

## WARTIME INTERNMENT AND THE FATE OF THE PERUVIAN JAPANESE

As in other countries involved in World War 2, enemy aliens in Panama were liable to internment. Given what was seen as the strategic importance of the Panama Canal, it is not surprising that the US authorities would want such internment in the Canal Zone and the Republic to be swift and effective.

The fear from enemy spies and saboteurs was not a totally unrealistic one. Many Latin American states had a sizeable German and/or Japanese presence, and Panama had small communities of people of both nationalities or origin. Some countries in Latin America also had governments of a right wing or authoritarian tendency.<sup>1</sup> At the start of the war the President of the Dominican Republic, for example, admired Hitler and similar views were held by the dictators of Guatemala and El Salvador. Even the administration of Arnulfo Arias Madrid, elected in 1940 in Panama, had nationalistic, authoritarian (and anti-American) policies<sup>2</sup>.

In December 1941, neighbouring Colombia had around 4,000 Germans lived there, with internment only being reluctantly introduced. Panama's other neighbour, Costa Rica, saw the imprisonment or deportation of German families, with the Costa Rican government expropriating property from many elite German families which had dominated the coffee<sup>3</sup>, sugar and other export industries. Expropriated property was used to pay down the country's soaring national debt. Unlike Panama, Costa Rica saw riots targeting

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Mexico and Cuba.

<sup>2</sup> Even prior to that, a 1934 Law, subsequently ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, had imposed restrictions on non-Panamanian involvement in domestic trade - aimed principally at the Chinese, Japanese, East Indian, Syrian, Levantine (what would now be described as Lebanese), French, Italian and Spanish merchants. In 1941, Law No. 24 was again aimed at squeezing out non-Panamanians and/or "undesirables". Within a year or so, nearly 90% of retail establishments with a capital of less than \$500, and more than 75% of larger businesses, were being operated by Panamanians, and large numbers of Chinese, Japanese and others had been forced to liquidate their business, and many to leave the country - where this was possible. The Japanese in particular found it near impossible to leave.

<sup>3</sup> When war broke out, the US State Department imposed a boycott of coffee from German-owned businesses, including coffee producers, and coffee represented 54% of the country's exports (with 40% of its output having gone to Germany).

German businesses – this after a U-boat torpedoed a United Fruit Company vessel in Puerto Limón, killing 24 Costa Ricans, in July 1942<sup>4, 5</sup>

### **AN ALREADY HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT**

President Arias Madrid headed a mass movement known as *Panamefiismo*, the essence of which was nationalism, which in Panama's situation meant opposition to US hegemony<sup>6</sup>, but his administration aspired to rid the country of non-Hispanics (which meant not only North Americans, but also West Indians).<sup>7</sup>

On 22 November 1940, an additional clause for the new Constitution called for the denationalisation of children of Asiatics and blacks whose original language was not Spanish. It was approved by the National Assembly, and was. These racial minorities were to be treated as alien groups within society. The National Assembly passed a Law in February 1941 barring aliens from the operation of all retail businesses, with citizenship a prerequisite.

During 1941, before being deposed, Arias Madrid introduced a law prohibiting Jewish immigration and depriving anyone of the Jewish faith without at least one Panamanian parent of their citizenship<sup>8</sup>. The inherent anti-Semitism appeared to continue in the Government under the following President De La Guardia.

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<sup>4</sup> When the war ended in 1945, the internment camp in San José was closed and detainees returned to their families, homes and businesses, if they were able to keep them. Some reclaimed lost property, but others could not and faced starting over from nothing.

<sup>5</sup> <https://ticotimes.net/2014/12/15/the-story-of-costa-ricas-forgotten-world-war-ii-internment-camp>

<sup>6</sup> Among the consequences of his campaigns, banks such as the National City Bank and Chase National Bank found themselves compelled to move their offices to the Canal Zone:  
<https://scholarsrepository.llu.edu/etd/535>.

<sup>7</sup> The US refused to deport the West Indians and other non-Hispanics. A distinction was made by the Arias Madrid government between West Indian blacks and what were termed Jamaicanos-Americans.

<sup>8</sup> This being despite the new Constitution introduced by Arias Madrid guaranteeing freedom of speech, press, assembly, and religion.

In October 1941, the US Ambassador to Panama sent a memorandum to the Secretary of State in which he described Panama's willingness to cooperate and to intern any Japanese on Panamanian territory, and see them interned on the island of Taboga<sup>9</sup>, once the US had taken action to intern Japanese in the US –

“Immediately following action by the United States to intern Japanese in the United States, Panama would arrest Japanese on Panamanian territory and intern them on Taboga Island .... All expenses and costs of internment and guarding to be paid by the United States. The United States Government would agree to hold Panama harmless against any claims which might arise as a result of internment<sup>10</sup>.”

