

# “No longer a silent victim of history:” repurposing the documents of Japanese American internment

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Published online: 22 April 2010  
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**Abstract** During World War II, the US government detained over 120,000 Japanese American men, women, and children in internment camps. Two-thirds were American citizens, yet they were treated as enemies of the American people. After the war, historians and activists used archival records created during internment to prove that it had been unjustified by military necessity. They succeeded in overturning Supreme Court rulings and achieved redress for former internees. By relying on the documentary record created during internment and preserved in archives, it was later possible to hold the American government accountable for the violation of people’s rights. The very documents that were originally used to control the Japanese American population became the documents that enabled recognition of injustice and led to the conclusion of the redress movement.

**Keywords** Japanese American internment · Collective memory · Social justice

## Introduction

The persistent archival researcher Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga gained a reputation as a “destructive force.” Beginning as a private citizen in 1978, she worked tirelessly to research and document Japanese American internment during World War II, spending 50 or 60 h per week at the National Archives and filling her house with

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An earlier version of this paper was written for a course on “Understanding Records and Archives: Principles and Practices,” taught by Professor David A. Wallace in the Archives and Records Management specialization at the School of Information, University of Michigan.

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boxes of documents. Although not formally trained as an archival researcher, she examined hundreds of thousands of pages of documents and developed a complex cross-referencing and indexing scheme to follow the paper trail of evidence through multiple collections of records at the National Archives. Her research revealed a pattern of abuses of power by multiple branches and agencies of the US government after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, which had resulted in the unjust internment of 120,000 innocent Japanese Americans. This documentary evidence formed the basis of a groundbreaking report in 1983 by the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, which concluded that Japanese American internment had been caused by “race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership” (Fujita-Rony 2003). Herzig-Yoshinaga’s research, combined with discoveries by Peter Irons, a legal historian, also allowed Irons to reopen the Supreme Court cases of Gordon Hirabayashi, Minoru Yasui, and Fred Korematsu, which had upheld the legality of internment during World War II. Irons and a team of lawyers successfully overturned their convictions, leading to new understandings of internment that spurred the redress movement for all Japanese American internees (Irons 1983; Murray 2000). This episode in Japanese American history illustrates the power of archival records to document injustice and promote social change. The very documents that were originally used to control the Japanese American population became the documents that enabled recognition of injustice and led to the conclusion of the redress movement.

My own archival research into Japanese American internment documents began as a search for a glimpse into my family history. During World War II, my grandmother, a second-generation Japanese American, was interned with her family in Poston, Arizona. My grandfather’s family was also interned in that camp, although he was a lieutenant in the all-Japanese-American 442nd regiment in the US Army. Like many other Japanese Americans, they remained quiet about their experiences after the war, and my grandmother passed on before I was old enough to ask her about it. They lost most of their personal belongings during the relocation, and cameras were confiscated in the camps, so there were no family pictures from that time period. One day when I was browsing the Online Archive of California for a research project, I came across the War Relocation Authority (WRA) collection at the Bancroft Library, and on a whim, typed in my grandmother’s name. To my surprise, the search returned a photograph from the Poston internment camp. Looking at the digitized photograph, I immediately recognized my grandmother in a group of legal staff members (Fig. 1). Her slightly mischievous smile was exactly the same, and she looked so much like my aunt that the family resemblance was unmistakable. Finding this photograph online in an archival collection was a revelation to me. After this discovery, I went to the National Archives website and searched for her in the database of War Relocation Authority case files. From her case file summary, I found out that she had been a first-year college student when she was interned, had been to Japan once before the age of 10, and her potential occupation was “Semiskilled dressmakers and seamstresses.” These small pieces of information filled in gaps in my knowledge of her life and helped me to reconstruct a family history I had never known. Like many others before me, I found a personal meaning in the archives when I uncovered records that revealed my family’s past.



**Fig. 1** Photograph of the author's grandmother, Hideko Kimoto (on far left). "Poston, Arizona. Front row: Hideko Kimoto, Marianne Nosui, Aki Sakuma, Tadao Yoshwaru, George Fujii. Back row: Hidio Zumo. The legal staff at Camp 1." Photographer: Francis Steward, 1943. Record Group 210: Records of the War Relocation Authority, National Archives. From Flickr.com, Public Domain: National Archives

People use archives for many reasons, ranging from the personal to the political. Archiving the records of Japanese American internment has allowed for many reinterpretations of this episode in American history, leading to political redress and healing of collective memories.

The case of Japanese American internment during World War II provides an example of two seemingly contradictory purposes of documents: social control and social justice. First, in enacting internment, the US government created and used documents to establish control over the Japanese American evacuees. During the course of enacting internment, records were created, maintained, and kept as evidence of organizational activities; this was the primary value of the records for their creators. Second, the documents were repurposed after internment to reinterpret the meaning of that era and to seek redress for interned Japanese Americans. This secondary informational value of the records was made possible because the documents had been preserved at repositories such as the National Archives. The case of Japanese American internment documents illustrates one value of archives to society: to preserve documents that can aid in the reinterpretation of historical events and the recognition of past errors. The use of

records for social justice is a key illustration of the power of recordkeeping. By relying on the documentary record created during Japanese American internment and preserved in archives, it was later possible to hold the American government accountable for the violation of people's rights.

