

Primary Sources: General J. L. DeWitt Relocates Japanese Americans

By Lieutenant General John Lesesne DeWitt, adapted by Newsela staff on 01.02.20

Word Count 326

Level 1070L



Japanese Americans were forced out of their homes and moved to prison camps during World War II. This first order was issued on April 1, 1942, by Lieutenant General J.L. DeWitt, instructing Japanese Americans to move out by noon on April 7, 1942. Photo: Wikimedia Commons/National Archives and Records Administration.

Editor's Note: Lieutenant General John Lesesne DeWitt was an American army leader who played a major role in the relocation and imprisoning of Japanese Americans during World War II.

Following the Japanese attack on a naval base at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, fear and racism led the United States government to punish a group of its own citizens. On March 2, 1942, DeWitt issued the first orders to "evacuate" Japanese Americans. Immediately after, thousands of Japanese-American citizens were forced from their homes. They were sent to remote internment camps to wait out the remainder of the war.

The following report was sent about a year after DeWitt's first orders to the Secretary of War, Henry Stimson.

Final Report: Japanese Evacuation From The West Coast (June 5, 1943)

In the war in which we are now fighting, loyalty to one's race is not ended by migration. The Japanese race is an enemy race. While many second- and third-generation Japanese born on U.S. soil have become "Americanized," and are citizens, they are still fully Japanese. They still identify with the Japanese race. After all, we would not expect children born of white parents on Japanese soil to cut all racial ties and become loyal Japanese subjects. We would not expect them to be ready to fight and die for Japan in a war against the nation of their parents.

Japan has allied itself with Germany and Italy. The Japanese person raised in this country is not a part of mainstream society. Thus it is unreasonable to assume that he will not turn against this nation when the final test of loyalty comes. It, therefore, follows that along the Pacific Coast there are over 112,000 potential enemies, of Japanese ancestry, at large today. There are signs that these enemies are organized and ready to take action. The very fact that no sabotage has taken place to date is disturbing proof that such action will be taken.