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Introduction

With the sudden invasion of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese in December of 1941,

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, outraged by the Japanese actions, declared war on Japan, with Italy and Germany soon following. 10 weeks later with World War 2 in full throttle, Roosevelt subsequently signed Executive Order 9066, which gave military commanders the authority to expel people from certain areas to decrease the threat of sabotage and espionage. This, however, was mainly targeted at the roughly 100,000 Japanese Americans on the West Coast of the United States. These included the Issei (first-generation Americans) and the Nisei (second-generation Americans), with some of the Japanese Americans being US citizens. They were then forced to leave their homes and move to relocation centers in the desolate parts of the Western USA (Tetsuden 70-74). The motives behind such drastic and unprecedented actions in US history might seem clear– racial prejudice coupled with wartime anxiety and hysteria. However, the forced internment of Japanese Americans during World War II served as an excuse for the U.S. white majority population and government to assert control over a succeeding minority racial group before the USA's involvement in World War 2. This was to maintain the power structure of white superiority over Japanese Americans for a multitude of crucial economic and societal reasons, causing grave socio-economic effects on the Japanese internment camp survivors.

Economic Factors

A multitude of economic factors that illustrated Japanese economic success before WW2 was particularly a threat to the power hierarchy White Americans had instilled in American society.

By 1940, Japanese farmers produced at least 90 percent of a variety of agricultural

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produce, like strawberries and snap beans, and close to 50 percent of other produce like carrots and lettuce, despite anti-Japanese legislation and the rise of white Caucasian farming

organizations like the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Organization, who were eager to acquire the Japanese-held farmland. This agricultural fear stemmed from mainly Japanese contract laborers arriving in the US during the 1880s to replace the Chinese Laborers who were banned under the First Chinese Exclusion Act, causing Congress to pass a law banning foreign contract laborers from entering the US. Similarly, the Immigration Act of 1907 listed 20 classes of workers banned from entering the US including contract laborers while preventing foreign laborers from entering the US through a third country/territory. The most infamous restriction on Japanese labor migrants was the “Gentlemen's Agreement” of 1908 which forced the Japanese government to limit immigration to the US to “settled agriculturalists” or people who had invested in an enterprise and whose proceeds were in proportion to the investment in the business. This law was inscribed to make land ownership in California mainly unattractive to Japanese immigrants. Then at a state level, California passed the Henry-Webb Alien Law Act of 1913 which limited the leasing of land by non-citizens to 3 years while also simply restricting the acquisition of any property. 1919 saw the law revised so the land couldn't be leased to non-citizens or purchased land if the title was held under a different person's name (Caudill and Mixon 1-4). Japanese-Americans, in the eyes of white farmer Americans and white state and federal government, had a stranglehold on the agricultural sector of the Western US, which jeopardized their economic security. They were ultimately seeking an avenue in which to reimpose proper white superiority economically because all the profit from their perspective was being diverted to a less deserving minority group.

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Further contributing to the whites' animosity was that in agriculture, economic factors combined with envy caused White farmers' fears of Japanese economic advancement as the Issei farmers had great success raising fruits and vegetables in soil considered useless (Burton et al. 18). This

envy was apparent in the Asiatic Exclusion League, a prominent anti-Japanese group formed in 1905 that consisted of White union workers and leaders, drawing worker supporters from around California. They were principally able to prompt Pacific States' legislatures to limit Japanese immigration from Hawaii, which was a protectorate of the US at the time (Caudill and Mixon 3). The Japanese were succeeding in a crucial aspect of the American economy, and the whites were primarily concerned with stopping this economic gain since they were losing out on pivotal money. White superiority entailed ensuring the Japanese didn't have access to potentially valuable agricultural land that they profited from. Whites needed a proper excuse (internment camps) to lay their hands on rich western agricultural lands that were now supposedly highly lucrative. They were ultimately afraid this capitalistic success would allow the Japanese to rise to a higher economic status that many Whites were able to enjoy. The Japanese agricultural success contributed to the median income of Japanese Americans, which was around \$630, which was close to the median income of the entire United States labor force. The Japanese American employment rate was also over 95%, which was higher than the normal employment rate of California's 86%. Accordingly, prominent leaders of the Anti-Japanese movement in California like Valentine McClatchy opposed Japanese immigration due to them being "superior workers against whom White Coast whites couldn't compete against" (Tetsuden 71). The relatively similar median income of Japanese American laborers to the rest of white American laborers was particularly damaging to the white hierarchical system because it showed there was competition from a minority group. Economic competition was the opposite of white superiority preached, so

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measures from the lens of whites had to be implemented to reduce the income the Japanese were earning as laborers. Without doing so, the Japanese could outpace the economic progress white Americans have achieved so far in the USA.