The use of archives for social justice is a subject that has received increasing recognition in the archival community in recent years. Archivists such as Verne Harris, David A. Wallace, Randall Jimerson and others have contributed to a growing body of literature on this topic. In *Archives Power*, Jimerson calls on archivists to recognize their ethical responsibilities and “respond to the call of justice.” He emphasizes that access to archives is essential for those who seek to redress past injustices (Jimerson 2009). The case of Japanese American internment is one of many such uses of archives to document and redress historical injustices, such as US government records on American Indian tribes or the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings in South Africa. In all of these cases, the documents originally created to enact control became repurposed to redress an imbalance of power and achieve social justice. What is perhaps unique about the Japanese American situation is its well-defined parameters: a time period of less than a decade, involving a relatively small population and an abundance of documentary evidence. By the time the last redress payments to internees were made in 1999, Japanese Americans had achieved a significant measure of closure and largely succeeded in redefining the collective memory of that event.

### Historical summary

The history of Japanese American internment began with the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. In the following weeks, the FBI arrested more than 12,000 “enemy aliens,” including Japanese, German, and Italian immigrants. Those considered dangerous were sent to Department of Justice internment camps. By February 16, the camps held 2,192 Japanese, 1,393 German, and 264 Italian detainees (Murray 2000). Simultaneously, the Treasury Department froze the bank accounts of all enemy aliens in American banks, and all the American branches of Japanese banks (Daniels 1993b). Curfew restrictions were also imposed, and contraband such as radios and cameras seized during FBI searches of Japanese American homes. On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which authorized the creation of military areas from which “any or all persons may be excluded as deemed necessary or desirable.” General DeWitt of the Western Defense Command subsequently issued a series of proclamations which excluded “enemy aliens” and persons of Japanese ancestry from Military Areas 1 and 2, which covered the coastal regions of Washington, Oregon, all of California, and part of Arizona (Daniels 1993b). The evacuation orders included families with children and elderly first-generation immigrants, despite a complete lack of evidence that any of these people presented a danger to the American populace. They were given only a week's notice in most cases and were allowed to take only what they could carry to the camps. In April and early May of 1942, Japanese

Americans were removed to sixteen assembly centers run by the army, where they were housed in horse stalls at local fairgrounds. By the end of May, they were transported to ten relocation centers administered by the War Relocation Authority. All told, over 120,000 Japanese Americans were interned, two-thirds of them American citizens. The exclusion order was not lifted until December 1944, when they were allowed to return to the West Coast. From 1944 to 1946, the camps closed as people resettled and reestablished their lives (Murray 2000).

When internment was enacted in 1942, several Japanese Americans challenged its constitutionality in court. The cases of four challengers eventually reached the Supreme Court: Gordon Hirabayashi, Minoru Yasui, Fred Korematsu, and Mitsuye Endo. Hirabayashi, Yasui, and Korematsu were convicted of resisting curfew and exclusion orders, sustaining the constitutionality of internment for Japanese Americans. Endo was released, but the court ruling did not overturn internment in general, only its application in her particular case (Daniels 1993a, b).

In the postwar era, a number of trends contributed to the achievement of redress for Japanese Americans interned during the war. Historians' reexamination in the 1970s and 1980s prompted a growing acknowledgment of the injustices that had been committed (Murray 2000). In Japanese American communities, a grassroots redress movement started to develop in the 1970s, influenced by the work of revisionist historians. As a result of their lobbying efforts, in 1976 President Gerald Ford issued Presidential Proclamation 4417, "Confirming the Termination of the Executive Order Authorizing Japanese American Internment During World War II" (Murray 2000; Parks 2004). By 1979, bills were started in the Senate and House of Representatives that resulted in Congress's proposal of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC), which President Jimmy Carter signed into law in 1980. The Commission was charged with reviewing the circumstances surrounding Executive Order 9066 and its impact on the relocation and detention of American citizens and resident aliens. To accomplish this, the Commission extensively reviewed archival and public sources. In a series of public hearings across the country, the Commission heard testimony from over 750 witnesses, including many interned Japanese Americans, as well as noted scholars. In 1983, the Commission issued its reports, *Personal Justice Denied* and *Recommendations* (United States Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians 1983a, b). These reports and continued work by Japanese American activists, combined with the overturning of convictions in the Supreme Court cases between 1983 and 1988, led to the passage of the Civil Liberties Act in 1988. This act, signed by President Ronald Reagan, apologized for internment and paid \$20,000 to surviving Japanese Americans interned during World War II (Maki et al. 1999).

## Review of literature

The phases of literature on internment correspond to phases of archival access. In the immediate postwar period, most works were published by WRA officials and academics who had conducted research in the camps. These works, based primarily

on government documents, presented a more positive view of internment and treated it as a misguided but well-intentioned policy, praising Japanese Americans for their patience and cooperation (Murray 2000). By contrast, historians in the 1970s were influenced by the civil rights movement, protests against the Vietnam War, and ethnic and racial pride movements. They no longer trusted official explanations of internment, and instead wrote “revisionist” histories that challenged people’s assumptions about internment (Murray 2000).<sup>1</sup> Roger Daniels, a prominent historian of internment, condemned the rationale of “military necessity” and highlighted the racist thinking that led to mass internment. Historians’ work was greatly aided by the Freedom of Information Act in 1966, which allowed them to access more government archival records.

After the Commission report in 1983 and the achievement of political redress in 1988, more documents became available. The research conducted by the Commission brought together many important archival sources, and also encouraged Japanese Americans to share their personal experiences, about which many had kept silent (United States Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians 1983a, b; Murray 2000). As a result, recent historians have had a wealth of material, both documents and oral histories, to draw upon in their studies. Also, as one historian pointed out, prior to the accomplishment of redress, many scholars were hesitant to depict Japanese Americans as anything but loyal to the United States, so topics such as draft resistance and protests were often glossed over (Hayashi 2004). Now that redress is concluded, contemporary researchers have been able to delve into the complex issues of loyalty and resistance in the Japanese American community without fear of jeopardizing the redress cause.

