

JAPANESE INTERNMENT AS AN AGRICULTURAL LABOR CRISIS:

Wartime Debates over Food Security versus Military Necessity

By Yu Tokunaga

ABSTRACT: Japanese Internment inflicted a grave injustice on Japanese immigrants and Japanese American citizens. At the same time, it resulted in the sudden loss of ethnic Japanese farmers, triggering a serious labor shortage in California, where vegetable production was an integral part of wartime food security. This article examines the economic impact of Japanese Internment on California agriculture as well as political debates over food security versus military necessity. Using state and federal government documents, records of congressional hearings, and the Japanese immigrant press in Los Angeles, this article demonstrates that Japanese Internment prompted voices sympathetic to ethnic Japanese farmers to question the necessity of the full-scale implementation of mass evacuation and also led to a growing demand for Mexican farmworkers who would come through the Bracero Program. Consideration of these processes helps us to better understand the Japanese Internment as not solely about race but about economics in wartime, multiethnic California.

Keywords: Japanese Internment; food security; agriculture, California; World War II food production; Bracero Program

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In March 1942, the *Los Angeles Times* ran an article with the headline “Network of Japanese Farms Covers Vital Southland Defense Areas” and a map made by Los Angeles County authorities. The map shows in black the locations of Japanese agricultural settlements in order to sound the alarm on the alleged internal Japanese military threat following the Pearl Harbor attack. As the map’s caption states, “Depicting how Japanese landholdings are spaced throughout the Los Angeles County area in a manner to permit disastrous assaults on every military objective,” it reflects the alarm and suspicion among local authorities toward Japanese farmers, many of whom lived near the militarily important areas of Los Angeles County such as “dams, oil refineries and tank farms, bridges, aircraft plants and other defense factories,” unlike their fellow co-ethnics living in the downtown Little Tokyo.¹

Japanese Internment marked a key moment in U.S. racial history by inflicting a grave injustice on Japanese immigrants and Japanese American citizens. Previous studies of Japanese Internment have meticulously studied the decision-making processes that led to the forced removal of the ethnic Japanese (*Nikkei*) population in the contexts of anti-Japanese racism, wartime hysteria, and political tension among different governmental agencies.² From the agricultural

1. “Map Reveals Jap Menace,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 1942; “Network of Japanese Farms Covers Vital Southland Defense Areas,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 1942. The *Times* identified the source of the map: “Information compiled by County Agricultural Commissioner Harold J. Ryan and County Assessor John R. Quinn was consolidated into the master map. Working with these two men were County Surveyor Alfred Jones and Dist. Atty. John F. Dockweiler.” And the newspaper explained the additions to the map: “Times Staff Artist Charles H. Owens shows, in black, the approximate location of the many plots of land, either owned by or leased by Japs.” It is worth noting that the map gives an exaggerated impression that Japanese were densely populated in the Palos Verdes Peninsula, the militarily important southwestern coastal area of Los Angeles County although in reality only about fifty Japanese families lived there at the time. In 1929, about forty-five Japanese farming families lived in the Palos Verdes Peninsula area. Their population in 1940 was likely to be very similar to that of 1929 because the ethnic Japanese population did not significantly increase from 1930 to 1940, largely due to the Immigration Act of 1924. See Minami Kashū Nihonjin Shichijūnenshi Kankō Inkai (Publishing Committee of Japanese in Southern California: A History of 70 Years), ed., *Minami Kashū Nihonjin Shichijūnenshi* (Japanese in Southern California: A History of 70 Years) (Los Angeles, 1960), 59 (hereafter as *Minami Kashū Nihonjin Shichijūnenshi*); U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population* (Washington, D.C., 1943), Table 4, “Race by Nativity and Sex for the State: 1850 to 1940,” 516.
2. Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, *Personal Justice Denied* (1982; repr., Washington, DC: Civil Liberties Public Education Fund and University of Washington Press, 1997), Summary, 18. As for the decision-making process of Japanese Internment, see Morton Grodzins, *Americans Betrayed: Politics and the Japanese Evacuation* (1949; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Jacobus tenBroek, Edward N. Barnhart, and Floyd W. Matson, *Prejudice, War and the*

Network of Japanese Farms Covers Vital Southland Defense Areas



“Map Reveals Jap Menace,” blazoned a March 4, 1942, headline in the *Los Angeles Times*. It was accompanied by a map indicating that Japanese farms were located suspiciously near strategic oil fields, defense industries, and the harbor. Charles Owen, *Los Angeles Times*. Copyright 1942. *Los Angeles Times*. Reprinted with permission.

perspective, however, internment resulted in the sudden loss of Japanese farmers, triggering a serious labor shortage in California, where vegetable production was an integral part of wartime food security.³ The ethnic Japanese in California were economically very important

Constitution: Causes and Consequences of the Evacuation of the Japanese Americans in World War II (1954; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970); Roger Daniels, *The Decision to Relocate the Japanese Americans* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1975); Greg Robinson, *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Brian Masaru Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy: The Japanese American Internment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Alice Yang Murray, *Historical Memories of the Japanese American Internment and the Struggle for Redress* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Lon Kurashige, *Two Faces of Exclusion: The Untold History of Anti-Asian Racism in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

3. As for the impact of Japanese Internment on non-Japanese minorities, see Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 161–69; R. J. Smith, *The Great Black Way: L.A. in the 1940s and the Lost African-American Renaissance* (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), 139–53; Greg Robinson, *After Camp: Portraits in Midcentury Japanese American Life and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 105–22; Allison Varzally, *Making a Non-White America: Californians Coloring outside Ethnic Lines, 1925–1955* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 122–23. Also see George J. Sánchez, “Disposable People, Expendable Neighborhoods,” in *A Companion to Los Angeles*, eds. William Deverell and Greg Hise (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 129–46.

just like their co-ethnics in Hawai'i who were not interned because of their economic importance in the islands.⁴ This article examines the economic impact of Japanese Internment on California agriculture and political debates over food security versus military necessity by highlighting the reactions of California's farming communities, the federal government, the California state government, particularly California Governor Culbert Olson, and the attitudes of Japanese immigrants living in Los Angeles to such debates before the implementation of the mass removal.

This article consists of three sections. The first section looks at how local officials of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and California Governor Olson attempted to keep the ethnic Japanese within the border of the state of California, portraying them as important contributors of labor and as trustworthy people. The second section explores how Olson continued to hold his idea of using Nikkei agricultural workers on California farms despite growing anti-Japanese hysteria, as well as how ethnic Japanese residents in Los Angeles reacted to Olson's position. The final section discusses the linkage between Japanese Internment and the Bracero Program by looking at how the importation of Mexican workers emerged as a potential solution for the loss of ethnic Japanese agricultural labor in California. By explaining these processes based on state and federal government documents, records of congressional hearings, and the Japanese immigrant press in Los Angeles, this article demonstrates that Japanese Internment prompted voices sympathetic to the ethnic Japanese population that questioned the necessity of the racist and full-scale implementation of mass evacuation and eventually led to a growing demand for Mexican farmworkers, while generating a serious labor crisis that would endanger wartime food security.

Food security is often an overlooked subject in the study of Japanese Internment, as its legal and military aspects tend to be

4. It is generally explained that the ethnic Japanese in Hawai'i were not interned because of their economic importance in the islands. For example, see Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 127. While acknowledging the importance of ethnic Japanese workers in wartime Hawai'i, Akihiro Yamakura argues that Japanese Internment on the mainland and the military rule of Hawai'i during World War II were "essentially the same in terms of the vigilance against the ethnic Japanese and the intention to contain them." Akihiro Yamakura, *Shiminteki Jiyū: Amerika Nikkeijin Senji Kyōsei Shūyō no Rīgaru Hisutorī* (Civil Liberties: A Legal History of the Wartime Incarceration of the People of Japanese Ancestry in America) (Tokyo: Sairyusha, 2011), 120.

foregrounded. By looking at the Japanese Internment from an agricultural perspective, we can deepen our historical understanding of this tragedy through the lens of interethnic relations that takes into account, for example, the resistance of white leaders such as Olson to full-scale internment and the substitution of Mexican workers provided to replace Japanese farmers. Consideration of these understudied realities may shift the narrative of Japanese Internment from an almost exclusive focus on the ethnic Japanese population to inclusion of non-Japanese populations who also experienced the impact of Japanese Internment. Seen from this perspective, Japanese Internment is not simply an ethnic Japanese experience but rather an integral part of the racial and economic history of California, a region characterized by a uniquely diverse population and economy.⁵

JAPANESE AGRICULTURE IN WARTIME CALIFORNIA

After Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the U.S. government declared war on Japan and thus Japanese immigrants became enemy aliens in the United States. After ten weeks, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 providing a legal basis for the mass removal of Japanese immigrants (*Issei*) and Americans of Japanese ancestry (U.S.-born citizens) from the Pacific Coast of the mainland United States. As far as agriculture was concerned, U.S. agricultural officials faced two contradictory tasks created by the Pearl Harbor attack: keeping Japanese farms operational for the Food-for-Freedom program while also removing the Japanese from their farms. Eventually, the War Department and USDA reached a compromise by keeping Japanese farms functioning but without the Japanese. However, before putting this compromise into action, local USDA officials in California had to handle a messy situation caused by the Treasury Department's freezing of Japanese bank accounts immediately following the Pearl Harbor