The next month, a memorandum dated 27 November 1941 from the Commandant of the 15<sup>th</sup> Naval District based in the Canal Zone set out which types of person should be detained and was accompanied by lists of –

- dangerous Axis sympathisers;
- dangerous Germans;
- dangerous Italian aliens; and
- Japanese in the city of Colón.

The memorandum also recommended that whereas all Japanese should be interned immediately, but the detention of others should be limited to only those considered most dangerous.<sup>11</sup>

Within an hour of the news of the Pearl Harbor attack (which took place at 2 pm, Panama local time), the Army had put one company of its Mobile Force on alert, to be ready to

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<sup>9</sup> Situated some 15 miles offshore in Panama Bay, and administratively part of Fort Grant on the mainland, this large fortified island lies near the Pacific entrance to the Canal. During World War 1, the island had been used as an internment site for Germans.

<sup>10</sup> *Justice Held Hostage: US Disregard for International Law in the World War II Internment of Japanese Peruvians - A Case Study* by Natsu Taylor Saito (Boston College Third World Law Journal, Vol.19, September 1998): <https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1186&context=twlj>

<sup>11</sup> <https://ncisahistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Priority-List-of-Dangerous-Aliens-in-the-Canal-Zone-Nov-27-1941.pdf>

guard an alien internment camp at Balboa Quarantine Station. Three hours later it was ordered there.<sup>12</sup>

With preparations already in place, within 20 minutes of the announcement of the Pearl Harbor attack, the Panamanian authorities began rounding up Japanese aliens in the country and, once rounded up, they were turned over to US authorities, and transported into the Canal Zone for internment at a camp near Balboa<sup>13</sup>. Potential Axis sympathisers as well as the enemy aliens, were also rounded up.

On 8 December 1941, the New York Times carried an AP report saying that –

Canal Zone police, with close cooperation from Panamanian authorities, began rounding up Axis nationals today as the United States clamped a tight wartime guard over the vital area. In Cristobal the activities of the police were coordinated with a roundup at Colon where Panama police had taken eleven Germans into custody and were combing the city for more Axis nationals.

On 9 December, the Melbourne Argus in Australia reported that –

Messages from Balboa say that the Panama Canal Zone was blacked out last night while warplanes roared constantly over the Canal and the huge coast artillery batteries were manned on a wartime basis. All soldiers and sailors were summoned immediately to return to their posts and ships as soon as word of the Japanese attack on Honolulu was received. The heavily armed zone is under full military control and is on the alert, prepared for a possible Japanese air or sea assault on the vital isthmus link between the Atlantic and Pacific. The Panamanian Government has ordered the arrest of all Japanese nationals and about 300 had been taken into custody late last night. They will probably be interned.

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<sup>12</sup> *Security and Defense of the Panama Canal 1903-2000* by Charles Morris, Panama Canal Commission: <https://original-ufdc.uflib.ufl.edu/AA00047733/00001/6j>

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* Figures quoted are 57 from Colon and 114 from Panama City. Added to these were around 300 Japanese detained in the Canal Zone itself.

While the initial round-up of enemy aliens involved just the Japanese, after Germany's declaration of war on the US on 11 December<sup>14</sup> German and other Axis nationals, and potential sympathisers of other nationalities (including some naturalised Panamanians), in the both the Canal Zone and Panama were picked up<sup>15</sup>. Those detained by the Panamanian authorities were turned over to the US Army in the Canal Zone for internment at the camp at Balboa - in tents at first, which was fine during the dry season in Panama, but more permanent structures would be required from early- to mid-1942, as the rains began.

A committee was established to decide who should be permanently detained. As in the UK, some of those initially detained included some who had fled the Nazi regime, and in Panama included at least one ex-Buchenwald inmate. In fact, of the 247 Germans subsequently removed to the US from Panama during 1941-1945, 30 were Jewish, and of these five had spent time in Nazi concentration camps. About 60 Jews were amongst a Germans, Italians and Japanese transported to the US for internment in the Spring of 1942.

Unlike in many Latin American states, in Panama and British Honduras, the influence of anti-Semitic officials is said to have made these countries especially eager to include Jews in those removed from the country. In Panama, there was the added bonus of then being able to sequestrate their assets and businesses, the Arias Madrid administration having overseen an "anti-foreigner" campaign.

According to Latin American expert Richard Behrendt, fascist and anti-Semitic groups "became very powerful" in Panama - because "some of them . . . remained in office" even

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<sup>14</sup> The US reciprocated later the same day. Italy also declared war on the US on the same day, and the US again responded in kind.