The use of documents for internment and redress has been touched upon by a number of authors. Judith Roberts-Moore made a detailed study of the use of documents from the National Archives of Canada for Canadian Japanese internment and redress, which in many ways paralleled the case of the United States (Roberts-Moore 2002). Kimberley Roberts Parks conducted a survey of US government documents about internment, although her scope was limited to the creation of documents, not their uses for redress (Parks 2004). Several scholars have focused on the use of specific documents to enact internment, such as Takeya Mizuno’s work on Japanese-language newspapers and Raymond Okamura’s study of census records (Mizuno 2005; Mizuno 2007; Okamura 1981). Pieces of the larger story can also be found in a variety of historical studies, such as Eric Muller’s research on Japanese American draft resisters (Muller 2001).

### **Social control through documents**

The creation and use of records are not always benign acts. Records often serve the purposes of social control by identifying populations, manipulating information they

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, historical revisionism refers to the academic practice of reinterpreting the evidence surrounding a historical event, significantly altering the standard interpretation as accepted by the majority of scholars.

receive, and physically controlling their movements. The censorship of records is another method of social control, whereby access to information is limited to those in power. Recognizing this dark side of records is crucial to understanding the controversies in the archival world over access and use of archival materials. In the case of World War II relocation, several types of documents were instrumental in enabling and implementing the internment of Japanese Americans. From the surveillance records of the FBI to the case files of the War Relocation Authority, Japanese Americans on the West Coast were defined and controlled by the documents that determined their fates.

To examine this theme in further detail, a range of documents types have been selected to illustrate different steps in the process of internment. The concluding section will discuss archiving of the records, an important action which created the basis for reinterpretation and social justice efforts in the postwar era.

### Espionage records

As World War II escalated in Europe, the United States began implementing a number of defense programs in preparation for a possible entry into the war. In 1940, the Alien Registration Act was passed, requiring the registration and fingerprinting of all aliens over fourteen. The Department of Justice began to compile a list of dangerous or subversive German, Italian, and Japanese aliens who would be arrested or interned if war broke out with their countries (Daniels 1993a). The product of this effort was known as the “ABC” list, a master list compiled from investigations of three intelligence agencies: the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), and the Army’s Military Intelligence Division (G-2).

The name “ABC” list derived from the three categories of the list. Group A contained “known dangerous” aliens who had been the subject of individual investigation, either because they held influential positions within the community or because their work made them likely “fifth-column” agents. Group B listed “potentially dangerous” aliens who had not yet been fully investigated. Group C aliens were “watched because of their pro-Japanese inclinations and propagandist activities.” Agents obtained many of these names by clipping them from Japanese-language newspapers. When Pearl Harbor was attacked and war declared on Japan, the FBI used the list to make its arrests of “enemy aliens” (Irons 1983).

In March 1941, ONI and the FBI broke into the Japanese consulate in Los Angeles and photographed their espionage records. Because of that, the agencies were confident that they had adequately identified potentially dangerous people on the existing “ABC” list. All three intelligence agencies agreed that they had terminated Japanese espionage before Executive Order 9066 was signed, and they opposed mass internment of Japanese Americans on the grounds that it was unnecessary. In a meeting to decide about Executive Order 9066, the Attorney General at the time made it clear that “The Department of Justice [...] was opposed to and would have nothing to do with the evacuation” (United States Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians 1983a, b). If it had not been for demands from other quarters, it is likely that wartime detainment of Japanese

Americans would have been limited to those on the “ABC” list, as it was for German and Italian Americans.

### Japanese-language newspapers

Along with the infringement of personal liberties, the advent of World War II put a severe strain on freedom of the press in the United States. The US government placed pressure on newspapers to voluntarily “self-censor” their content, and particularly leaned on foreign-language newspapers. According to Takeya Mizuno, a journalism historian, federal officials used the Japanese-language press to “pacify Japanese Americans and facilitate mass incarceration,” relying upon it to spread government news, build morale among Japanese Americans, and defend against propaganda from abroad (Mizuno 2005). The press was critical for the dissemination of information in Japanese American communities, especially since many Issei (first-generation immigrants) did not speak or read English. According to an intelligence report by the Department of Justice, in the fall of 1941 there were seventeen Japanese-language newspapers on the West Coast with more than 60,000 paid subscribers (Mizuno 2005). Control of these newspapers was crucial for implementing internment.

General DeWitt of the Western Defense Command wanted an immediate ban on all Japanese-language publications, fearing that they could be used for conspiracies and pro-Japanese propaganda. DeWitt was overruled by other government officials, who maintained that First Amendment freedoms must be upheld even in wartime because the nation was fighting to preserve these freedoms. The officials also recognized the pragmatic value of the Japanese-language press as a channel of communication with Japanese Americans. Closing off a vital source of information for the community might cause panic and misinformation to spread (Mizuno 2007).

After Pearl Harbor, the Office of Facts and Figures (OFF) sent a number of press releases to the Japanese press to explain regulations affecting the community, the national defense program, and other relevant issues. The Department of Justice worked closely with the OFF to provide information to Japanese-language newspapers, especially after Executive Order 9066, when detailed regulations, orders, and notices needed to be conveyed to the Japanese American community. The OFF became a filter between government agencies and Japanese-speaking people; if an agency wanted to send out orders or announcements, the materials were first sent to the OFF for editing and translating to be printed in Japanese newspapers. Even after West Coast Japanese Americans were evacuated and the newspapers closed, the OFF sent press releases to the camp newspapers published by the evacuees under WRA supervision (Mizuno 2005).

