfer students is a small example of the larger “loyalty problem” faced in the nationwide internment of the Japanese-American population. Those who had a history of disloyalty were quickly picked out. Some took the decision out of the government’s hands by returning to Japan when the war broke out. Others simply answered, “No,” when asked if they would swear allegiance to the United States. However, these “easy” cases were few and far between. The majority of the Japanese-American population claimed to be loyal United States’ citizens. Proving disloyalty was simple, but proving loyalist sentiment was entirely different. The government was facing the same questions in regards to the larger population that they were with the students: Who was truly loyal? Was it safe to allow them to leave the camps? And, who had the authority, let alone the ability, to prove the loyalty of any one individual? A broader discussion of the loyalty question would reveal that the same bureaucratic chaos and conflicting policies that afflicted these transfer students also plagued relocation efforts for the Japanese-American population as a whole.

The American government has grappled with this “question of loyalty” throughout its history. It has been central to the treatment of “enemy” minorities in wartime since the American Revolution. Obviously, how government and military leaders handled this question depended on

the historical context in which it was asked. Yet, an extended historical inquiry into the “question of loyalty” would demonstrate the same struggles faced by the military leaders in charge of transferring Nisei students during World War II. As we continue to try to answer the “question of loyalty” today, it would help to look back on our inability to answer it in the past and the consequences of these failures.

¹ Gary Y. Okihiro, *Storied Lives: Japanese American Students and World War II* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 49-50.

² Robert W. O'Brien, *The College Nisei* (New York: Arno Press, 1978), 116. O'Brien worked closely on student relocation himself from the War Relocation Authority, and his book was originally published in 1949. Its quick publication allows important insight into the mindset of government officials and their intentions and is a good general overview of the process.

³ Dillon S. Myer, *Uprooted Americans: The Japanese Americans and the War Relocation Authority during World War II* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1971), 131.

⁴ John J. McCloy to Clarence Pickett, May 21, 1942, 000.8-Schools, Central Correspondence, WCCA and Civil Affairs Division, WDC and 4th Army, Record Group 210; National Archives College Park. Franklin Roosevelt to Governor Culbert Olson, May 18, 1942, Subject-Classified General Files, Headquarters, Records of the WRA, Record Group 210; National Archives.

⁵ Allan W. Austin, *From Concentration Camp to Campus: Japanese American Students and World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004). Austin's work definitively demonstrates the enrollment shortages of American universities, specifically in his third chapter "In Free America, Fall 1942-Summer 1943." The majority of universities mentioned are willing to take Japanese-American students, with a few notable exceptions.

⁶ Richard Drinnon takes a decidedly negative view of Myer and the WRA in *Keeper of Concentration Camps: Dillon S. Myer and American Racism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). Drinnon argues that Myer's attempts to help students were based in a racialized view of the need for dispersion. By sending students out into the country, Drinnon argues, Myer believed he could "Americanize" them. Drinnon believes that this was Myer's intention for the entire relocation process. Other earlier authors, such as Roger Daniels and Michi Weglyn, share similar opinions to Drinnon, though they focus more on the effects of internment on the Japanese-American population. Dillon Myer's intentions and actions are defended by Jenness Evaline Hall in her PhD dissertation entitled *Japanese American College Students during the Second World War: The Politics of Relocation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). Hall is Myer's granddaughter, which is worth noting.

⁷ Hall places the blame for the failure of student relocation on the student relocation council, uncooperative college administrators, and the government organizations involved in the relocation process. Hall, *Japanese American College Students*, 159, 195. Allan Austin's *From Concentration Camp to Campus* takes a more sympathetic approach to the council, demonstrating its abilities to work with limited resources and government support.

⁸ In the continuing game of pass the blame, Austin agrees with Hall that the military and the government are to blame for the slow process of relocation. Although he wants to avoid painting the result of relocation as the story of "good defeating evil," he is much more critical of the government than the actions of the relocation council. However, he fails to address the reasoning behind each agency's actions.

⁹ Milton Eisenhower to Clarence Pickett, May 5, 1942, National Japanese-American Student Relocation Council, box 110, Barstow file; American Friends Service Committee Archives.

¹⁰ Greg Robinson, *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 54.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹² Federal Bureau of Investigation, Memorandum, November 15, 1940, 64.507, #1, Subject-Classified General Records, Headquarters, Records of the WRA, RG 210; National Archives.