Social Factors

There were social advancements and assertions of Japanese American values in the USA that Anglo-Americans believed represented a threat to white racial hierarchy before World War II. One of these values White Americans believed Japanese Americans possessed was sexually aggressive traits among Japanese men. This sexual urge would endanger not only white females but the racial purity of White American offspring. On the outside, particularly, white men described Japanese males as savages to mask their desires to engage sexually with Japanese women due to their exotic sensuality (Yoshitake 20-21). Despite these exaggerations of Japanese males, it's still important to highlight how they illuminate how Japanese males were beginning to integrate into white society. That said, these pronounced fears of integration reveal how whites were intent on keeping the rigid restrictions of white supremacy by not letting outsiders (minorities) penetrate their sphere of influence. Furthermore, institutions like the US Army's Western Defense Command argued interracial children with a Japanese father were assumed to be made "more than half Japanese" while European fathers provided more of an "American" home environment to assimilate into American culture (Yoshitake 20). Because white government leaders wanted to keep their racial purity, they sought a systematic removal of Japanese from mainstream society where they couldn't influence white social norms that included sexual abuse of minority women like the Japanese. Preservation for the whites was pivotal.

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At a more robust level, the Issei started to establish ethnic organizations for social purposes called Kenjinkai, with other associations for the Issei developing in Western cities like San Francisco. These included organizations for certain professions, like cobblers and restaurant

owners, and religious purposes to perpetuate an inner community. The anti-Japanese factions on the West Coast saw this as proof of the inability of Japanese Americans to assimilate into an American lifestyle. (Tetsuden 63-65). The influx of social and political associations of Japanese to whites made it seem whites couldn't maintain their "superior social values" of an American lifestyle as Japanese values were further introduced to American society, as seen before with Japanese men intermarrying. Because the Japanese were in a foreign land, this development constituted a form of success in their eyes, which is what white superiority sought to dismantle. Most importantly, the White majority of California claimed these associations were under the influence of the Japanese government, creating a nativism similar to the Know-Nothing Party of the 1800s on the US East Coast that targeted the newly arrived Irish and German American immigrants (Tetsuden 66). Therefore, because these Japanese organizations enabled them to possibly socially advance to where whites were, whites were concerned that these grassroots organizations would replace the roots of what the US racial pyramid was held up by. The fostering of community was a pillar that whites were keen on exterminating, but that is a fundamental key to immigrant success, which threatens the white sphere.

Internment Camp Factors

There were immensely substantial factors within the internment camp process itself to maintain the restrictive white power structure upon Japanese Americans' socio-economic opportunities. Firstly, in the Supreme Court case *Korematsu v. United States* of 1944, Fred Kormatsu, a Japanese American citizen, refused to comply with Executive Order 9066, citing a

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violation of the 5th Amendment of the Constitution. The court ruled, though in a 6-3 decision, that despite citizenship coming with privileges and the removal of citizens from their homes

except during times of emergencies not aligning with governmental institutions, modern warfare calls for great protections like forced evacuation due to the great danger of war. (“Korematsu v United States”) The American government was keen, despite the known immorality, to strip the Japanese of their basic privileges in interacting with government agencies. The white American government's knowingly stepping past the line of immorality reveals they were focused on stripping Japanese Americans of their rights to ensure they wouldn't surpass white Americans in their ability to exert social and political influence in American society. Stripping them of government privileges ensures more socio-economic isolation, making it harder for social mobility. This perception of isolation is further seen in how the Japanese on the West Coast lost many of their large economic assets when they were given anywhere from 1 day to 2 weeks' notice to sell their assets quickly at a very low price to exploitative white merchants who seized on their panic and lack of government trust to store their assets to comply with the execution notices. Many businesses began to refuse the Japanese basic services like their bank accounts, causing the Japanese who owned shops to lose their clients and customers. (Laher and Neal 9; Meller 74) The rapidity with which the Japanese had to forfeit their economic privileges demonstrates that white Americans were more keen on gathering their resources for their use to better their own lives. Whites gaining more economic opportunity enabled them to further distance themselves from the Japanese in the American economic pyramid. The notion of evacuation served as a disguise for the White Americans' true intention, which was to hamper economic gains from Japanese Americans.