### Executive Order 9066

News accounts and official reports concerning the attack on Pearl Harbor spread wild rumors about “fifth-column” saboteurs and spies, despite the fact that no such activities were ever documented. Under pressure from General DeWitt, as well as a number of politicians and government officials, President Roosevelt passed



Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942. The order authorized the Secretary of War and “the Military Commanders whom he may ... designate” to “prescribe military areas” “from which any and all persons may be excluded.” The Secretary of War was also authorized to “provide for residents of any such area who are excluded therefrom, such transportation, food, shelter, and other accommodations as may be necessary ... until other arrangements are made.” Remarkably, this order never once mentioned Japanese or Japanese Americans, even though this was the only group of people to which the order was applied (Daniels 1993a). Historian Peter Irons wrote that Executive Order 9066 “simply offered General DeWitt a blank check to be filled in as he thought best” (Irons 1983).

To enforce Executive Order 9066, Congress passed Public Law No. 503, which made it a federal crime for any one ordered to leave a “military area” to refuse to do so. General DeWitt then issued a series of proclamations to designate military areas, impose curfews on “enemy aliens” and “persons of Japanese ancestry,” and prohibit them from traveling more than five miles from their place of residence. Beginning in March 1942, DeWitt issued civilian exclusion orders to evacuate all West Coast Japanese Americans, regardless of citizenship, to temporary assembly centers. Permanent custody of the Japanese Americans was the responsibility of the War Relocation Authority, created in March 1942 by Executive Order 9102. The WRA administrated the ten permanent internment camps, euphemistically known as “relocation centers.” Although Executive Order 9066 was the starting point for mass internment of Japanese Americans, the text of the document itself does not reveal its intended purpose. Enacting internment required a series of other documents that further elaborated and specified who would be affected by Executive Order 9066.

### Census data

The use of census data to conduct internment has been a matter of ongoing debate. For many years the Census Bureau claimed that, although under pressure from the War Department during World War II, it had never released personal information on Japanese Americans that would have aided in internment. However, after investigations by independent historians and Japanese American activists, it became clear from the documentary record that the Census Bureau had significant contact with the War Department and materially aided the process of internment, in violation of census confidentiality laws. Confronted with evidence from the Census Bureau’s own files, the Director of the Census Bureau was forced to admit in 1980 that “based on our recent review of the events, it is apparent that a different account would be appropriate in the future” (Okamura 1981; Daniels 1982).

Historians gathered significant evidence on this topic, which was published by the *Amerasia Journal* and submitted to the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians in 1981. Among their findings: after Executive Order 9066 was issued, the Census Bureau assigned an official to help the War Department with planning for mass internment. The Census Bureau prepared detailed tabulations of Japanese in the United States from the 1940 census and provided these on punched cards to the War Department. In an oral history interview, an official from the

Western Defense Command also recalled that the Census Bureau brought out raw data files and used maps to point out where the Japanese were and how many lived in each city block (United States Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians 1983a, b). It is still unclear whether the Census Bureau ever provided the names and addresses of individuals, although some evidence seems to indicate it. In any case, the release of detailed statistical information on Japanese Americans significantly aided the planning and implementation of internment. According to the United States Code, census data “shall be used only for the statistical purposes for which it is supplied ... and in no case ... be used to the detriment of the person or persons to whom such information relates” (Okamura 1981). By supplying census data to the War Department for the purpose of enacting internment of Japanese Americans, the Census Bureau was in clear violation of its mandate.

### WRA case files

The War Relocation Authority collected a number of documents to process individual internees through relocation and maintain authority over the camp operations. These records were later compiled into case files on each individual internee. The process began after notice of evacuation was posted—representatives for each family reported to a control center to be registered and assigned a WRA I.D. number. Each family received twenty tags with their number (ex: Family #10710) to put on each piece of luggage and member of the family. After preliminary processing during evacuation, other papers such as family information, medical and school records, interviews, loyalty hearings, and work releases were also accumulated for each person. Before anyone could be granted leave from a camp, such as for medical treatment, short-term employment, or education, they had to pass an inspection of their WRA and FBI files to make sure there was no evidence that the individual might endanger national security (United States Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians 1983a, b).

In February 1942, the WRA and the army conducted a divisive loyalty review of the internees. Everyone in the camps over the age of 18 was required to fill out a loyalty questionnaire, regardless of gender or citizenship status. The army originally initiated the questionnaire as part of its effort to encourage young Nisei (second-generation) men to volunteer for the 442nd all-Nisei combat team. The WRA extended the review to include most of the camp population, to aid in later decisions about leave policies for the internees. However, the questionnaire was poorly worded and created great confusion among the camps, especially because internees had been warned that their answers would have serious implications (Muller 2001). Two questions in particular caused uproar:

No. 27. Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?

No. 28. Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or

domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power, or organization?

Question 27 was baffling to women and elderly Issei, but its implications for young Nisei men were more worrisome. Would answering ‘yes’ be tantamount to volunteering to serve in the military? Question 28 was even more troubling. For Issei, legally barred from obtaining US citizenship, renouncing their Japanese citizenship would leave them stateless. Nisei, who were American citizens, resented the implication that their loyalty was in question and feared that saying ‘yes’ would trap them into ‘forswearing’ an allegiance to the emperor they had never had. Attempting to answer these questions divided Japanese Americans along generational and ideological lines, caused rifts in the community that never healed. “No–no” boys, who had answered in the negative to both questions, were ultimately segregated at Tule Lake camp along with other “disloyals” (Muller 2001).

Even more controversial was the decision in January 1944, to reinstate the draft for Japanese Americans, which had been suspended after Pearl Harbor. Over the next few months, young men in the camps began receiving draft notices. Over three hundred men in the camps resisted the draft, and some served up to 5 years in prison, before being pardoned by President Harry Truman in 1947. The loyalty questionnaire and draft notices became symbols of injustice for many Japanese Americans, who questioned why they would be held in camps for suspicion of disloyalty, then forced to serve in the military of a country that distrusted them.

