

border. Most of the camps were in desert regions, intensely hot in summer and bitterly cold in winter. The buildings were made of wood frame and tar paper.

These barracks cities were called relocation camps or centers rather than concentration camps, and they were under the control of a civilian agency, the War Relocation Authority (WRA). The administrators of the WRA generally were able and understanding persons who wished to allow the internees the maximum of self-government that was possible under the circumstances. But the camps were essentially prisons, surrounded by tall barbed-wire fences and guarded by soldiers.

Relocation had a devastating effect on Japanese American families. The residents of the camps did their best to maintain traditional family structures, but disintegration was a constant threat. The stress hit many Japanese American women particularly hard. "Our family unit had been very strong until that time," Kimiko Kitamaya later recalled. "It broke down a little bit in the camps because the younger kids were running around and being very independent. So the family unit that we always considered as very strong, slowly disintegrated."

The evacuation was based on the argument of "military necessity," but this argument was untenable. The Japanese never contemplated an invasion of the mainland of the United States, and moreover neither General DeWitt nor any other commander ever maintained that such a landing might be attempted. As for the possibility of air raids, the Japanese lost one of their carriers in the Battle of the Coral Sea, May 4–8, 1942; in the Battle of Midway, June 4–6, they lost four more—all the carriers they could have committed to any further action in the central Pacific, let alone in the eastern Pacific. Any possibility of an air attack on the American mainland ended with the Battle of Midway. Yet the movement of Japanese American internees from the local assembly centers on the west coast to the relocation centers in the interior took place *after* that battle.

The logic behind the claim of military necessity becomes even more puzzling when the evacuation of Japanese Americans from the west coast is contrasted with the government's policy toward Italian Americans and German Americans. The United States was at war with Japan, Germany, and Italy, but only Americans of Japanese ancestry were subject to mass evacuation. Individual aliens from Germany and Italy—including some who were naturalized citizens—endured wartime internment and exclusion. But these actions affected only those aliens declared "dangerous" by various intelligence agencies. It was a small group. Out of the several hundred thousand German and Italian aliens living in the United States, about 2000 were placed in wartime internment camps and 250 naturalized citizens were ordered to move from coastal states.

The argument of military necessity appears even more contrived when one considers what happened to the Japanese Americans living in the Hawaiian Islands. Not only did thousands of them live in close proximity to military and naval installations on Oahu, but they actually worked in them and continued to do so after Pearl Harbor, simply because they formed the bulk of the skilled labor on the island and could not have been replaced for months. As an Army spokesman explained to the Honolulu press, "The shipping situation and the labor shortage make it a *military necessity* to keep most of the people of Japanese blood on the island." [The italics are added.]