5. The history of Japanese Internment can be better understood in the context of transpacific history as it is interwoven with the history of Mexican immigrants particularly in California. Lon Kurashige, Madeline Y. Hsu, and Yujin Yaguchi argue that the emerging field of transpacific history sees people's struggles within and around the Pacific Ocean "as not simply national problems, but as articulations of transpacific processes and circumstances that have produced new relationships and modes of explanation." Lon Kurashige, Madeline Y. Hsu, and Yujin Yaguchi, "Introduction: Conversations on Transpacific History," *Pacific Historical Review* 83, no.2 (May, 2014): 187-88.

attack.⁶ Around that time, Japanese farmers produced from 35 to 50 percent of the vegetables grown in California, and California's vegetable harvest constituted between one- to two-thirds of the country's vegetable production. About five thousand ethnic Japanese farmers operated 175,000 acres of California farmland, constituting more than half of the total California farmland devoted to vegetables.⁷ In Los Angeles County, the number of Japanese-operated farms increased from 531 in 1910 to 1,523 in 1940 operating 28,670 acres.⁸ This article focuses mainly on Nikkei farmers in Los Angeles because Los Angeles County was the largest concentration of ethnic Japanese residents in the mainland United States. In 1940, their population was 36,866, representing 39 percent of the Japanese population in California and, more importantly, 29 percent of the entire Japanese population in the mainland United States. In Los Angeles County, about 28 percent of the total 17,005 employed ethnic Japanese were engaged in agriculture and about 90 percent of Japanese farmers were tenants. Ethnic Japanese farmers dominated the county's production of at least seventeen crops, including celery, peas, spinach, beets, broccoli, radishes, peppers, snap beans, strawberries, cauliflower, and lettuce.⁹

The Treasury Department's action to freeze Japanese immigrants' bank accounts halted the distribution of Japanese-grown vegetables and forced three major produce markets on Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Streets in Downtown Los Angeles to suspend their operation. On December 8, about two hundred people—Japanese, Chinese, and white Americans—working at these markets held a joint meeting about the wartime emergency and affirmed the necessity of resuming

6. "Accounts 'Frozen,'" *Rafu Shimpō* (English edition), December 9, 1942.

7. Laurence I. Hewes, Jr., Regional Director of the Farm Security Administration, to District Officers and Field Agents of the Wartime Farm Adjustment Program of the Farm Security Administration, March 15, 1942, Carton 2, W. R. Ralston Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (hereafter as Ralston Papers); U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration, National Defense Migration: Hearings before the Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration, 77th Cong., 2nd session, March 6, 7, and 12, 1942 (hereafter as Tolan Committee), 11658; *Minami Kashū Nihonjin Shichijūnenshi*, 58.

8. Masakazu Iwata, *Planted in Good Soil: A History of the Issei in United States Agriculture*, 2 vols (New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 1992), 1:294; Leonard Broom and Ruth Piemer, *Removal and Return: The Socio-Economic Effects of the War on Japanese Americans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949), 74.

9. U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population* (Washington, D.C., 1943), Table 4, "Race, by Nativity and Sex, for the United States: 1850 to 1940," Table 4, "Race, by Nativity and Sex, for the State: 1850 to 1940," and Table 25, "Indians, Chinese, and Japanese by Sex, for Counties, and for Cities of 10,000 to 100,000," 19, 516, 567; Broom and Piemer, *Removal and Return*, 13, 74, 85.



A 1927 photograph of the Los Angeles Wholesale Terminal produce market, on the right, built in 1918 along the rail line for shipping produce to out-of-state customers. *Herald Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library, 00032658.*

their market operation based on the understanding that the suspension of vegetable distribution would cause a serious inconvenience for consumers living in Los Angeles County and other neighboring counties. Issei merchants decided to hand over their stored vegetables to the companies run by white American or Japanese American merchants so that they could prevent the vegetables from going rotten.¹⁰ In Downtown Los Angeles, the Treasury Department's action made Japanese immigrants feel uneasy about their assets as many "rushed into" a bank to withdraw money only to find out that the bank allowed only Nisei, U.S.-born children of Japanese immigrants, with birth certificates to withdraw money. Like the produce markets, most Japanese-operated shops in Little Tokyo were closed because "banking transactions by Issei were prohibited." Although the *Rafu Shimpō*, a major Japanese immigrant newspaper, expected the U.S. government to alleviate the restriction on behalf of "bona fide Issei," the immediate reaction of the Treasury Department to the Pearl

10. "San Nōsan Shijō no Nichi-Bei-Shi Jin ga Taisaku Kyōgi" (Japanese, Americans, Chinese of the Three Produce Markets Hold a Meeting to Discuss Measures), *Rafu Shimpō*, December 10, 1941.

Harbor attack certainly created a financial crisis in the daily lives of ethnic Japanese residents in Los Angeles County.¹¹

This situation, which unfolded right after the Pearl Harbor attack, was troubling not only for Japanese farmers and merchants but also for the USDA because it could jeopardize wartime food security. During World War II, the USDA promoted the Food-for-Freedom program that sought to increase food production as a home front war effort against the Axis Powers. In a program pamphlet published in November 1942, Secretary of Agriculture Claude R. Wickard explained, “Our farm recourses must be used toward but one end—Victory” and “Not only must we keep our own soldiers strong physically by producing the food they need, but we must back them up in another way by keeping workers in our war factories well fed.”¹² Local officials of the USDA took the suspension of Japanese agriculture seriously because it could impede their wartime efforts under the Food-for-Freedom policy. On December 10, Dave Davidson, Chairman of the California USDA Defense Board, sent a letter to representatives of County Defense Boards, warning, “All resources of alien Japanese are frozen. This is creating a serious problem in the Food-for-Freedom program in areas where alien Japanese are employed.” The State and County Defense Boards were established by the USDA in July 1941 and later changed to War Boards in January 1942. Their goal was to “help farmers produce commodities needed in the war” in cooperation with other war agencies in the field. Davidson asked the county representatives to make sure that “[e]mployers . . . be advised verbally not to hire other labor to replace alien Japanese.” It was most likely because white landowners would possibly terminate contracts with Japanese farmers and hire non-Japanese workers as their new tenants if the Japanese could not pay for land lease, given the situation that “all payments by check and cash to enemy aliens is stopped.” Davidson also informed them that the Treasury Department was about to modify their anti-Japanese measure regarding Japanese assets. In his correspondence, Davidson showed no prejudice or antipathy against the Japanese but instead stressed that

11. “Senjika no Shō Tōkyō, Hotondo Zenbu Heiten, Issei no Ginkō Yokin Hikidashi Kinshi” (Little Tokyo in the Wartime, Almost All Closed, Banking Transactions by Issei Are Prohibited), *Rafu Shimpo*, December 10, 1941.

12. U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Food for Freedom: Informational Handbook* 1943, November 1942, 3, accessed October 9, 2018, <https://archive.org/details/foodforfreedom14unit>.

“Japanese should not be disturbed as to their safety.”¹³ In Davidson’s understanding, the suspension on Japanese immigrants’ economic activities generated concerns not only about the Food-for-Freedom program but also about the socioeconomic safety of ethnic Japanese residents.

On the next day, the Treasury Department decided to partially unfreeze Japanese assets so that the immigrants could sustain a minimum level of living. With this modification, the Treasury Department approved Japanese immigrant withdrawals up to \$100 (approximately \$1,660 in 2017 dollars) per month by showing a notarized affidavit to designated banks.¹⁴ Yet, this measure did not restore the normal operation of Japanese agriculture because Japanese farmers were still unable to receive payment for their produce directly from merchants at wholesale markets. The Central Industrial Association of Southern California (*Nanka Chuō Sangyō Kumiai*), an ethnic Japanese organization consisting of both producers and merchants to adjust shipping and control market prices of their produce, claimed, “Due to the outbreak of war between Japan and the United States, Japanese *Issei* are not able to receive payment for their produce so . . . they could not make their living . . . This is a serious problem in terms of national defense. In time of war, the shortage of food, particularly fresh vegetables, will affect the spirit of soldiers in the war front and that of people in the home front.”¹⁵ Before the Pearl Harbor attack, it was not uncommon for Japanese immigrants to express their national and racial pride for Japan, directly or indirectly supporting Japanese imperialism. After the attack, in contrast, they found themselves in an emergency situation in which they needed to explain that Japanese agriculture was an important part of the war effort of the United States to fight *against* Japanese imperialism.¹⁶ The sudden shift of the

13. Dave Davidson, Chairman of the California USDA Defense Board, to Chairmen of USDA County Defense Boards, December 10, 1941, Carton 2, Ralston Papers; U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Food for Freedom*, 36.

