

“No Japs Allowed”: The Wartime Internment of Mikiso Hane

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In August of 1942, Mikiso Hane and other Japanese from Hollister, California, rode a train into the blistering desert of Poston, Arizona to discover their new home. This was not a joyous occasion, an exciting adventure to look forward to, but instead a forced evacuation. At its peak, the internment camp at Poston held twenty thousand Japanese during World War II, under the guise of national security, simply because of the fact that they were Japanese.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, racial tensions skyrocketed, and Mikiso remembers Japanese being considered “sneaky, treacherous, disloyal, untrustworthy elements.”¹ In 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order No. 9066, allowing the Secretary of War and military commanders to remove and intern any people they believed necessary: basically, West Coast Japanese. Rumors ran rampant in Japanese communities about what would happen next, from lynch mobs to concentration camps with mass executions. The press and government officials often helped to justify these rumors. Army General John L. De Witt said in 1943, before a congressional committee, “We will have to worry about the Japs until they are wiped off the face of the map.”² This included Japanese-Americans like Mikiso.

Soon, towns all along the West Coast began requesting that Japanese either leave or be removed from their areas because of the threat they posed. Mikiso’s hometown of Hollister was one, claiming that Japanese farmers in their area might sabotage the war effort by using their farm equipment to “obstruct the movement of troops or supplies.”³ This was the beginning of Mikiso’s journey to the internment camp at Poston.

First, all Japanese living in Hollister were removed to a temporary camp southwest of Hollister in the town of Salinas for three months, giving up their jobs, education, and homes. From there they rode a train to their permanent location in Poston, Arizona. Mikiso’s time in Poston consisted of the harsh living conditions of the camp and the compliant attitudes of his fellow internees. Mikiso says he “struggled with the heat, the sandstorms, the scorpions, the rattlesnakes, the confusion, the overcrowded barracks, and the lack of privacy.”⁴ Even in this severe environment, watched over by guards, suspicion of the internees ran high. Innocent activities such as attempting to escape the crushing heat, cooking food, and organizing athletic teams were irrationally considered subversive. Somehow, everything was thought to be part of a possible long-range plan for Japanese invasion, despite the fact that almost all the internees were exceptionally obedient. Japanese-American leaders apparently thought that the best way to show loyalty to the United States was to be completely accommodating, accepting even the insult of internment without question. Mikiso

says they were even encouraged, while interned in the camps, to say they were willing to serve the United States in combat.

In 1943 Mikiso became one of the internees allowed to leave the Poston camp on the condition that he not return to the West Coast. He found a job on the East Coast as a tutor and generally was able to continue with his life as normal. However, many internees were still not permitted to leave until the camps closed toward the end of World War II, when they were also finally allowed to return to the West Coast. This did not go smoothly, as many Americans were still exceedingly anti-Japanese in their feelings. Mikiso recalls his oldest brother attempting to return to their hometown of Hollister only to find "No Japs allowed" signs wherever he went.³

While Mikiso's experience in the internment camps may have ended well, he, like his fellow internees, should not have had to waste part of his life because of prejudice. In 1948, Congress approved some monetary compensation for property loss as a result of internment, but it was not until 1988 that President Reagan signed legislation offering each internee an official apology and \$20,000 for government actions "motivated largely by racial prejudice, wartime hysteria, and a failure of political leadership."⁶

Works Cited

"Executive Order 9066: Resulting in the Relocation of Japanese," *Our Documents*, <<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=74>>.

Hane, Mikiso. "Wartime Internment." *Journal of American History* Vol. 77, No. 2 (Sept., 1990): 569-575.

"Public Law 100-383 - Aug. 10, 1988." *Internment Archives*. <http://www.internmentarchives.com/showdoc.php?docid=00172&search_id=23035&pagenum=>>.

Endnotes

¹ Hane, Mikiso. "Wartime Internment." *Journal of American History* Vol. 77, No. 2 (Sept., 1990): 569-575, 570.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, 571.

⁴ Ibid, 572.

⁵ Ibid, 575.

⁶ "Public Law 100-383 - Aug. 10, 1988." *Internment Archives*. <http://www.internmentarchives.com/showdoc.php?docid=00172&search_id=23035&pagenum=1>.