

Fear Itself

How pop culture and Pearl Harbor drove the Japanese-American internment

By Otis L. Graham

FIFTY-SEVEN YEARS AGO this month, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, creating exclusion zones around strategic installations on the West Coast and authorizing the relocation of residents of Japanese ancestry to ten sites in the interior. Some 112,000 “Japanese”—two-thirds of them American citizens—were sent to internment camps, where they spent much, in some cases all, of the war.

For almost 30 years, I taught a course in modern U.S. History at UC Santa Barbara, a campus washed on its western edge by the Pacific surf, just a few miles south of a junction on the coastal highway that had been shelled by a Japanese submarine a few weeks after Pearl Harbor. I could have left “the Japanese Removal” out of my courses, as my teachers on the East Coast had done. But I believed that the nation’s bad moments must be addressed along with the good, and this was one of the bad ones. The internment, in my view, was driven far more by hysteria and ethnic suspicion than military necessity. It is a blemish on the history of civil liberties in America and demands critical scrutiny.

When I began teaching at UCSB in 1966, the students’ reaction to my annual lecture was quite passive. They were overwhelmingly Caucasian and seemed little interested. But as the years passed, the proportion of students of Asian origin in my classes increased, and those of Japanese heritage strongly challenged my interpretations.

I regretted the relocation as unjustified, while noting that the presence of sig-

nificant numbers of West Coast residents of Japanese ancestry raised serious concerns about espionage and sabotage, though the American government had little reliable evidence of a “fifth column.” I pointed out that the governments of Canada and Mexico also relocated and imprisoned residents of Japanese ancestry, on a smaller scale, suggesting that responsible officials and some neighboring citizens at the time had a different view from we angry critics decades later.

The Japanese-American students, who sat in a group, frowned through this lecture and at the end invariably objected to what they considered my tepid critique of American racism in general and anti-Japanese bigotry in particular. They rejected my suggestion that mitigating circumstances—the Pearl Harbor attack and continuing West Coast vulnerability, the relocation decisions of the Canadian and Mexican governments—deserved some place in the accounting. I sensed that “the Japanese Relocation lecture” each February was occasioning no real dialogue or reassessment. I began to consider it my least effective lecture, yet could not bring myself to abandon the topic.

One Friday evening, after my annual lecture and an especially sour student grumble, my wife and I had dinner with Susie and Phillip French. Susie was a friend of long standing, her new husband Phillip a tall, muscular veteran of the Alpine campaigns of the Fifth Mountain Division in World War II and currently a ranch salesman. Over cocktails, I described the agitated student reaction.

“Can I give that lecture on the Japanese Removal next year?” Phillip asked.

I found some acceptable way to inquire about his qualifications. “I was born and raised on a ranch near Paso Robles,” he responded. “Several Japanese families lived near or on the property, and Japanese children were among my childhood friends and schoolmates. I was in the National Guard in March 1942 when my unit received orders to round up Japanese families for transportation to a nearby armory and then to a place called Manzanar. I want to tell your students why I obeyed these orders without complaint or reservation.”

His purpose, he said, would be to acquaint my class not only with the coastal fears of further Japanese attacks or espionage, but also with the stereotype of the Japanese conveyed to my generation of Americans through the popular culture of the 1920s and ’30s. He would not ask for forgiveness but for broader understanding of the circumstances of that emotional time. Phillip assured me that he would use the year ahead for research and would give me a preview of his presentation, after which I could back out of the deal if I wished.

I sensed that having Phillip as guest lecturer would give my students a welcome break from the views of Professor Graham, who was 7 years old and living in Arkansas when the relocation took place. Phillip spent ten months in preparation, gave me a preview, and one Friday afternoon in March—was it 1980?—I introduced him to my class of some 250 students. The Japanese-Amer-

icans sat in a knot of about 20 in the rear of the hall. This is a condensed version of what he said:

"I was raised in Paso Robles, California, on a ranch, and Japanese-American families were our working partners, their children my schoolmates and pals. On Dec. 7, 1941, a Japanese task force, without a declaration of war, attacked the American base at Pearl Harbor and other targets in the Pacific, killing more than 2,200 Americans. In December and January, the location and intentions of the Japanese fleet were unknown, and Americans on the Pacific coast were in a high state of anxiety. For security reasons, the Rose Bowl on New Year's Day 1942 was played on the East Coast.