14. “Nihonjin wa Yokin wo Hyaku Doru made Hikidaseru” (Japanese Allowed to Withdraw up to \$100), *Rafu Shimpō*, December 12, 1941. I have used MeasuringWorth.com to convert the monetary value of the 1940s into that of 2017. See MeasuringWorth.com, online at <http://www.measuringworth.com>, accessed October 26, 2018.

15. “Nihonjin wa Shukka Seyo” (The Japanese Need to Ship), *Rafu Shimpō*, December 12, 1941; *Minami Kashū Nihonjin Shichijūnenshi*, 59.

16. As for prewar Japanese immigrant nationalism, see Yuji Ichioka, *Before Internment: Essays in Prewar Japanese American History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), Ch.8.

immigrants' attitude towards Japanese imperialism was a necessary means for them to survive in the wartime political environment.

Meanwhile, the Treasury Department came to understand the importance of Japanese agriculture in the West Coast economy and the necessity of letting money flow between Japanese farmers and the Los Angeles wholesale markets. Under government control, Japanese farmers were allowed to receive payment for their produce from the banks designated by the government but required to bring bills to prove their expenses for growing their crops in order to receive the payment. On December 13, Japanese farmers resumed shipping operations for their vegetables. Yet some farmers were reluctant to ship their vegetables because they were not able to receive the cash payment directly from merchants at the markets. The *Rafu Shimpō* warned that reluctance to ship vegetables could be seen as an act of sabotage and encouraged farmers to ship as many as possible "in line with the national defense policy." With Japanese assets partially unfrozen, Japanese shops in Little Tokyo such as grocery stores, restaurants, and barber shops began to reopen, advertising the end-of-year sales.¹⁷

Nevertheless, the USDA was still concerned about whether unfreezing the Japanese assets would really restore the living and working conditions of Japanese farmers. In late December, P. A. Mingos, a specialist on truck crops at the California Extension Service of the USDA, conducted a survey of ethnic Japanese farmers between December 19 and 24. Mingos collected information from eleven California counties: Yolo, Fresno, Tulare, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, Imperial, Orange, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Monterey, by working with local farm advisors and conducting interviews with people who knew Japanese farming conditions well and, in some cases, with Japanese farmers in person. Mingos wanted to find out if Japanese farmers could resume shipping after December 15 and if they were willing to stay in their business and continue farming in the coming years as usual. According to his survey, "Practically all Japanese farmers indicate that they are going ahead with present

17. "Nōsan Shijō Narabini Haikyū wa Heijō no Kinō ni Fukusu" (Produce Markets and Distribution Recovered to Normal), *Rafu Shimpō*, December 12, 1941; "Nihonjin wa Shukka Seyo," *Rafu Shimpō*, December 12, 1941; "Sā Yasai ga Kita" (Vegetables Have Come), *Rafu Shimpō*, December 13, 1941; "Mise mo Hiraite Shō Tōkyō Kakkizuku" (Shops Open, Little Tokyo Revitalized), *Rafu Shimpō*, December 13, 1941.



Japanese-operated farms on owned or leased land produced a significant portion of California's agricultural output and American consumers' fruit and vegetables. In addition, Japanese farm laborers working for hire were also important contributors to agricultural production. Top: A Japanese family and workers pose proudly in their strawberry field in the Imperial Valley, California, ca. 1930. *Photo by Leo Hetzel.*

Courtesy of the Imperial County Historical Society/Pioneers' Park Museum. Bottom: Japanese farm workers harvesting carrots, one of a series of undated photos taken before World War II near today's Marina del Rey. *Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library, 00063741.*

crops and are planning to continue in the future as usual.” Some farmers had already signed contracts for larger acreages for the next year. Yet, Minges observed that “the Japanese realize they are on the spot and their optimistic outlook may not be entirely sincere,” assuming that Japanese farmers had signed new contracts to prevent landowners from replacing them with American farmers who “are anxious to get control of the land now operated by Japanese.”¹⁸

While appreciating the likelihood that unfreezing Japanese assets “greatly benefitted the truck crop growers,” Minges identified four problems that Japanese farmers could face. First, Japanese-operated banks were still closed, preventing money saved in those banks from flowing for Japanese agriculture, while American banks would likely stop making loans to Japanese farmers due to increasing public antagonism toward them. Second, non-Japanese farmworkers began to refuse to work for the Japanese. Minges mentioned particularly that “Filipinos have definitely quit [on] the Japanese. In some sections, other races have also refused to work for the Japanese.” Minges carefully observed that “Japanese farmers may be able to obtain more Japanese labor than usual, because many Japanese are losing their jobs in town and will therefore be available for farm work,” although this situation would depend on “public opinion and on the progress of the war.” Third, white landowners might remove Japanese farmers who used the names of their U.S.-born children to lease lands, despite the fact that it had long been practiced by Japanese farmers and tacitly approved by white landowners, agribusiness leaders, and local governments. War hysteria could easily turn such a practice into an evidence of the dishonesty of Japanese farmers as “in some sections there apparently is much agitation for landowners to do this very thing [to remove Japanese tenants].” In his survey, Minges maintained, “there is nothing to prevent landowners to refuse to lease land to American-born Japanese . . . Since 90 to 95 per cent of the land operated by Japanese is leased, the refusal of landowners to renew leases could be serious.” In this regard, the situation had already become serious in Salinas and the Imperial Valley. He suggested that “one solution for this situation may be for Americans to take over the land and then to hire the replaced Japanese [tenant farmers] as farm

18. P. A. Minges, “Report on the Effects of the Japanese War on the Japanese Alien and Native-born Vegetable Growers of California,” December 29, 1941, Carton 2, Ralston Papers.

laborers.”¹⁹ Even if landowners cancelled lease contracts with Japanese tenants, Mingos felt that it was important to guarantee the employment of Japanese immigrants. Similar to how Davidson stressed the need for their economic security, Mingos was also concerned with how to maintain the economic safety of Japanese farmers in the heightened racial climate of the weeks following the Pearl Harbor bombing.

Finally, Mingos pointed out that the fundamental problem was anti-Japanese sentiment, which was particularly strong in the areas where Japanese farmers dominated the production and distribution of vegetables. Mingos also mentioned that some informants “expressed the opinion that the Japanese may attempt to sabotage their crops” to support Japan’s war effort. However, he simply dismissed such a claim, arguing, “Such an occurrence [of sabotage] is to be doubted on the grounds that most Japanese are interested in self-preservation and money, and are not likely to jeopardize their own well-being or their pocketbook.” He also expressed concern that “[s]ome rumors are around that this discrimination [against the Japanese] is already occurring and that it may become a serious problem with the shipment to the eastern United States.”²⁰ Japanese immigrants had been legally regarded as aliens and were politically categorized as enemies of the United States due to the outbreak of war. Nevertheless, they were also important participants in California society due to their economic impact as resident farmers. Mingos did not overlook this socioeconomic aspect of Japanese farmers. His survey demonstrated the importance of Japanese agriculture in California and a hands-on understanding of Japanese farmers as a group of permanent residents who had long been working hard to make their

19. Ibid. As for Japanese-Filipino relations in Stockton, see Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 187–207. The California Alien Land Laws of 1913 and 1920 prohibited the Japanese from purchasing and leasing land on the basis that they were aliens ineligible for naturalization. After the enactment of the Alien Land Laws, Japanese farmers began to lease lands under the names of their children who were U.S. citizens. See Noritaka Yagasaki, *Imin Nōgyō: Kariforunia no Nihonjin Imin Shakai* (Immigrant Agriculture: The Japanese Immigrant Society in California) (Tokyo: Kokonshoin, 1993), 51–53.

20. P. A. Mingos, “Report on the Effects of the Japanese War on the Japanese Alien and Native-born Vegetable Growers of California,” December 29, 1941, Carton 2, Ralston Papers. Mingos also critically argued that the freezing and “the speedy work in unblocking Japanese assets may have created the impression in the East that most of California vegetables are produced by Japanese,” which could result in a boycott of Japanese vegetables that would help the competitors in other states “seize this opportunity to cut in on California produce.”

living in California. From this perspective, sabotage was the last thing they would do because they did not want to jeopardize their “pocketbook,” let alone the national security of the United States.