### Photographs and research records

The internment process was well documented by outside observers as well. Photographers and anthropologists authorized by the WRA generated a vast quantity of material on internment and the internees. By one estimate, the three official photographers of the WRA produced over 17,000 photographs documenting evacuation and life in the camps (Parks 2004). However, the work of photographers such as Dorothea Lange was carefully censored by the government. As one historian described, “A photographic record could protect against false allegations of mistreatment and violations of international law, but it carried the risk, of course, of documenting actual mistreatment” (Gordon and Okihiro 2006). When Lange, Ansel Adams, and other photographers visited the camps, they were prohibited from documenting the guards, the guard towers, or the barbed wire that surrounded the camps (Armor and Wright 1988). Lange was not allowed to release her photographs to the public, and they were suppressed for the duration of the war. Some prints even had the word “impounded” written across them by a military official (Gordon and Okihiro 2006). The photographs of internment were meant to document for control, not public information.

Three main groups of social scientists also documented internment: the WRA Community Analysis Section, the Office of Indian Affairs Bureau of Sociological Research, and a Japanese Evacuation and Resettlement Study done by researchers from the University of California, Berkeley (Hansen 1995). Although their intentions were often benevolent, anthropologists and ethnologists who documented

internment through interviews, observations, and analyses were still implicated in the process of controlling internees. Orin Starn's reexamination of their work sums it up:

[T]he attempt of ethnographers to realize their positive intentions inadvertently incorporated notions of social control with repressive implications, worked implicitly to justify relocation, restated stereotypes, and left unexamined the essentially racist assumptions behind internment (Starn 1986).

The controversy over anthropologists and internment has been hotly debated in the professional literature, as seen by a series of articles in response to Starn's charge (Opler 1987; Sady 1987, 1988; Starn 1987). However, the records created by anthropologists have been a rich source for research by later scholars, despite their controversial origins.

### Archiving the records

Records surrounding Japanese American internment were archived in a number of locations. Government record groups, including the War Relocation Authority, the Western Defense Command, the Office of War Information, the Department of the Interior, and other relevant collections, are located at the National Archives. Major collections on the West Coast include the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, the Japanese American Research Project at UCLA, and the University of Washington Special Collections.

The archived records of the WRA provide a rich source of material for studying internment. As a government agency, the WRA maintained documents such as correspondence, agreements, informational material, procedural documents, and personnel files, as well as individual case files for each evacuee. At the time of closing, workers trained at the Washington office went out to assist regional personnel to consolidate and box up the records, and dispose of nonrecord material. The National Archives assisted in creating a records retention policy to evaluate which record series should be kept, e.g. correspondence, memoranda, and case files.

A large part of the process was consolidation of individual case files. Records concerning individual evacuees had been kept separately by each camp and division. To consolidate these files, manila envelopes were prepared for each individual who had ever lived in one of the relocation camps, with the person's name written on the front. The envelopes circulated through each division in the camps, and materials concerning a particular person were placed in the respective envelope. This was a laborious process, since each division had filed its records differently, some by family number, others alphabetically by function or school grade. Also, some people had circulated among as many as four different camps during the internment period. All told, there were records on over 120,000 evacuees, which were consolidated in the space of 3 months (United States War Relocation Authority 1946).

Records from each of the ten camps were sent to the Washington office, where arrangements were made to transfer them to the appropriate authorities. School

transcripts, for example, were sent to the Office of Education. Most of the records were eventually transferred to the National Archives, where they are filed as Record Group 210: Records of the War Relocation Authority, 1941–1947. A second repository was established for the WRA at the University of California, Berkeley, to facilitate access for researchers on West Coast (Luomala 1948). The records of the Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study are also deposited at UC Berkeley.

In addition to official government records, many inhabitants of the camps created personal documents such as diaries, letters, and artwork. Some photographs and film footage of the camps by internees has also survived, despite the ban on cameras for most of internment (Ishizuka 2006). Many of these items have eventually found their way to museums and archives collections dedicated to Japanese American history, such as the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, California. These documents and artifacts provide a much-needed personal perspective on internment to balance the official records.

The Japanese American Research Project (JARP) was one of the earlier efforts to collect source materials from Japanese Americans, beginning in 1962, with a grant from the Japanese American Citizens' League (Ichioka et al. 1974). Inspired by the rise of Asian American social and political activism in the 1960s, this project sought to document Japanese American communities by surveying and interviewing three generations of Japanese Americans, the Issei (first generation), Nisei (second generation), and Sansei (third generation). Part of this project was to collect historical materials from interviewees, including personal papers, photographs, and books, which are now archived in the Special Collections of UCLA's University Research Library and have become one of the most significant collections for the study of Japanese American history (Sakata 1992).

However, as the compiler of the JARP bibliography observed, the wartime internment of Japanese Americans precipitated a massive destruction of prewar historical materials, comparable to losses during the San Francisco earthquake in 1906. At the time of the evacuation, internees' personal papers, business records, books, newspapers, and other materials were unavoidably left behind, since they could take only what they could carry. Some materials may also have been deliberately destroyed out of fear of persecution. During internees' absence, any remaining belongings were often neglected, lost, or vandalized. Almost 90% of the Japanese American population in the continental United States was interned during the war and lost some or almost all of their belongings. The loss of historical materials from before the war was enormous, erasing most traces of prewar Japanese American history. Ironically, some of the materials that survived best were the personal papers of Issei leaders who had been seized immediately after Pearl Harbor. Their papers were confiscated by government agents as documentary evidence and impounded for the duration of the war. After internment was over, papers and other possessions were returned to their owners, although many internees did not retrieve their papers because they were reluctant to contact the FBI (Sakata 1992). Although the documentary record of Japanese American history is still fragmentary, active efforts to improve it through the collection of archival materials have provided a rich source for researchers to work with.