¹³ All of the works mentioned in the historiography paragraph attribute the outside pressure to West Coast government officials, businessmen, and farmers. Added to that list can be many journalists, the American Legion, some military leaders (Karl Bendesten of the WCCA included), members of the Roosevelt administration, and others. Greg Robinson's chapter in *By Order of the President* entitled "War Abroad, Suspicion At Home" is a perfect overview of these pressures.

¹⁴ "Nisei: California Casts an Anxious Eye upon the Japanese Americans in its Midst," *Life*, October 14, 1940, 75-80. See also "Japanese in the U.S.," *Newsweek*, October 14, 1940, 42.

¹⁵ Editorial, *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 1941.

¹⁶ Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps U.S.A.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc), 68.

¹⁷ W. H. Anderson, Editorial, *Los Angeles Times*, February 2, 1942. For the *Reader's Digest* Article, see Stanley High, "Japanese Saboteurs in Our Midst," *Reader's Digest*, January 1942, 11. For radio talks of John Hughes see Robinson, *By Order of the President*, 89.

¹⁸ Daniels, *Concentration Camps U.S.A.*, 68.

¹⁹ Knox Press Conference Transcript, December 15, 1941, 64.503, #2, Subject-Classified General Files, Headquarters, Records of the WRA, RG 210; National Archives.

²⁰ The Roberts Commission actually concluded that the Japanese were not a threat, but the public and media focused on the parts of the report that detailed possible Japanese subversive activities in Hawaii. "Report on Roberts Commission, January 23, 1942," *New York Times*, January 25, 1942, 1.

²¹ Robinson, *By Order of the President*, 93.

²² Ford to Stimson, January 16, 1942, Correspondence, Secretary of War, RG 107; National Archives.

²³ "Discussion on Stewart Resolution," *San Francisco Times*, March 13, 1942.

²⁴ Testimony of John L. DeWitt, April 13, 1943, House Naval Affairs Subcommittee to Investigate Congested Areas, Part 3, pp. 739-40 (78th Cong., 1st Sess.), WDC and Fourth Army, RG 338; National Archives College Park.

²⁵ Peter Irons, *Justice at War: The Story of the Japanese American Internment Cases* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 64.

²⁶ Memo, Roosevelt to Stimson, February 12, 1942. Stimson had asked Dewitt's opinion prior to receiving the go-ahead from Roosevelt. Memo, Dewitt to Stimson, January 29, 1942, Central Correspondence, WCCA and Civil Affairs Division, Western Defense Command, and Fourth Army, RG 338; National Archives College Park.

²⁷ “Executive Order 9066,” 64.507, #1, Subject-Classified General Records, Headquarters, Records of the WRA, RG 210; National Archives.

²⁸ Letter, Pickett to Eisenhower, May 15, 1942, National Japanese-American Student Relocation Council, box 110, Pickett file; American Friends Service Committee Archives.

²⁹ Eisenhower to Pickett, May 5, 1942, National Japanese-American Student Relocation Council, box 110, Pickett file; American Friends Service Committee Archives.

³⁰ Boeke to Ade, April 30 1942, 000.8-Schools, Civilian, Volume 1, Central Correspondence, WCCA and Civil Affairs Division, Western Defense Command, and Fourth Army, RG 338; National Archives College Park.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Bendensten to Tate, August 3 1942, 000.8-Schools, (Civilian), #1, Central Correspondence, WCCA and Civil Affairs Division, WDC and Fourth Army, RG 338; National Archives College Park.

³³ Digest of Points Presented at Chicago Conference, Hall, “Japanese American College Students,” 108.

³⁴ Hoover to Myer, December 16 1942, 64.507, #1, Subject-Classified General Records, Headquarters, Records of the WRA, RG 210; National Archives.

³⁵ From the available lists of students sent for approval in 1942 and the beginning of 1943, only 12 had been expressly denied by the FBI. Most had been seen spending time with previously arrested Issei (first-generation Japanese) who were sent back to Japan. After 1943, the lists were no longer circulated, so it is impossible to know if any other students were denied.

³⁶ Even into 1944, John J. McCloy stated that the War Department could not safely assume “that all persons of Japanese descent... are loyal to the United States.” McCloy to American Civil Liberties Union, January 4, 1944, Educational Institutions, OPMG, RG 389; National Archives College Park.

³⁷ O’Brien, *The College Nisei*, charts on 135-138.

³⁸ O’Brien, *The College Nisei*, charts on 135-138.

³⁹ Memo, OPMG to Military Intelligence, August 21, 1944, 000.8-Schools, (Civilian), #1, Central Correspondence, WCCA and Civil Affairs Division, WDC and Fourth Army, RG 338; National Archives College Park.