Minges’s observation was also correct because Japanese immigrants were well aware that any suspicious activities would do great harm to the entire ethnic Japanese community. The day after the Pearl Harbor attack, the *Rafu Shimpo* issued two breaking-news extras but voluntarily refrained from publishing the daily issue, considering it necessary to discuss with the U.S. government about how to continue their business before resuming their daily operation. The next day, on December 9, the immigrant press issued only the English edition, mainly for English-speaking Nisei readers, and made clear their loyalty to the United States with a large headline on the bottom of the front page “We Are 100 Percent for The United States.” After consulting with the federal government, the *Rafu Shimpo* resumed its main Japanese edition on December 10, in which it posted a “warning to fellow Japanese in the United States.” The message stressed that Japanese immigrants should understand their position as “*eijūsha* [permanent residents] who have moved and settled in the United States and benefit from living under the U.S. Constitution” exhorting them to demonstrate “one hundred percent” cooperation with the U.S. government. On the next day, another message from the *Rafu Shimpo*, in a tone that was both careful but emotional, expressed alarm that “even if only one individual makes a rash action, that will throw all Japanese residents in the United States into the jaws of death and bring indescribably serious troubles to the whole Japanese immigrant society.”²¹ When the U.S. government prohibited Japanese immigration in 1924, the *Rafu Shimpo* had indirectly but openly criticized the United States on the front page by quoting Japanese newspapers that said, for example, “Americans are stupid people” or “We have learned the barbarity of Americans.” However, in 1941, the immigrant press recognized the need for greater caution. The *Rafu Shimpo* explained that they were able to resume publication just because they lived in “the United States, a democratic country that secures the freedom of speech and publication.” Yet there was no

21. “We are 100 Percent for the United States,” *Rafu Shimpo* (English edition), December 9, 1941; “Zaibei Dōhō Shoshi e Keikoku” (Warning for Fellow Japanese in the United States), *Rafu Shimpo*, December 10, 1941; “Minasama eno Gochūi” (Warning to All), *Rafu Shimpo*, December 11, 1941; “Minasama eno Onegai” (Request to All), *Rafu Shimpo*, December 13, 1941

room for the ethnic Japanese community or its newspapers to exercise such freedom of speech.²² Japanese immigrants knew that sabotage or any suspicious activity could seriously jeopardize not only their financial survival but also their very existence in California.

While the U.S. government arrested 924 Japanese leaders in the mainland United States (and 367 in Hawai'i) in the three days following the Pearl Harbor attack, political pressure against Japanese farmers became increasingly heavy. Just as Minges anticipated, in January 1942, the California Senate unanimously adopted a resolution to "investigate any and all possible evasions of the Alien Land Laws and to prosecute to the utmost . . . any violations," clearly targeting Japanese immigrant farmers. Congressman Leland Ford of Los Angeles saw the whole ethnic Japanese community as a group of enemies and demanded an even more aggressive measure against them. In his letter to the Secretaries of War and Navy as well as the FBI Director, Ford claimed that "all Japanese, whether citizens or not, be placed in inland concentration camps."²³ Such a mass evacuation of ethnic Japanese residents could mean the sudden disappearance of Japanese farmers that could imperil wartime food security, since Japanese farmers had been an integral and indispensable part of California agriculture. Along with the intensification of anti-Japanese sentiment, prominent leaders of the state and federal governments would soon join the political debates over food security versus military necessity.

One of those leaders was California Governor Culbert Olson. His actions show us a significant point of analysis in problematizing the political and economic dialogue that led to the mass removal of ethnic Japanese farmers. In the midst of intense anti-Japanese public sentiment, Olson neither strongly protested nor enthusiastically supported a policy of mass evacuation but took a more nuanced attitude. He was concerned with the intrinsic well-being of the ethnic Japanese community in California and aware of the negative impact that Japanese evacuation would wreak on the California economy. Five days after the Pearl Harbor attack, Olson sent a message to Japanese American citizens urging them to support the U.S. government

22. "Nihon Kankei Denpō" (Telegrams Related to Japan), *Rafu Shimpō*, June 25, 1924; "Minasama eno Onegai," *Rafu Shimpō*, December 13, 1941.

23. *Personal Justice Denied*, 54–55, 70; tenBroek, et al, *Prejudice, War, and the Constitution*, 76–77.

and continue working hard in any kind of production.²⁴ Many Nisei were engaged in agriculture. In Los Angeles County, 1,895 U.S.-born Japanese Americans, 26 percent of the total employed U.S.-born Japanese Americans in the region, were farmers, farm managers, or farmworkers.²⁵ Regarding Issei and other enemy aliens, on January 28, 1942, Olson issued a proclamation pursuant to the proclamation issued by President Roosevelt on January 14, which required all Japanese, German, and Italian aliens fourteen years of age or over to have identification certificates and register for identification, so that the state government could keep them under surveillance.²⁶

At the same time, Olson developed an original plan that weighed the importance of Japanese agricultural labor for both the California economy and national food security. The governor's plan, which historian Roger Daniels calls the "California plan," was to relocate but still keep Japanese agricultural labor within the borders of the state of California, which Olson believed could solve both military and economic problems related to the Nikkei population.²⁷ On February 2, Olson met with General John DeWitt of the Western Defense Command, Assistant Attorney General Thomas B. Clark, USDA official J. M. Thompson, and Adjutant General J. O. Donovan of the California State Guard to discuss "particularly this problem of the Japanese population" and develop "plans for protection against any menace to defense and civilian safety from the large population of Japanese within our borders." Two days later, Olson gave a radio speech in which he talked about the California plan discussed in the meeting. To the people of California, he explained that "general plans were agreed upon for the movement and placement of the entire adult Japanese population in California at productive and useful employment, within the borders of our State, and under such surveillance and protection for themselves. . . . Such plans, we believe, are the most feasible for meeting this problem, both from the standpoint of State and national defense and from the standpoint of fairness to the

24. "Oruson Shū Chiji Nikkei Shimin ni Yōbō" (Governor Olson's Demand for Japanese American Citizens), *Rafu Shimpō*, December 13, 1941.

25. Broom and Piemer, *Removal and Return*, 13.

26. Culbert Olson, "Defense," January 28, 1942, Carton 5, Culbert L. Olson Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (hereafter as Olson Papers). As for the presidential proclamation issued on January 14, 1942, see "Western Alien Register First," *Los Angeles Times*, January 16, 1942.

27. As for the California plan, see Daniels, *The Decision to Relocate the Japanese Americans*, 36–39.

Japanese people themselves.” While touching upon “the possibility of sabotage and organized fifth column Japanese activities,” Olson clearly stated that “[t]o lose the benefit of this Japanese labor in agricultural production would be a serious loss to our war economy.”²⁸ While California’s location on the Pacific Coast made it vulnerable to the Japanese Empire, the removal of Japanese immigrants could be a great risk to the food security at the home front.

Olson’s radio speech—publicly acknowledging the importance of Japanese agriculture and not calling for relocation to inland areas outside of California—was favorably received by Japanese immigrants. On February 5, the *Rafu Shimpō* covered Olson’s radio speech about the California plan. On the next day, the immigrant press highlighted Olson’s position in an article entitled “Governor Olson opposes the evacuation of Japanese to inland areas, considerable influence on the food problem,” reporting that Olson explained that the loss of Japanese farmers meant “a serious loss to our war economy.”²⁹ On the same day, Olson invited Nisei representatives of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) and the ethnic Japanese media to his State Capitol office in Sacramento, where he spent two hours explaining to them how the state government would handle the situation of ethnic Japanese residents. Attending the meeting were three writers of the *Rafu Shimpō* including Akira Komai, the eldest son of Toyosaku Komai, the president of the *Rafu Shimpō*, who had been arrested by the FBI after the Pearl Harbor attack. Olson told them that it was difficult to distinguish the loyal from the disloyal among Japanese immigrants, which “makes it embarrassing for loyal American Japanese, and it might have more tragedy if there is indiscriminate treatment of all persons of the Japanese race.” He added that he had learned of the presence of Japanese engaged in sabotage or fifth column activities through his communication with DeWitt and other federal government officials. While acknowledging that the ethnic Japanese were “law abiding” and “industrious,” Olson demanded that both Issei and Nisei

28. Culbert Olson, “National Defense,” before the 17th District American Legion, Los Angeles, February 20, 1942, Carton 5, Olson Papers.

29. “Kashū Nihonjin no Torishimari ni” (Regarding the Control of the Japanese in California), *Rafu Shimpō*, February 5, 1942; “Okuchi eno Nihonjin Tachinoki, Oruson Chiji Hantai” (Governor Olson Opposes the Removal of the Japanese to Inland Areas), *Rafu Shimpō*, February 6, 1942.

support the U.S. war effort by voluntarily leaving the militarily important areas designated by the War Department.³⁰

However, Olson explained the state's middle position to the Nisei leaders in a careful manner. According to the *Rafu Shimpo's* report in its English edition on their meeting with Olson, he gave a more nuanced explanation. Olson told them to be ready to leave the militarily important areas, "EVEN THOUGH YOU AND I MIGHT BE SURE THAT THERE WOULDN'T BE ONE JAPANESE IN THAT AREA WHO WOULD BE DISLOYAL" because "[t]here would still be suspicion in the minds of the people in that area." The *Rafu Shimpo* emphasized Olson's explanation in capital letters emphasizing its importance for the ethnic Japanese community. Regarding where Japanese evacuees would go, Olson told them, "There will definitely be movement to places where the Japanese can be employed in producing goods and engaging in other activities OUTSIDE the combat areas."³¹ Although the *Rafu Shimpo's* description of what Olson said might not be completely the same as what he actually said, it did not change the significant fact that Olson took time to meet with the Nisei leaders in person to discuss the wartime situation. What is even more significant is that Olson did not treat all the Japanese as a faceless group of an enemy race and that he suggested a possibility of employment "outside the combat areas," which actually meant "somewhere in California outside the combat areas" in line with Olson's California plan.

