Oregon in Depression and War, 1925-1945: Japanese Removal

Themes: Social Relations, Politics and Government



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Although Studs Terkel and others have described United States involvement in the European and Asian struggles as the “good war,” the conflict also produced one of the most notable violations of civil rights in American history. The removal of more than 100,000 Japanese Americans from the Pacific Coast and their resettlement in the interior West, according to historian Roger Daniels, brought about “one of the grossest violations of the constitutional rights of American citizens in our history.” The United States and the Canadian province of British Columbia evacuated all persons of Japanese descent from the Pacific Coast within three months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The relocation remains to this day the central historical reference point for modern Japanese-American history.

Although military references appear in all the justifications for relocation, the directive was political, coming from the highest office in the land. When President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, he set in motion policies that permitted the forced evacuation of Japanese American citizens and resident aliens to inland internment camps. General John L. Dewitt of the Wartime Civil Control Administration directed the relocation process beginning in early March. He ordered Japanese in restricted zones along the Pacific Coast to report to temporary assembly points to await transfer to interior relocation camps. Nearly two-thirds of the Japanese were American-born citizens who were sent to internment camps, even though several highly placed military figures assured civilian authorities that Japanese Americans posed no threat to the internal security of the United States.