The redress movement also prompted many individual internees to donate their personal papers to public and private institutions such as the Japanese American Research Project (JARP) at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the Japanese American National Museum (Hayashi 2004). By revealing the personal side of internment, these papers greatly added to the documentary record.

### **Social justice through documents**

Once records have been archived, it is possible for them to be rediscovered by historians and other researchers, who draw upon the materials in ways other than their original purposes. In the second life of the documents, they may be used as evidence to reevaluate the historical processes they document, leading to new understandings. In the aftermath of Japanese American internment, many felt that a great injustice had been done. As scholars reexamined the evidence and traced the decision-making process that led to internment, they concluded that internment had not been justified by military necessity. The espionage records, for example, clearly indicated that it was known at the time that the majority of Japanese Americans were no threat to national security. These conclusions led to calls from the Japanese American community for formal redress. As court cases were reopened and the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians began to scrutinize the internment process, archival sources became central to this question of social justice. In addition, the renewed interest led to many efforts to fill the gaps in the official documentary record. Academic institutions began to collect personal papers of many surviving internees, and oral history projects flourished.

Postwar reinterpretation of internment can be divided into several phases, each relating to the use of archival documents. The process of achieving social justice for Japanese Americans was by turns constrained and enabled by the availability of archival records, as the following sections will illustrate.

#### **Property loss**

In 1948, Congress passed the Japanese-American Evacuation Claims Act in an attempt to compensate Japanese Americans for “damage to or loss of real or personal property” which occurred as “a reasonable and natural consequence of the evacuation or exclusion.” However, this effort was stymied by serious records management problems. When the Act was implemented, the Justice Department discovered that the Internal Revenue Service had already destroyed most of the 1939–1942 income tax returns of evacuees, which would have provided the most complete documentation of their financial records. The Japanese American Citizens’ League pointed this out in testimony, noting that most personal documents had been lost during the upheaval of relocation and that, “to add to further difficulties, under Federal and State codes, most of the Government records of 1942—which might have been of value as cross-references—have been destroyed pursuant to law” (United States Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians 1983a, b). Without these records, it was next to impossible

for individuals to adequately document property and income losses as a result of internment. Estimates of total losses for internees have ranged from \$77 million to \$400 million, although few records can substantiate any of these numbers. The Evacuation Claims Act ultimately distributed \$37 million in claims payments, far short of adequate compensation for either financial or personal damages caused by internment (United States Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians 1983a, b). It failed because the documentation required to prove damages was simply unobtainable, either lost during the process of internment or destroyed as a result of routine IRS records management practices.

### Revisionist historians

In the field of history, revisionist historians challenge existing assumptions and interpretations of historical events and processes by reexamining the evidence. To do so in this case, they first needed access to the documentary evidence of internment, which proved to be a considerable challenge. Prior to the 1966 Freedom of Information Act, historians had tremendous difficulties in obtaining access to internment records. Roger Daniels, a prominent historian of Japanese American internment who began research in the 1960s, observed that if more government material had been declassified, he would have been able to write his book much earlier. While examining Department of Justice files, Daniels was told to alert archivists about any FBI files he found so that they could be removed from the files. A sympathetic archivist allowed him to view files and then go to the bathroom to take notes from memory, before handing the documents over. Using his notes, he was able to find other evidence to use in his book. Daniels' research was also aided by military historian Dr. Stetson Conn, who in 1969 gave him access to his personal notes on many documents no longer available at the National Archives, which became key evidence for Daniels' conclusions (Murray 2000).

In 1976, Michi Weglyn published *Years of Infamy*, a groundbreaking work that called attention to government racism and misconduct during World War II. Her work was influenced by the political climate of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and sought to correct the prevailing view of Japanese American internment as a well-intentioned and justified action. Weglyn reexamined numerous archival sources at the National Archives, Library of Congress, and Pentagon, and uncovered information about internment that had previously been ignored or censored. For many Japanese Americans, her book and the evidence she presented in it started a conversation that led to renewed calls for redress among Japanese American communities (Murray 2000). When Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga attended a talk by Weglyn in 1976, she was inspired to begin her own research, which ultimately laid the foundation for both political redress and overturning the three Supreme Court cases (Fujita-Rony 2003).

In 1981, Peter Irons' discoveries of Justice Department memoranda about the internment court cases were made possible by the Freedom of Information Act, under which he was able to get access to documents never before seen by the public. From the evidence he uncovered, Irons concluded, "This documentary record reveals a legal scandal without precedent in the history of American law. Never



before has evidence emerged that shows a deliberate campaign to present tainted records to the Supreme Court” (Irons 1983). Archival sources were key to reexaminations of internment by historians such as Irons, Weglyn, and Daniels. In order to reshape public memory of internment, they had to return to the primary sources that documented its history.

### Court cases

Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga’s extensive research and cataloging of internment-related documents became more than a personal interest in 1980, when Michi Weglyn connected her to the National Council for Japanese American Redress (NCJAR). Herzig-Yoshinaga joined this group, and her archival research became the basis for a \$27 billion class-action lawsuit by NCJAR, which sought \$220,000 for each person who had been interned. Although this lawsuit was eventually dismissed, it was heard by the Supreme Court and successfully publicized the issues during the simultaneous struggle for legislative redress (Fujita-Rony 2003).

When the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians was formed in 1980 to study the internment of Japanese Americans, they hired Herzig-Yoshinaga to coordinate their research efforts, and her personal catalog of thousands of documents formed the core of the Commission’s documentary evidence and their report in 1982, *Personal Justice Denied*.