The USDA was a proponent of the California plan.³² On the same day Olson discussed the California plan with General DeWitt, Roscoe E. Bell, secretary of the California Agricultural (Land Use)

30. "Olson Kashū Chiji Issei Nisei no Kyōryoku wo Yōbō" (California Governor Olson Demands Cooperation of Issei and Nisei), *Rafu Shimpo*, February 7, 1942; "State Attitude Outlined by Olson at Confab," *Rafu Shimpo* (English edition), February 7, 1942. As for Akira Komai, see Chris Komai, "Revival: Rafu Shimpo," Discover Nikkei, March 7, 2014, online at <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2014/3/7/revival-rafu-shimpo>, accessed October 10, 2018. The militarily important areas to which Olson was referring were not the Military Areas No. 1 and No. 2 designated after Executive Order 9066. As of February 5, for instance in Los Angeles County, these military areas were far smaller than the so-called Military Areas. The map of Military Areas delineated after the Executive Order 9066 appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* in March 1942. See "Army Lists Areas Barred to Aliens," *Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 1942.

31. "State Attitude Outlined by Olson at Confab," *Rafu Shimpo* (English edition), February 7, 1942.

32. Daniels, *The Decision to Relocate the Japanese Americans*, 37. The Associated Farmers, a farmers' organization with which Japanese farmers cooperated in order to break the Venice Celery strike in 1936, was also a proponent of the use of Japanese labor within California under the supervision of the government authorities. See Grodzins, *Americans Betrayed*, 32–34.

Planning Committee of the USDA Bureau of Agricultural Economics, sent a letter to its local representatives of the County Farm Labor Subcommittees in California about “the possibilities of using enemy alien evacuees.” The USDA letter asked its local representatives four questions: (1) “Which of the three nationalities (Japanese, Italians, and Germans) are now members of your communities in sufficient numbers so that immigration of evacuees would not cause serious problems?”; (2) “Are there any possibilities of housing these individuals with people now resident in the community?”; (3) “Can you rally public support for an evacuation of enemy aliens into certain areas in your county?”; and (4) “What is your estimate of the number of people that could be handled by the various communities in your county?” The USDA bureau described the use of enemy alien labor as a war effort that agricultural communities could make, explaining that “an opportunity is provided for certain areas to build up a local reservoir of labor required to harvest the agricultural crops so vitally needed for defense.” Furthermore, he counseled, they had to recognize “the need for increased food production and the utilization of all available sources of labor in that production.” In addition, the letters gave the impression that the California plan had already been in progress with support from other government agencies, as they advised, “It is important, also, to emphasize that the FBI will have investigated the aliens and that they will be under observation.”³³

By February 7, 1942, Bell had hastily collected the answers from the representatives of twenty-five counties: Lassen, Tehama, Glenn, Butte, Yuba, Sutter, Colusa, Sacramento, Yolo, Solano, Placer, El Dorado, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare, Kern, Lake, San Benito, San Bernardino, Riverside, and Imperial. Bell created a report based on the survey and, on February 11, sent it to the California USDA War Board. According to the report, the county representatives in general showed “[a] willingness on the part of local people to cooperate with the Federal Government in any evacuation plans undertaken.” Regarding Japanese enemy aliens, the report explained that “[i]n a few counties there was very strong anti-Japanese feeling” and that “[t]he anti-Japanese sentiment was stronger than the anti-Italian and anti-German sentiment.” For

33. Roscoe E. Bell, Secretary of the California Agricultural (Land Use) Planning Committee of the USDA Bureau of Agricultural Economics, to Chairmen of County Farm Labor Subcommittees, February 2, 1942, Carton 2, Ralston Papers.

example, counties in Southern California such as San Bernardino, Riverside, and Imperial either wanted no enemy alien labor or did not reply by the deadline. On the other hand, “[i]n some counties a preference was expressed for Orientals because of their ability to do certain kinds of labor,” as Japanese immigrants had been known as skilled farmers for decades. In fact, counties in Northern or Central California such as Glenn, Sutter, Colusa, Solano, Placer, San Joaquin, and Tulare Counties regarded the Japanese acceptable for their respective communities. Thus, Bell explained, “[w]illingness to use approximately 10,000 Japanese was expressed.”³⁴ What this USDA report clearly tells us is that California was not unanimously anti-Japanese after the Pearl Harbor attack and some counties even needed and wanted Japanese immigrants for the harvest of their agricultural crops. At the time, the California plan was considered feasible, and the fear of the “yellow peril” was not dominant in California because both Japanese immigrants and agricultural communities in California could agree on the plan.

Like the ethnic Japanese in Hawai‘i, their co-ethnics in California were equally very important in terms of the local economy and thus their removal was similarly problematic during the war. For the USDA officials and Olson, agricultural necessity for the local economy and national food security was as important as military necessity. Furthermore, their documents help us understand that they shared a certain level of sympathy toward the ethnic Japanese based on their awareness about the importance of Japanese agriculture in California and their understanding of the ethnic Japanese as resident farmers. With this understanding, their attempt to maintain food security by keeping the Japanese within the borders of California would invigorate the political debates over enemy aliens, challenging the racist policy of mass evacuation that deemed the ethnic Japanese as a faceless group of undesirable and expellable people.

34. Ibid; Roscoe E. Bell to the California USDA War Board, February 11, 1942, Carton 2, Ralston Papers. Governor Olson was aware that anti-Japanese sentiment was strong, particularly in Imperial County. In February 1942, R. W. Ware and Elmer W. Heald, sheriff and district attorney of Imperial County, sent a telegram to Olson to tell him that sending the evacuated Japanese to Imperial Valley would complicate defense and could cause a conflict with the local Filipino population, and that Mexican officials of Baja California were also concerned about the relocation of the Japanese to the neighboring Imperial Valley. See “Protest Against Sending Jap Evacuees to Valley Answered,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1942.

ALLEGED MILITARY NECESSITY VERSUS REAL
ECONOMIC NECESSITY

While DeWitt indicated that the California plan was acceptable after discussing it with Olson and USDA representatives, Army officials such as Provost Marshall General Allen W. Gullion and his assistant Karl R. Bendetsen were pressing the War Department to implement the mass evacuation of ethnic Japanese residents, both aliens and citizens. Gullion warned Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy that the United States “shall very possibly lose the war” unless the U.S. government took a stern measure regarding ethnic Japanese residents and that “the danger of Japanese inspired sabotage is great.” Their stance was supported by anti-Japanese politicians and newspapers suspecting that ethnic Japanese residents would engage in fifth column activities. On February 10, a committee organized by the joint delegation of Congress members from Western states approved a resolution calling for the evacuation of enemy aliens and citizens from the coastal area.³⁵ Los Angeles business leaders were also part of the anti-Japanese campaign. The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce played an active role in crafting the evacuation ideas in cooperation with anti-Japanese congressional members. And the Chamber’s teletypewriter contained a message that Wayne Allen, chief administrative officer of Los Angeles County, wanted to send to a leading proponent of Japanese removal, Leland Ford: “Japanese Daily News [presumably the *Rafu Shimpō*] still publishing according to their own admission. Thought you might be interested in this for use on radio or press release.”³⁶

In the 1930s, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce was a business partner of Japanese farmers in order to suppress the Mexican farmworkers’ labor movement. However, the Chamber quickly altered its stance in wartime when Los Angeles could expect to enjoy the rapid growth of defense industries and its lands were “in a transition period” from agriculture to other industries and urbanization. In this context, Mexicans ceased to be regarded as undesirable strikers but instead became regarded as desirable substitute

35. Daniels, *The Decision to Relocate the Japanese Americans*, 36–39; tenBroek, et al, *Prejudice, War, and the Constitution*, 86, 205.

36. Grodzins, *Americans Betrayed*, 67–76; quotation from footnote on p. 68.

farmworkers who could replace Japanese evacuees in remaining agricultural lands. The utilization of Mexican workers would soon become a central subject in the political debates over food security versus military necessity generated by the possibility and eventual implementation of Japanese removal. In March, when the manager of the Chamber's Agricultural Department, Howard B. Miller, discussed before Congress the availability of substitute workers who would go into former Japanese farms, he mentioned, "the Japanese are rather large employers of Mexican labor" and that the operation of Japanese farms are conducted "in a considerable degree by employment of Mexican and other labor," implying that Mexicans could be substitute workers and keep Japanese farms operational.³⁷

Mainstream media coverage on Japanese military activities in Asia and Japanese residents in the United States, such as Walter Lippmann's piece entitled "The Fifth Column on the Coast," fueled anti-Japanese sentiment, turning public opinion increasingly in favor of mass evacuation. As historian Greg Robinson argues, President Franklin D. Roosevelt certainly lacked empathy for the Japanese. On February 19, he issued Executive Order 9066 empowering the Army to execute the mass removal of the ethnic Japanese population. Although the Justice Department had resisted the idea of evacuating Japanese American citizens on constitutional grounds, by mid-February, its resistance ceased. The ethnic Japanese community of Los Angeles had no choice but to follow the executive order, but some expressed their frustration. For instance, in Little Tokyo, Japanese immigrants showed their anger by casting contemptuous eyes, spitting on the street, and even vandalizing patrolling cars. The *Rafu Shimpō* strongly criticized such countrymen as "molesters who don't know their place."³⁸

37. Tolan Committee, 11679, 11685, 11691. At the Tolan Committee, W. S. Rosecrans, Agricultural Coordinator of the Los Angeles County Defense Council and former President of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, testified that the lands of Los Angeles County "are not purely agricultural lands" and "are, in themselves, in a transition period" for industrial purposes or settlement.