<sup>15</sup> <https://ncisahistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Priority-List-of-Dangerous-Aliens-in-the-Canal-Zone-Nov-27-1941.pdf>

after Arias Madrid was deposed in 1941. They were in positions of power [and able] to use the outbreak of the war to harass and intern Jewish refugees". Whereas the Panamanian authorities are said to have quickly released local fascists and refugees of Czechoslovakian, Polish, and Italian origin they kept German and Austrian Jews confined<sup>16</sup>.

A further difficulty for those affected was that most of the Jewish refugees had left Germany and Austria with their families but without funds because of German government restrictions.<sup>17</sup> In 1945, none of the refugees wanted to return to Europe, and only a few of those removed to the US wished to go back to Latin America, because of the manner in which the Latin American countries, especially Panama, had rounded them up and expelled them<sup>18</sup>.

In early 1942, a dispute arose when the Panamanian Government objected to the US military releasing some of the internees that had been picked up by the Panama authorities and delivered for internment. As a result, the US Army was ordered to continue to detain such internees, at least until a more permanent camp could be constructed. It has been claimed that the practice of releasing the internees had angered the Panamanian authorities, who wanted the enemy aliens removed from the country. As long as internees remained in Panama there remained a chance that they could be released, but should they be removed from the country entirely the Government could move to take possession of their unattended shops and farms.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> [http://americanjewisharchives.org/publications/journal/PDF/1990\\_42\\_01\\_00\\_strum.pdf](http://americanjewisharchives.org/publications/journal/PDF/1990_42_01_00_strum.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> For example, Gerhard Schlesinger was arrested in 1938 and sent to Buchenwald. He was released on the condition that he leave Germany but, because of the outbreak of the war in 1939 he and his wife, Charlotte, had to travel via the Soviet Union and Japan before reaching Panama in September 1940. As another example, Fred Kappel was residing in Berlin in 1938 when the Gestapo ordered him to leave Germany within a month. After going to Denmark, he obtained a visa for Panama and arrived there in December 1938. In Panama they had to take other kinds of work to support their families - they worked as butlers, labourers, and servants. In fact, one refugee served as a servant to the US governor of the Canal Zone. Once interned, most lost their jobs.

<sup>18</sup> [http://americanjewisharchives.org/publications/journal/PDF/1990\\_42\\_01\\_00\\_strum.pdf](http://americanjewisharchives.org/publications/journal/PDF/1990_42_01_00_strum.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Internees removed to the US would eventually go to Seagoville and "Camp Crystal" in Texas: <https://www.unive.it/media/allegato/dep/n9-2008/Saggi/Friedman-saggio.pdf>

Internees were placed in temporary tented accommodation at Camp Empire in Balboa in the Canal Zone, administered by the US Army, but conditions were said to be poor. Subsequently, the internees were removed by boat the Taboga, but with women and children detained separately in Balboa.

The first arrivals in detention were said to have gone two weeks without bathing and saw their Red Cross care packages plundered by US soldiers. Many of the internees were mature or older men from the white-collar professions, unaccustomed to hard physical labour, but they were nevertheless put to work clearing thick brush around the camp with machetes, enduring the intense midday heat. Working in their underwear, and swallowing salt tablets every half hour, with occasionally brutal guards, sickness, exhaustion, and ringworm were said to have been common.<sup>20</sup>

A report in the Chicago Daily News in January 1942 said that there were 185 Japanese held as civilian internees in a camp “somewhere in the Canal Zone”, within a larger camp with separate facilities for Germans and Italians. Meanwhile, outside the camp, it was said that a former private club housed 34 women and 47 children. 400 other enemy aliens were said to have been detained but then released after hearings, while a Nisei Japanese<sup>21</sup> from the Canal Zone had been transported to California. It was said in the article that the US intended to hold the internees until the Republic of Panama had built its own camp, and then all internees would be transferred to that facility, except for 15 who had been arrested inside the Canal Zone itself. Of course, the Panamanian Government built no

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The Crystal City internment camp in Texas has been described as a relief to those internees who had been held in camps in Latin America before being shipped north. Latin American camps and jails, including the US Army-administered Camp Empire at Balboa, were said to be far grimmer.

<sup>20</sup> One internee suffered a heart attack; another lost 50 lb (22.7 kg). Roaming police dogs are said to have attacked one internee and forced him up against the barbed-wire fence, lacerating him so badly he spent a week in the hospital.

<sup>21</sup> Nisei is a Japanese-language term used in countries in North America and South America to specify the ethnically Japanese children born in the new country to Japanese-born immigrants.

such facilities, and internees would either remain in Panama, in detention in the Canal Zone, or be deported to camps in the US.

The historian C Harvey Gardiner later wrote -

*“Denied communication with their families, unaccustomed to hard labour, resenting the unsavoury food and their inadequate shelter under intolerable weather conditions, the men understandably put forth no special effort. In return guards occasionally kicked, beat, or nicked with their bayonets some passive worker”.*<sup>22</sup>

Swiss diplomats, representing German interests, told the US State Department that each successive wave of German internees reported similar complaints to those which had been made on behalf of the Japanese, repeating their complaints in letters to family members in Germany.

