

## Japanese Internment Primary Source Docs

### Document 1:

### **“Evacuation Was a Mistake”: Anger at Being Interned**

America fought World War II to preserve freedom and democracy, yet that same war featured the greatest suppression of civil liberties in the nation’s history. In an atmosphere of hysteria, President Roosevelt, encouraged by officials at all levels of the federal government, authorized the internment of tens of thousands of American citizens of Japanese ancestry and resident aliens from Japan. The federal government tried to monitor conditions inside the relocation camps and keep tabs on the feelings and attitudes of the internees. An interview conducted in the Manzanar, California, camp in July 1943 by a U.S. government employee with a man identified only as “an Older Nisei” (an American-born person whose parents were born in Japan) revealed the anger many internees felt toward the United States. Asserting his loyalty and his early willingness to support the war effort, the Older Nisei condemned the evacuation of Japanese Americans from the West Coast. He questioned why the government did not act similarly against citizens of German and Italian descent.

---

If this country doesn’t want me they can throw me out. What do they know about loyalty? I’m as loyal as anyone in this country. Maybe I’m as loyal as President Roosevelt. What business did they have asking me a question like that?

I was born in Hawaii. I worked most of my life on the West Coast. I have never been to Japan. We would have done anything to show our loyalty. All we wanted to do was to be left alone on the coast. . . . My wife and I lost \$10,000 in that evacuation. She had a beauty parlor and had to give that up. I had a good position worked up as a gardener, and was taken away from that. We had a little home and that’s gone now. . . .

What kind of Americanism do you call that? That’s not democracy. That’s not the American way, taking everything away from people. . . . Where are the Germans? Where are the Italians? Do they ask them questions about loyalty? . . .

Nobody had to ask us about our loyalty when we lived on the coast. You didn’t find us on relief. . . . We were first when there was any civic drive. We were first with the money for the Red Cross and the Community Chest or whatever it was. Why didn’t that kind of loyalty count? Now they’re trying to push us to the East. Its always “further inland, further inland.” I say, “To hell with it!” Either they let me go to the coast and prove my loyalty there or they can do what they want with me. If they don’t want me in this country, they can throw me out. . . .

Evacuation was a mistake, there was no need for it. The government knows this, Why don’t they have enough courage to come out and say so, so that these people won’t be pushed around? . . .

I’ve tried to cooperate. Last year I went out on furlough and worked on the best fields in Idaho. There was a contract which said that we would be brought back here at the end of the work. Instead we just sat there. . . . We had to spend our own money. The farmers won’t do anything

for you. They treat you all right while you're working hard for them but as soon as your time is up, you can starve. . . . When I got back to [Camp] Manzanar, nearly all my money that I had earned was gone. . . .

Source: Morris E. Opler, "Interview with . . . an Older Nisei," Manzanar Community Analysis Report No. 36, July 26, 1943, RG 210, National Archives.

**Document 2:**

**Excerpt from an interview with Yuri Tateishi who was interned at Manzanar, a camp near Los Angeles.**

"When we got to Manzanar, it was getting dark and we were given numbers first. We went to the mess hall and I remember the first meal we were given in those tin plates and tin cups. It was canned wieners and canned spinach. It was all the food we had, and then after finishing that we were taken to our barracks....The floors were boarded, but they were about a quarter to a half inch apart, and the next morning you could see the ground below. What hurts most I think was seeing those hay mattresses. We were used to a regular home atmosphere....You felt like a prisoner. You know, ... you had a certain amount of freedom within the camp I suppose, but...you're kept inside a barbed wire fence and you know you can't get out."



<http://www.binghamton.edu/ctah/staiger/PFVStaiger2.html>