38. Walter Lippmann, "The Fifth Column on the Coast," *Washington Post*, February 12, 1942; *Personal Justice Denied*, 80; Robinson, *By Order of the President*, 123; Daniels, *The Decision to Relocate the Japanese Americans*, 49; "Kanken ni Furachi na Soburi wo Suru Minohodo wo Shiranu Chikan Ari" (There Are Some Rogues Who Behave Rudely to the Authorities), *Rafu Shimpō*, February 24, 1942.

The issuance of Executive Order 9066, however, did not mean that the California state government gave up the California plan. In fact, Olson continued to promote the plan and even explained it before anti-Japanese organizations. On February 20, Olson visited Los Angeles and gave a speech on the state's position on national defense before local members of the American Legion. The American Legion was an organization of veterans who fought in World War I; it was one of the anti-Japanese organizations that promoted the nativist movement for the enactment of Japanese Exclusion in 1924. In January 1942, the American Legion's national commissions on the war effort unanimously adopted a resolution calling for the mass evacuation of all enemy aliens from the Pacific Coast.³⁹ At the meeting in Los Angeles, Olson praised the American Legion as "perhaps the only group of citizens" with "a realistic conception of our problem" in the war and discussed the importance of the California State Guard newly organized in 1941. Then, Olson moved on to rearticulate the effectiveness of the California plan by quoting his own radio speech made on February 4, 1942, repeating that to lose Japanese agricultural labor would mean "a serious loss to our war economy." And he stressed that the Army, the Department of Justice, the Department of Agriculture, and the State of California will "determine upon specific plans for comprehensively locating and regulating the activities of our adult Japanese population for the duration of the war" outside the combat zone along the West Coast but "within the borders of our State."⁴⁰ Even after the Army took control of the Japanese issue, Olson confidently clarified his policy before this patriotic and anti-Japanese organization, hoping that the California plan could be implemented in cooperation with the Army and the USDA.

In the context of the wartime emergency, however, the governor of California could do only so much to resist the decision of the federal government, particularly the Army. Two days after the issuance of Executive Order 9066, the House Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration, the so-called Tolan Committee, began hearings to discuss the possibility of the mass removal of

39. As for the American Legion, see tenBroek, et al, *Prejudice, War, and the Constitution*, 43–46; Grodzins, *Americans Betrayed*, 38–43.

40. Culbert Olson, "National Defense," before the 17th District American Legion, Los Angeles, February 20, 1942, Carton 5, Olson Papers.

ethnic Japanese residents from the West Coast. On March 6, Olson gave his testimony and agreed with the racist idea that the Japanese should be examined as a group, while Germans and Italians should be examined as individuals. He eventually supported mass evacuation. Yet, for the purpose of this article exploring the relationship between Japanese removal and food security, it is important for us to carefully observe his testimony. There were three reasons why Olson agreed with the mass evacuation of the Japanese at the Tolan Committee. First, as he had already told Nisei leaders, it was difficult for “the average Caucasian” to distinguish the loyal from the disloyal among the Japanese, which Olson described as “a most unfortunate disadvantage.” Second, “representatives of the Japanese-American population,” presumably JAACL representatives, “professional men, businessmen, farmers, and publishers . . . were in good faith when they said whatever program is decided upon with regard to the removal of the entire Japanese population from any area in California or from the State, they would follow,” which did not contradict what the *Rafu Shimpō* urged their community members to do. Finally, local communities in California refused to accept Japanese evacuees as of March 1942, although Olson wanted to “put these evacuated Japanese people in the State, so as to utilize their manpower in productive effort during the war, and their contribution to our agricultural production.” As mentioned earlier, in December 1941 the USDA conducted a survey regarding where Japanese agricultural labor could be relocated within California and several counties showed a willingness to accommodate Japanese evacuees. In February 1942, at Olson’s request, the State Department of Agriculture was conducting another survey and its result turned out to be quite different from the previous survey. The February survey could find no county willing to accept large numbers of Japanese evacuees, reflecting the rapidly growing anti-Japanese sentiment in California in the few months since the Pearl Harbor attack, during which the Japanese military expanded its control in East Asia, defeating the U.S. military in the Philippines and the British military in the Malay Peninsula. Tulare County, for example, indicated a willingness to accommodate Japanese evacuees in December 1941 but switched its position in February, rejecting the relocation of the Japanese to the county—a significant change of public opinion that made the California plan look unfeasible. The Tulare County

hospital even ordered a Japanese doctor fired simply because of his national origin.⁴¹

At the Tolan Committee, Olson's testimony was not only about his concerns about California's economy and wartime food security, but it demonstrated his sympathy towards ethnic Japanese residents in California confronting a very difficult situation in the aftermath of the Pearl Harbor attack. Olson stressed the importance of understating the feelings of ethnic Japanese residents who faced an extremely difficult situation in which their country of ancestry attacked their country of permanent residence. Olson was "hoping that it will be your [the Tolan Committee's] recommendation that States . . . cooperate so as to help the movement of these evacuees in a way to maintain, as near as possible, their normal lives; to have them made self-sustaining and avoid any injustices and the consequences of prejudices against them." While Olson "would yield largely to the judgement of the Department of Justice and the F.B.I. and the military" with respect to the removal of Japanese enemy aliens, he mentioned that Japanese evacuation "presents a problem" since "there are a great many whom we shouldn't treat as alien enemies, although so classified, because of their lack of citizenship" and "the trouble about that is, as I say, too many people will conclude that every Japanese is a fifth columnist, no matter what may be in his heart." He even confessed that if Japan attacked California, "I would feel sorry for any Japanese loyalist inside because I am just afraid that he would suffer even if he were innocent."⁴² In other words, the triumph of military necessity over food security in the political debates regarding the ethnic Japanese population as seen at the Tolan Committee did not mean that Olson reconciled himself with the idea of mass removal. He did not change his mind. As he told the representatives of Japanese Americans in person in February, Olson continued to express his concern about the situation of ethnic Japanese residents during the war, no matter whether his California plan was adopted or not.

41. Tolan Committee, 11629-11642; Culbert Olson, "National Defense," before the 17th District American Legion, Los Angeles, February 20, 1942, Carton 5, Olson Papers; "Tsurare Gun demo Nihonjin Okotowari" (Japanese Rejected in Tulare County, Too), *Rafu Shimpō*, February 22, 1942. The aggression of the Japanese military in Asia in the initial period of the war strengthened war hysteria in the United States. See, for example, *Personal Justice Denied*, 28.

42. Tolan Committee, 11629-11642.

The *Rafu Shimpō* did not translate Olson's sympathetic words for the Japanese in detail and thus reported his testimony with the impression that he was not particularly anti-Japanese but still pushing for mass evacuation. The immigrant press did not report on Olson's sympathetic comments probably because all *Rafu Shimpō* articles were censored by the Anti-Axis Committee, which was formed by the JACL right after the Pearl Harbor attack. JACL leaders were determined to cooperate with any measure taken by the federal government, including mass evacuation, to prove their loyalty. For this reason, the Anti-Axis Committee might have censored and edited the *Rafu Shimpō* articles to minimize Olson's sympathy to avoid sounding as though the ethnic Japanese community was resisting the idea of mass evacuation.⁴³ In line with the federal government's plan for mass evacuation, the *Rafu Shimpō* reported that Olson urged other states to accept Japanese evacuees because "ethnic Japanese residents are children of the United States," which was the translation of Olson's actual words, "It is our baby, all of us—the United States of America."⁴⁴

In contrast, the *Rafu Shimpō* was critical of Los Angeles Mayor Fletcher Bowron, who fueled anti-Japanese sentiment, although he had demonstrated a rather friendly attitude toward the ethnic Japanese population before mid-January of 1942. Bowron became increasingly concerned about the large Japanese population in Los Angeles, particularly on Terminal Island, an economically and militarily important site located in Los Angeles Harbor. On February 5, Bowron made his first public statement in favor of mass removal, and about a week later, gave a Lincoln Day address in which he stated, "If Lincoln were alive today, what would he do[?]. . . Lincoln, the mild-mannered man whose memory we regard with almost saint-like reverence, would make short work of rounding up the Japanese

43. "Anti-Axis Committee formed by J.A.C.L.," *Rafu Shimpō* (English edition), December 9, 1942; "Minasama eno Onegai," *Rafu Shimpō*, December 13, 1941. On March 10, 1942, in San Francisco, representatives of JACL chapters held a meeting to discuss their position regarding mass evacuation; they adopted a resolution that they would willingly cooperate with mass evacuation to prove their loyalty to the United States. See "Ikanaru Gisei mo Amanjite Shinoban" (We Will Endure Any Sacrifice), *Rafu Shimpō*, March 11, 1942.