"That winter, Japanese submarines released incendiary balloons off the Oregon and Washington coasts, and one sub shelled a portion of Highway 1 north of Santa Barbara. Rumors of plans for further military attacks and sabotage

Honolulu, knife in hand and—one must assume—treachery in mind. Some of his material was drawn from articles in magazines like *Life* and the *Saturday Evening Post* or books such as Julian Street's *Mysterious Japan*. The portrait of the Japanese that he drew out of American popular culture in his formative years was an unrelieved story of a furtive, inscrutable people, their feelings hidden behind a mask.

Then the pictures turned violent. The centerpiece of his presentation was the depiction in American media of the "Rape of Nanking." The capital of the Chinese Republic fell to Imperial Japanese forces on Dec. 13, 1937, and sources estimated that up to 300,000 Chinese civilians were tortured and massacred long after the military outcome was settled. American media obtained film and still photos of the most shocking brutalities—rapes of women and children, beheadings, mass burials alive. Phillip

on Pearl Harbor. When I was asked, in February and March 1942, to load Japanese-American families on trucks to be 'relocated' for security reasons, I did so, along with my fellow soldiers. Perhaps the young Japanese pilots who turned the battleship *Arizona* into a tomb for 1,177 young Americans could, if invited, present similar slide-shows illuminating how as young people they acquired their willingness to inflict harm on people they did not know. When we prepare to condemn the actions of others, we should first walk a while in their shoes."

Phillip stepped back. The 50 minutes was over, though the students raised no hands signaling questions. After an awkward silence in which I floundered in search of appropriate closure, a student rose from the Japanese-American clump. "Mr. French, there is much to discuss, and we would like to invite you to have dinner with a group of us in Isla Vista" (the student enclave on the northwest edge of campus). Phillip agreed with enthusiasm, and within moments, Susie and I watched our expected dinner partner walk away from campus toward the sunset, surrounded by a dozen or so Japanese-American students, talking animatedly and at once—and for three hours afterward, Phillip later told me.

I tried to sign him up for an annual appearance, but he had done his thing, offering an explanation, if not an apology, to the students and, I realized, to his Paso Robles Japanese-American neighbors. I later learned that his father stored the household goods of those Japanese-Americans relocated from the ranch and returned them when the families were released. ■

Otis L. Graham is professor emeritus, University of California, Santa Barbara and visiting scholar, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. His most recent book is Immigration Reform and America's Unchosen Future.

MY IMAGE OF "THE JAPANESE" WAS SHAPED BY THE MOVIES, THE PRINT MEDIA, THE COMIC BOOKS OF MY ERA, AND BY A SAVAGE ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR.

saturated the media. Could we trust our Japanese-American neighbors now that Japan and America were locked in total war? I was a 19-year-old National Guardsman and read the local newspapers and heard radio news [here Phillip began a slide show], which almost daily conveyed predictions by public officials and military personnel of Japanese-American civilian sabotage plans and even some aborted attempts."

The rest of his lecture was accompanied by minimal commentary. Phillip instead projected single images or footage from Hollywood movies in which shadowy, slant-eyed, obviously sinister and murderous Japanese figures lurked behind curtains of beads or doors in dimly lit rooms in San Francisco or

closed with photos from American magazines of the art of "death by a thousand cuts," with knife-wielding Orientals—identified as Japanese—slowly peeling layers of skin from live victims.