Through this work, Herzig-Yoshinaga met Peter Irons, the legal historian who was researching the *Hirabayashi*, *Yasui*, and *Korematsu* Supreme Court cases that had upheld the legality of internment. In 1981, Irons began research on the topic of Japanese American internment, intending to write a book about the Supreme Court cases that challenged internment. Using the Freedom of Information Act of 1966, he requested several boxes of documents from the Justice Department. Upon examining the first files, Irons made a shocking discovery: memoranda written by lawyers at the Justice Department, which charged their superiors with “suppression of evidence” and “intentional falsehoods” in presenting the cases to the Supreme Court. In particular, the *Final Report* produced by the Western Defense Command to justify internment contained serious errors and falsehoods regarding charges of espionage and sabotage against Japanese Americans. This had been a key piece of the argument in favor of internment, despite the fact that no Japanese American had ever been found to have committed an act of espionage or sabotage. The report even claimed that the very fact that no sabotage had taken place was a “disturbing and confirming indication that such action will be taken” (United States Department of War 1943). However, Irons was not allowed to copy the documents he had found, so Herzig-Yoshinaga, who had better access as a researcher for the Commission, copied the documents for him (Fujita-Rony 2003).

Herzig-Yoshinaga also found, through her cross-referencing system, that the *Final Report* in question was a revised and corrected version; the earlier version had contained even more serious problems and overtly racist statements. Ten advance copies of this earlier version had been printed and sent to Washington, DC in 1943, but when the Assistant Secretary of War read it, he realized that it was not only contrary to official War Department policy, but also too accurately presented their



unconstitutional rationale for interning Japanese Americans. He ordered the report altered and all evidence of the earlier report's existence destroyed. However, Herzig-Yoshinaga's careful research had uncovered correspondence regarding this process and a "Certificate of Destruction by Burning" for the original copies. She also discovered the interesting fact that the tenth copy of the original report had never been found and therefore had not been destroyed with the others. On a visit to the National Archives in 1982, Herzig-Yoshinaga saw a copy of the Final Report sitting on an archivist's desk and noticed that the binding differed from other copies she had seen. When she opened it, she saw notes written in the margin and realized this was the missing tenth copy, with revisions marked by the Assistant Secretary of War. She immediately called Irons, who confirmed her discovery. This copy, combined with the evidence found by Irons in the Justice Department files, provided the "smoking gun" they had been seeking to overturn the Supreme Court cases (Fujita-Rony 2003; Aiko Herzig interview 1994).

Once Irons had uncovered proof of deliberate suppression of evidence by the government, he and a team of lawyers were able to reopen the cases of *Hirabayashi*, *Yasui*, and *Korematsu* through a little-known proceeding called a "petition for a writ of error coram nobis," meaning that the original trial was tainted by "fundamental error" or that the conviction resulted in "manifest injustice" to the defendant. The documents Irons and Herzig-Yoshinaga uncovered showed that the government was aware of the lack of military necessity for internment, but deliberately withheld that information during the cases (Maki et al. 1999). Internment of innocent civilians had not been an "honest mistake" but a deliberate choice to violate the rights of American citizens. Between 1983 and 1988, the court overturned the convictions in all three cases, acknowledging fundamental error in the original Supreme Court decisions. Herzig-Yoshinaga's lengthy research and expertise were central to the success of these cases (Fujita-Rony). As Alice Yang Murray concluded, "No longer a 'silent victim' of history, Herzig-Yoshinaga illustrated how individuals could literally rewrite history and establish a powerful claim for redress" (Murray 2008).

The *coram nobis* cases, which happened concurrently with the political redress movement, had a great impact on public opinion. They publicly discredited the rationale for mass internment by proving the innocence of these three men, "coinciding perfectly with the redress efforts seeking to persuade the public and Congress that no legal, moral, or factual basis existed for the mass imprisonment" (Maki et al. 1999).

### Political redress movement

The political redress movement relied on many archival documents about internment to support its case. Evidence compiled by historians, the Commission, and Japanese American activists all contributed to the effort for redress. The first major success of the movement came in 1976, when President Gerald Ford officially ended Executive Order 9066 and acknowledged that internment of Japanese Americans during the war had been wrong. After this, the Japanese American Citizens' League (JACL) continued efforts for monetary redress and a public acknowledgment from Congress that internment had been unjust. Advised by four

Japanese American members of Congress (Senators Daniel Inouye and Spark Matsunaga from Hawaii and Congressmen Norman Mineta and Robert Matsui from California), the JACL focused its energies on establishing a commission to investigate the history of internment and make recommendations. This succeeded in 1980, when Congress established the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (US CWRIC). The House bill had been introduced by Majority Leader Jim Wright and cosponsored by Representatives Mineta and Matsui, along with 114 other congressmen. The Senate bill had been cosponsored by Senator Inouye and Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska.

After studying the matter, gathering archival sources, and hearing testimony from former internees, historians, and others, the CWRIC issued its report, *Personal Justice Denied*, in 1983. The commission concluded that internment had not been justified by military necessity, but had instead been motivated by “race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership.” It issued five recommendations to Congress: one, an apology in the form of a joint resolution from Congress and the president; two, presidential pardons for Japanese Americans convicted of violating laws related to internment; three, recognition of Japanese American claims for restitution of losses during the war; four, establishment of a special foundation for educational purposes; and five, personal redress payments in the form of \$20,000 to each surviving internee (United States Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians 1983a, b).