44. "Kain linkai ni okeru Chiji, Shichō no Shōgen" (Testimonies of the Governor and the Mayor at the Lower House Committee), *Rafu Shimpō*, March 7, 1942. Olson said, "It is our baby, all of us—the United States of America. It seems to me when the Federal Government decides as to the most feasible places to go, and the Federal Government pays for that, that that is the program we all ought to follow and those who stand in the way ought to get out of it." See Tolan Committee, 11642.

and putting them where they could do no harm.” The *Rafu Shimpō* reported it with the headline that said “Mayor Bowron Dwells on Relocation” along with another article about the evacuation order to ethnic Japanese residents in Terminal Island.⁴⁵

At the Tolan Committee, Bowron gave his testimony, assuring the city’s full cooperation for the Army with respect to the evacuation of the Japanese. He dared to say, “I first want to make it clear that my position relative to the Japanese population here in our midst is not by reason of any racial or other prejudice . . . The Japanese have caused very little trouble. They are law abiding and industrious and cooperative,” but continued, “As I look back on some events after the 7th of December, I am quite convinced that there was a large number of the Japanese population here locally who knew what was coming.” Bowron’s racial prejudice was clear, although the aggression of the Japanese military in Asia and the increasingly hostile public opinion could have influenced his attitude. Furthermore, regarding food security, Bowron downplayed the economic impact of Japanese removal on the city’s food supply and distribution, making a rather optimistic assumption, “There are others who could describe that much better than I . . . Necessarily, it will quite seriously affect the fresh vegetable supply for this large populous area. However, I think our people will be glad to adjust themselves to wartime conditions.” As shown in his testimony, the ethnic Japanese residents were not part of “our people” in Bowron’s mind.⁴⁶ His hypocritical stance aroused Nisei to anger. After his testimony at the Tolan Committee, Togo Tanaka, a Nisei editor of the *Rafu Shimpō*’s English edition, wrote an open letter to Bowron and criticized him, contending, “You have been the spearhead of press publicity for uprooting us from the only home we know. Yet, before the Tolan Committee . . . [y]ou consistently referred to the

45. Grodzins, *Americans Betrayed*, 100–02; Page Smith, *Democracy on Trial*, 119–20; “Rinkorun Yo ni Araba Kanarazuya Yokuryū Sen, Bōron Shichō” (If Lincoln Were Alive, He would Have Interned Them, Says Mayor Bowron), *Rafu Shimpō*, February 13, 1942; “Tāminaru Tō Kyojūsha, Sanjūnichi Inai Tachinoki Meirei ka” (Residents of Terminal Island, Evacuation to Be Ordered within Thirty Days?), *Rafu Shimpō*, February 13, 1942.

46. Tolan Committee, 11642–11652. Bowron had come to consider that the civil and human rights of the ethnic Japanese population should be sacrificed for the greater good of the non-Japanese majority in Los Angeles. In February 1942, Bowron wrote in his letter to Congressman John Costello, “I would hate to see the three million people in the Los Angeles metropolitan area greatly inconvenienced, business activity slowed up, traffic congested, and the people given unnecessary cause for fear, merely because of the presence here of 40,000 Japanese, only a limited portion of whom might be expected to do something dangerous.” See Grodzins, *Americans Betrayed*, 104–05.

responsibility of the Federal government. In a word, you passed the buck.”⁴⁷ For the ethnic Japanese community of Los Angeles, Olson appeared more understanding and clearly different from Bowron, although both eventually agreed on the mass evacuation of the entire Japanese population. The testimonies of Olson and Bowron reflect the debates over alleged military necessity versus real economic necessity.

MEXICAN WORKERS AS A SOLUTION FOR THE JAPANESE REMOVAL

Even after the Tolan Committee hearings, the loss of Japanese agricultural labor remained a serious problem for California agriculture with no clear solution. At the Tolan Committee, Olson answered to the question regarding who would operate former Japanese farms, arguing that Japanese removal “will eliminate the possibility of having the benefit in agricultural production of the labor of the Japanese during this war period. We are going to have some labor problems, I believe, in agriculture.” Olson gave the committee a stereotypical explanation that “the Japanese are peculiarly fitted” to pick vegetables in a stooping posture, and “they have been a large part of it,” while Mexicans and Filipinos were also “adaptable to do that.” Although Olson believed that Japanese farms should be worked by new tenants, he thought it doubtful that “there will be sufficient manpower in certain classes of agricultural work.” For example, in Salinas, landowners were worried about the lettuce harvest because they could not find enough Filipino workers. Many Filipinos had been enlisted into the Army or were leaving to do more profitable work in the rapidly growing defense industries.⁴⁸

In April 1942, the *Los Angeles Times* reported on the Japanese evacuation from the local harbor areas, which the Army considered the “most vulnerable to sabotage and espionage,” embracing the areas of San Pedro, Long Beach, Wilmington, Redondo Beach, Torrance, Signal Hill, and Hynes. These areas included many war industry sites such as shipyards, naval installations, oil fields, the steel production center of Torrance, and the new aircraft factory at Long Beach. The

47. “Kain linkai ni okeru Chiji, Shichō no Shōgen,” *Rafu Shimpō*, March 7, 1942; Togo Tanaka, “An Open Letter,” *Rafu Shimpō* (English edition), March 8, 1942.

48. Tolan Committee, 11629–11642.



Manzanar Relocation Center, east of the Sierra Mountains, where the desert climate and soil contrasted sharply with the fertile fields that the Japanese had been forced to leave behind. View from guard tower, 1943, by Ansel Adams, Library of Congress. LC-DIG-ppprs-00275.

Times noted that “most of the affected Japanese are farmers.” By that time, out of the more than 25,000 acres of Los Angeles County farmland operated by the Japanese, one-third had been put under the control of the authorities to transfer the lands to “American owners going into production.” By August 18, 1942, the U.S. government had expelled all the ethnic Japanese residents, both aliens and citizens, from California except for those relocated to the remotely located Tule Lake and Manzanar incarceration camps and others supervised in hospitals and prisons. However, many of the Japanese farms were abandoned without being managed by new operators. One example was a 2000-acre tomato farm in Palos Verdes Estates in Los Angeles County. The *Los Angeles Times* reported later in September that the farm’s tomatoes “may never reach the United States Army, contract canneries or city markets unless there is some vital change in the labor outlook,” to the extent that the situation “became a do-or-die campaign among civic leaders today.” Although local high school students helped pick the tomatoes, the farm still lacked the manpower

for the peak of the crop season. To make matters worse, motorists picked the apparently abandoned tomatoes. As for this situation, non-Japanese growers also announced that the problem was “virtually out of control.”⁴⁹

While many Japanese farms were destined to remain unattended, Olson came to have a more optimistic view on how to maintain agricultural labor in California. Rapidly changing dynamics of international relations around the Pacific Ocean and across the U.S.-Mexico borderlands created a possibility of importing a large number of Mexican agricultural workers. The Pacific War between the United States and Japan resulted in a closer hemispheric cooperation between the United States and Mexico. In May of 1942, the U.S. and Mexican governments began to discuss the importation of Mexican agricultural workers into the United States. This binational measure, later known as the Bracero Program, would bring Mexican workers to the United States starting in the summer of 1942, awarding 4.5 million work contracts by 1964 when the program was terminated. With this wartime collaboration, the U.S. government intended to solve the wartime labor shortage in agriculture and the Mexican government sought to regulate the northward migration of its citizens.⁵⁰

Olson hoped that the importation of Mexican workers, or *braceros*, could replace his California plan. On July 2, 1942, Olson made a radio speech entitled “Mexican Labor” in which he argued that the importation of Mexican workers might solve the agricultural labor crisis created by Japanese Internment. Olson touched upon negotiations “conducted between the secretary of state of the United States and the Mexican government to ascertain whether Mexico will approve a plan for bringing Mexican laborers into this country to be employed on the farms for the duration of the war. Representatives of growers have been urging such a program in Washington.” Olson reported that he had demanded in his telegram to the War Manpower Commission that the federal government take the responsibility for recruitment and transportation of Mexican workers. Yet,

49. “Army Will Move 5000 Japs by End of Week,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1942; *Personal Justice Denied*, 112; “Tomato Harvest Action Pledged; Palos Verdes, Facing Loss of Crop, Will Place Matter Before Council,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 22, 1942.

50. Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2011), 21–28.

even at this stage, he mentioned his California plan, explaining its advantages and the difficulties that prevented its implementation. He said, "It was then [re]cognized that if the Japanese could [be] employed in the performance of [ag]ricultural work, under appropriate [re]gulations and control of their movements, [tha]t would serve the economy of the [nat]ion, avoid the appropriations of [hun]dreds of millions of dollars for [the]ir maintenance in Assembly Centers, [and] solve the agricultural labor problem [in] California. But the natural antipathy [of] having Japanese in the presence of [any] community under any condition was manifest." Olson pointed out that despite the economic importance of Japanese agricultural labor, rapidly growing anti-Japanese sentiment in California made it very difficult to implement his California plan, saying, "an entire change of [dis]position and sentiment on the part [of] the farmers and employers of farm [lab]or in California would be needed for the employment of Japanese."⁵¹

Then, Olson stressed that Japanese evacuees could have stayed and worked in California farms under continuous surveillance that would have made it impossible for Japanese evacuees to participate in sabotage or fifth column activities. He closed his radio speech by touching upon the importation of Mexican workers:

Such an effort to [util]ize this vast reservoir of manpower [would] undoubtedly be aided and assisted [by] that proportion of the Japanese people [them]selves, who undoubtedly have an [undi]vided loyalty to our country and . . . [as] thousands of Japanese now serving in [the] United States Army and fighting [agai]nst the Japanese power. If the farm labor shortage could be [suppl]ied without the importation of foreign [labo]r, we would avoid all of the problems, [delays, difficulties and expense which [such] importation would entail. But with [the] uncertainty that any other solution [may] be found, efforts will continue to [make] available such Mexican labor as shall [be] found needed to save the crops of California. I thank you and bid you good night.⁵²

Olson's radio speech was not only about his hope for the Bracero Program. It was also about his belief that the California plan was

51. Culbert Olson, "Mexican Labor," July 2, 1942, Carton 5, Olson Papers. At the time of my research in 2016, some parts of Olson's radio speech script were illegible because of the way in which the documents were bound.

52. Ibid. Interestingly, Olson's radio speech was reported by the *Los Angeles Times* but not broadcast in Los Angeles, possibly because it clearly conflicted with the uncompromising policy of Mayor Bowron against the ethnic Japanese population. See "Olson Threatens to Ask Jap Use," *Los Angeles Times*, July 3, 1942.

feasible because of the loyalty of ethnic Japanese residents as well as his implicit criticism of uncompromising anti-Japanese sentiment that made it impossible to keep Japanese farmers in California. In fact, after this radio speech, Olson met with DeWitt to discuss his idea of using evacuated Japanese people as emergency farm laborers. DeWitt simply declined Olson's idea, telling him that the use of evacuated Japanese as farm workers would contradict the ongoing evacuation program adopted as a military necessity. In fact, ethnic Japanese evacuees engaged in farming to feed themselves at their camp sites including Tule Lake and Manzanar. In 1943, the total amount of vegetables that Japanese evacuees produced and consumed at each of the ten internment camps was estimated to be more than forty-three million pounds. However, they were not allowed to work as emergency farm laborers in regular California farms as Olson hoped. In addition, proposing the use of the evacuated Japanese made Olson look weak or soft on enemy aliens, as a *Los Angeles Times* writer criticized Olson for his proposal, saying, "We don't need the Japs. . . In fact the Governor had better quit fooling around with the Army." At this time, Olson regarded Mexicans as a possible source of emergency farm labor but was not sure if the importation of Mexican workers could really solve the "still serious" situation on California farms.⁵³

As the situation worsened, in August 1942, Olson sent a telegram to President Roosevelt urging him to bring Mexican workers as quickly as possible. Olson explained the serious situation of California agriculture in which crops were "wasting and spoiling," even though "[e]very possible use is being made of all local supplies of labor." Olson contended, "We must have help now," and asked President Roosevelt "to immediately put an end to the current academic debates in Washington on this subject," "[s]end recruiting teams into Mexico and send someone to California with full authority [to] handle this matter now in a direct practical fashion." And he added, "Matter has been delayed to the point of negligence and will have serious effect upon our entire war effort." About a week later, Secretary of Agriculture Wickard responded to Olson, writing, "Final agreements are being made to supply Mexican farm labor to

53. "DeWitt Vetoes Using Japs in Harvest Crisis," *Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 1942; Ed Ainsworth, "As You Might Say—," *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 1942; "Project Agricultural Program Must Succeed," *Tulean Dispatch Daily*, June 12, 1943.

California farms where domestic labor cannot be obtained.”⁵⁴ Around this time, the Bracero Program began to bring Mexican workers from south of the U.S.-Mexico border.

The importation of Mexican workers was one of the wartime policies born out of U.S.-Mexico wartime collaboration. Mexicans not only worked in farmlands in the United States but also served as soldiers in the U.S. Army. The number of Mexican citizens serving in the U.S. Army reached nearly fifteen thousand during the Pacific War. This remarkable collaboration that incorporated Mexican manpower into the U.S. war effort was promoted by Mexican President Manuel Ávila Camacho. In October 1942, Ávila Camacho announced that Mexican residents in the United States were allowed to enlist in the U.S. Army because “Mexico is a member of the Allied Nations and we are obligated to contribute decisively to the triumph of Allies over Germany, Italy and Japan.”⁵⁵ The U.S.-Mexico wartime collaboration even made Japanese Internment a transnational project that developed in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. After the Pearl Harbor attack, Ávila Camacho promptly responded to the request of the U.S. government regarding ethnic Japanese residents in Mexico. In early January 1942, more than a full month before the issuance of the Executive Order 9066, the Mexican government took action to relocate more than 2,700 ethnic Japanese residents in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands to inland cities such as Mexico City and Guadalajara.⁵⁶ In sum, alleged military necessity brought about the forcible removal of the West Coast’s Nikkei farming population—and gave rise to the importation of Mexicans to solve the actual economic problems and relieve the concerns over wartime food security.

The wartime experience of the ethnic Japanese population teaches us not only how racism resulted in their mass removal but also how Japanese immigrants’ everyday activities as farmers mattered in terms

54. Culbert Olson to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, August 19, 1942; Claude R. Wickard, Secretary of Agriculture, to Culbert Olson, August 27, 1942, Box 7, Folder Migratory-120-A Thru-G, RG96, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, 1918–1975, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland.

55. Neil Foley, *Mexicans in the Making of America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014), 97, 101

56. Selfa A. Chew, *Uprooting Community: Japanese Mexicans, World War II, and the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015), 47.

of wartime food security and the productivity of California agriculture. After the Pearl Harbor attack, local USDA officials in California and Governor Olson attempted to keep the ethnic Japanese farming population within the state in order to assure wartime food security and California's agricultural economy. Some local farming communities demonstrated their willingness to accommodate the evacuated Japanese as agricultural workers. Along with growing anti-Japanese sentiment fueled by the Japanese military aggression in East Asia, the alleged military necessity for Japanese removal sidelined the argument stressing the importance of Japanese agricultural labor to wartime food security, as seen at the Tolson Committee hearings. Finally, the importation of Mexican farmworkers through the Bracero Program brought hope to California agriculture once Japanese removal became inevitable, ending the debate over food security versus military necessity.

Race, not nationality or loyalty, was the most powerful driving force of Japanese Internment. At the same time, it was one of several significant factors in wartime debates regarding people of Japanese ancestry, as Japanese Internment generated serious debates over food security versus military necessity, which in turn led to a growing demand for Mexican farmworkers. As shown in this article, economic and social roles played by the Japanese agricultural community functioned to affect the California state government and build resistance against the merciless and overtly racist policy of removing all ethnic Japanese residents, whether U.S. citizens or not, from their homes. More importantly, like the economic necessity that prevented the full-scale internment of the ethnic Japanese population in Hawai'i, there was a similar economic necessity regarding their co-ethnics in California. Nevertheless, such an economic necessity was attenuated by the Bracero Program in the context of the hemispheric wartime collaboration between the United States and Mexico, thus contributing to the mass removal and internment of the ethnic Japanese population from the Pacific Coast region. By looking at Japanese Internment as an agricultural labor crisis in California, we can understand it as not solely about race but also about economics in wartime, multiethnic California in which ethnic Japanese and Mexican immigrant workers' experiences were interwoven.

After World War II, many ethnic Japanese returned to Los Angeles County. By 1950, their population had almost returned to

that recorded in 1940.⁵⁷ However, due to the region's dramatic industrial growth and rapid urbanization brought on by the war, they were not able to reestablish their ethnic agricultural community of the prewar period. Along with the disappearance of Japanese farms in Los Angeles County, therefore, the agricultural labor crisis caused by Japanese removal seems to have faded from historical memory.

57. U.S. Census Bureau, *Seventeenth Census of the United States: 1950, Population* (Washington, DC, 1952), Table 47, "Indians, Japanese, and Chinese, by Sex, for Selected Counties and Cities," 179.