"I do not show you these words and images because they are accurate depictions of anything but American media representations of Japanese in the U.S. and in the Pacific war," Phillip said in conclusion. "They were a powerful force in shaping my own and my fellow soldiers' emotions in the weeks after Pearl Harbor. I liked the Japanese families I worked and played with on our isolated ranch, but my image of Japan itself and of "the Japanese" was shaped by the movies, the print media, the comic books of my era, and by a savage attack

Counter Intelligence

Today's CIA serves contractors and bureaucrats—not the nation.

By Philip Giraldi

SUPPOSE YOU WERE GIVEN the dark mission of spending \$50 billion a year to create a global intelligence organization that would be minimally effective. You would want to keep 90 percent of the employees in their home country and incentivize senior staff to stay “close to the flagpole” to enhance their promotion prospects. Training costs should be high—\$500,000 per recruit—and bureaucracy so stifling that a third of incoming officers will swiftly wash out. To keep morale low, surround those who remain with contractors—about half of the workforce—and pay the hired guns twice as much as the staff. Add a high level of corruption, routine cover-ups of malfeasance and incompetence, and you would have today's CIA. It is, as one critic noted, “a sorry blend of Monty Python and Big Brother.”

The Sept. 11 attacks caught the Agency off guard. After the devastating budget cuts of the Clinton years, the CIA was desperately trying to rebuild its capabilities, yet it was still gripped by a Cold War mindset. The over-the-horizon threat from China figured far more prominently than terrorism or nuclear proliferation. But overnight that orientation shifted, and this sclerotic bureaucracy was tasked with becoming the leading edge in the Bush administration's war on terror. Its budget exploded.

Many of the highly motivated but poorly prepared new hires came in without foreign-language fluency. Few had lived or worked outside the United States. Rather than being sent to overseas posts, most were shunted into CIA

offices popping up like mushrooms across the United States. Even non-official cover operatives, very expensive and specially trained officers under business cover, were frequently given domestic assignments because there was no place to put them. When the National Clandestine Service needed to increase “operators” overseas—usually because some congressman was nosing around—it prescribed sightseeing and “area familiarization” trips, which the dispatched officers referred to as “Axis of Evil Tourism.” The new CIA thus became its own false front—long on numbers, short on depth.

In a stopgap move designed to buy time to train the newcomers, numerous Agency retirees were called back to the colors as contractors, their clearances renewed. But contracting quickly became a way for senior managers to featherbed their own staffs. By 2002, contractors made up one third of the burgeoning workforce. By 2006, they were more than half, and, according to some estimates, up to 70 percent in certain areas, including the Clandestine Service. Some even found positions as chiefs of station, unimaginable when the contractor program was initiated. Experienced officers, spying an opportunity, retired early to set up their own companies and return as contractors. They could collect their pensions and also get back on the payroll at much higher salaries.

Contractors are not cheap and, once introduced into a bureaucracy, they tend to grow like Topsy. The average federal government civil servant costs \$128,000

per year, including benefits and legacy issues like pensions. Intelligence contractors make that much in salary alone—and sometimes significantly more because of the market value of their security clearances. The companies that employ them use a formula that multiplies the base salary by two and a half to four to come up with the figure that they charge the government. A contractor working for the CIA can easily cost taxpayers half a million dollars per year.

Ready availability of contractors to staff the myriad layers of bureaucracy in Langley encouraged the proliferation of what would be non-jobs anywhere else, what former CIA Chief of Station Milt Bearden described as headquarters' “buggy-whip makers.” Moreover, intelligence officers who serve overseas are able to retire early by American standards because the job is high stress and, after a point, the officer burns out. Contracting takes many of these officers considered to be less effective and puts them back into the system.

Eventually the growth of contracting alarmed even Congress, and in June 2007 CIA Director Michael Hayden agreed to cut the contractor numbers by 10 percent. It now appears, however, that commitment will be achieved by a hiring freeze rather than any actual cut in positions.

But concentrating on what the CIA has become since 9/11 ignores the roots of the problem. Anyone who has ever worked for the Agency would probably concede that the CIA's reality has never