However, the redress bill was stalled in committee for several years after the CWRIC issued its recommendations. It was only passed in 1988, after Democrats regained control of the Senate and those more favorable to redress assumed congressional leadership positions. The Japanese American congressmen were instrumental in gathering support and shepherding the bill through committee (Murray 2008). JACL and the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations (NCRR) headed a grassroots campaign and gathered endorsements from organizations, local governments, and veterans groups. After a hard struggle, the Civil Liberties Act was finally signed by President Reagan in 1988, authorizing redress payments to surviving internees. Camp survivors began receiving checks for \$20,000 in 1990, accompanied by a letter of apology from President Bush.

Evacuee case files became especially significant in enabling the distribution of redress monies after the passage of the Civil Liberties Act. The act created the Office of Redress Administration (ORA) in the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, which was responsible for administering the redress program. The ORA’s duties included identifying, locating, and authorizing payments to eligible individuals (Maki et al. 1999). This was made possible through the archival records of internment. During the 1960s, the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley, had converted punch card data files of the WRA evacuee case files to electronic format. The Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice obtained a copy of these data files in 1988 and used them to support the distribution of redress to evacuees (NARA Record Group 210). Staff were able to directly upload the data from tape into a network of databases to find and verify recipients of redress monies (Adams 2007). By the time the program officially ended in 1999, the ORA had provided redress payments to more than 82,000 Japanese Americans.

More recently, the records have been put online in the Access to Archival Databases (AAD) resource on the National Archives website. During the first 2 years it was public, there were almost 30,000 successful queries for records from this file (Adams 2007).

Many documents concerning Japanese American internment are still being discovered. The book *Impounded* published for the first time many of the photographs taken by Lange that were originally repressed (Gordon and Okihiro 2006). A number of newly published government documents continue to deal with internment and its legacy (Parks 2004). Access to documents is also improving, with projects such as the Japanese American Relocation Digital Archives and Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project putting digital copies of documents, photographs, and interviews on the Internet.

### Filling the gaps

Part of the process of redress was to identify and fill the gaps in the official documentary record of internment. Government records on internment provided official views, not the voices of the people who were interned. It was for this reason that the Commission's collection of testimonies from interned Japanese Americans had such a powerful and cathartic effect on the Japanese American community. After the Commission hearings in the 1980s drew public attention to the issue of internment, many more Japanese Americans were willing to break their silences about their own experiences (Murray 2000). During the 1980s redress movement, there was an explosion of oral history projects focused on Japanese Americans, and by the mid-1990s, Japanese American internment "was rapidly becoming one of the best-documented events in American history via oral history interviews" (Hansen 1995). A number of more recent historians have used oral histories as a central part of their research, and the Japanese American National Museum has established a program to act as a central repository for archiving oral histories on the Japanese American experience. These community-generated records have filled many gaps and omissions in the official records of internment, enriching our understandings of this complex and multifaceted history.

Along with a growing interest in oral histories of Japanese Americans, there has also been an increase in genealogical studies and personal narratives. *A Student's Guide to Japanese American Genealogy*, published in 1996, provides an introduction to archival research and oral history interviews for Japanese Americans. Memoirs and family histories, such as the recently published *Life Behind Barbed Wire: The World War II Internment Memoirs of a Hawai'i Issei* (2008), continue to reveal the personal side of internment history.

A number of museum exhibits have also drawn attention to this history and its place in American memory. In 1994, the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles put on an exhibit titled "America's Concentration Camps: Remembering the Japanese American Experience." This exhibit used a combination of archival documents, photographs, and film, as well as personal artifacts donated by former internees. *Something Strong Within*, a film created for the exhibit, used rare home movie footage of camp life to reveal never-before-seen

moments, such as the visit of a Japanese American soldier to his family in camp. Designed to engage visitors, it created spaces for former internees and their families to participate in remembrance by placing a model of their barracks on a camp map, including a photograph in a camp album, or adding their personal stories to memory books at the end of the exhibit. Through this collective experience, Japanese Americans could reclaim their past and build a collective memory (Ishizuka 2006).

Now that the history of Japanese American internment and redress has become part of American memory, the Japanese American Citizens' League and other community organizations want to ensure that it is not forgotten. After the September 11th attacks in 2001, it seemed that history was repeating itself. With Muslim and Arab Americans being investigated and detained on the basis of race, religion, or citizenship, Japanese Americans saw parallels to their own experiences during World War II, and the prejudice they suffered. They feared that civil liberties were again being sacrificed for the sake of national security (Murray 2008). In 2007, descendants of Fred Korematsu, Gordon Hirabayashi, and Minoru Yasui filed an amicus brief in support of an appeal for Arab and South Asian immigrants detained after 9/11. It remains to be seen whether the legacy of Japanese American internment and the justice achieved for internees will continue to be remembered in the future.

## Conclusions

In the end, the documents that enacted internment of Japanese Americans also made it possible for redress to be achieved. This historical moment illustrates the duality of recordkeeping and the power of records to influence society, for good or ill. Recognizing the dual nature of documents can aid archivists in understanding the ethics of preservation and access. The creation, selection, and preservation of archival documents are active choices fraught with ethical and social implications. As is often said, those who do not remember history are doomed to repeat it. The lessons of Japanese American internment are still with us today, as American society continues to grapple with the difficult issues of social control and justice. As one historian cautions, “[A]s rich as these archival holdings may be as primary source materials, they must be ‘re-read’ both critically and with imagination” (Hirabayashi 1998). Recognizing the uses of documents for social control and social justice can lead to more nuanced understandings of the role that archives play in societies. The archival documents of Japanese American internment have had many different meanings over the years. In preserving them, archivists have enabled the documents to be revisited and reinterpreted as each era of history reshapes the collective memory of internment. What once was a shameful secret has now become a powerful force for social justice and advocacy in Japanese American communities. This journey highlights the ethical issues of archives and power of achieving redress from past injustices.

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