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Another example of how White intentions were more simply about excluding Japanese Americans from the US economy and professions was that during the evacuation, the California government rescinded the certification of Japanese doctors and lawyers so they couldn't practice

in their field (Laher and Neal 9). The White Californian government took these measures out of fear that Japanese plunder into new professions would disenfranchise white Americans. Therefore, these new restrictions allowed white Americans to maintain their racial hierarchy. Inside the internment camps, even if the interned Japanese (Issei) displayed loyalty by answering “yes-yes” to loyalty questions and weren’t assigned to the military, they were given the chance to leave camp. However, the Issei were only given the opportunity for low-status jobs like domestics and farmhands in the East and Midwest with just \$25 and a one-way bus ride to potentially anti-Japanese areas. Also, the government instructed the Japanese not to congregate with each other in public. (Nagata et al. “Racial Trauma”). The white US government’s overall strategy was to marginalize Japanese Americans' economic opportunities, and forcing them to take low-paying or menial jobs in hostile areas to escape camp reveals this elaborate strategy. The government wasn’t concerned merely about Japanese loyalty but rather how to keep Japanese Americans at lower rungs of economic status in this process. Prohibiting interaction among Japanese Americans further hampers their ability to empirically thrive as they have less assistance, illustrating this elaborative scheme of subjugation.

Generational Socio-Economic Effects

The display of the US and their people seeking to uphold the hierarchy of white superiority over the Japanese during WW2 caused the manifestation of serious generational socio-economic effects among Japanese internment camp survivors. For instance, when the Japanese were permitted to return to the West Coast and settle, they found their once-thriving

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communities had become barren and desolate. Based on this reality, they sought to blend into

American culture with some seeking to be “110 % American” as some sought to distance themselves from psychologically identifying with the “aggressor” (Nagata et al. “Social Journal” 361). With the Japanese defecting to a more American identity, it ensured the whites would have less of a fear of a minority challenging their societal standing. The division and evaporation of Japanese identity in various communities hindered them from forming a proper cultural identity that White Americans already had. Even worse, some adult Sansei began in the 1960s and 1970s to engage in drug and gang activities and commit suicide due to their parents’s incarceration during World War II. They maintained the belief that their rights as American citizens could be violated again, and 44% saw future incarceration happening again. (Nagata 17). These lasting and damming social effects of gang-related activities reveal how the white Americans purposely knew that stripping the Japanese of potentially high socioeconomic status would cause such behavior to manifest. They wanted this behavior because it systematically kept Japanese Americans at the lower levels of society and made social mobility harder for future generations. An additional point to this claim is that because the Issei lost their homes, businesses, and potentially extremely valuable agricultural lands due to incarceration, they had to heavily rely on their children for survival. Even the Sensei generation born after World War 2 couldn’t inherit the economic gains of their parents from before the war (Nagata 11,15). The lack of socio-economic potential from the Issei and Sensei is what White Americans knew would prevent unity among this minority group, which is crucial to bringing a tightly-knit ethnic community to compete with a majority white population. The preoccupation of some Japanese recalibrating their livelihood is the essence of how white hierarchy works, as the Japanese had to

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pick up the remains after a detrimental war while Anglo-Americans mostly weren’t in that same position.

Conclusion

It's easy to look at Japanese internment during World War II and pin it on simply classic racial prejudice and wartime hysteria. However, there were clear socio-economic reasons for Anglo-Americans deciding on Japanese internment. Most importantly, this connected to how the white population and government of the US sought to strip the Japanese of this newly found progress as they believed the existing power structure of white superiority was under threat. This nuanced view explains why the US white population took drastic actions against Japanese Americans, which caused lasting socio-economic repercussions for them. This paper serves as an example for further understanding of how the intersection of white supremacy and socioeconomic progress in successful immigrant groups has continuously clashed with each other throughout US history.

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