The subsequent arrival of wounded men from Pearl Harbor at Gorgas Hospital in Panama City is said to have triggered a change of attitude among the Americans. One internee, Yoshitaro Amano (of whom there is more below) reported months of physically demanding manual labour such as digging latrines and picking up rocks, and even instances when soldiers hit and kicked internees. They were also interrogated, including by the FBI (Amano described his FBI interrogator as young, refined and polite).

After several months numbers of the Italians were released, but all the Japanese stayed in the camp, and were joined by others from other Latin American countries.

There was a policy for the removal of male internees to the US (they being seen as the greatest potential threat to the Canal Zone), leaving behind the “non-dangerous” women and children. The Panamanian internees were part of the first shipment sent to US

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2018/4/26/japanese-internment-panama/>

internment camps. These captives and other internees, primarily from Peru, arrived in New Orleans on 8 April 1942.

However, the removal of only males became a focus of anti-American propaganda and unrest in Panama, leading to allegations that the US was deliberately splitting up families and leaving the women and children without breadwinners to starve. As a consequence, from 1943, some women and children were permitted to join their men in family internment in the US<sup>23</sup>.

When, in April 1942, the interned Japanese were sent to internment camps in the US, Associated Press ran a photograph showing them being “evacuated” from the Canal Zone in a railroad car with blackened windows. They were sent by sea to New Orleans - fortunately the U-boat offensive in the Caribbean had yet got under way.

## THE JAPANESE

By 1941, the Japanese community in Panama numbered an estimated 400<sup>24</sup>. The *Chicago Tribune* stated in 1940 that Japanese made up a visible part of the population of Colón on the Atlantic coast and that some individuals even resided inside the Canal Zone<sup>25</sup>.

Japanese-owned businesses were common in Panama – for example, there were 47 Japanese-owned barber shops in Panama City and Colón (the cities at either end of the Canal) alone. In addition, the deep-sea fishing fleet was dominated by the Japanese, and further increased from 1938<sup>26</sup>. By the time of the war in Europe the Panamanian

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.unive.it/media/allegato/dep/n9-2008/Saggi/Friedman-saggio.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> In the book *Japan and Panama: the Role of the Panama Canal* (1993), it is said that Panama was the first part of Latin America to be visited by Japanese after their forced re-entry into contact with the outside world in 1853. The trans-isthmus railroad was the route chosen to cross the continent by the official Japanese mission to the US in 1860 (this being said to also be their first encounter with a railway): [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-349-13128-0\\_9](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-349-13128-0_9)

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2018/4/26/japanese-internment-panama/>

<sup>26</sup> In 1934, Japan had been pressing to have a refrigeration and processing plant on the island of Taboga, close to the Canals’ Pacific entrance. Counter-pressure to this proposal came from the US military, the then US Army Chief of Staff, General MacArthur, advising the Secretary for War that any use of Taboga or other

Government had already imposed a ban on Japanese boats fishing in Panamanian waters, as US-encouraged restrictions increased, and amid concerns over spying activity.

Much more than the Germans, the Japanese were seen as potential spies, saboteurs and a potential fifth column. Indeed, from 1935, Japanese espionage activity in Panama did increase<sup>27</sup>. I have written elsewhere about the real and imagined espionage threat posed by the Japanese in Panama<sup>28</sup>.

On 20 October 1941, Japanese businesses in the Republic of Panama were told that they had to close after 28 October, the Japanese Legation being told that the necessary licences would not be renewed, and an application for a 90-day delay was refused by the Panamanian cabinet. A total boycott of Japanese goods was then expected. The Japanese Legation considered that its nationals would have to travel to another country, even if only to find passage home to Japan – but noted that this would be difficult as Central and South American countries refused to grant travel permits to Japanese residents from Panama<sup>29</sup>. Hence, when the Pearl Harbor attack occurred there were many Japanese effectively trapped in Panama, unable to leave and earmarked for internment<sup>30</sup>.

In November 1941, Japan lodged an official complaint to Panama about the treatment of its nationals and interests, seeking compensation and asking that Panama arrange travel

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islands in Panama Bay should be denied to anyone other than nationals of the US or Panama. The President of Panama, Harmodio Arias Madrid (brother of President Arnulfo Arias Madrid) rejected the Japanese request.

<sup>27</sup> Not just in Panama, the first American tried in peacetime under the Espionage Act of World War 1 was a naval yeoman caught spying for Japan in San Diego in 1936. He sold engineering, gunnery, and tactical information about the Pacific Fleet that was mainly based in San Diego: <https://ncisahistory.org>

<sup>28</sup> <https://wordpress.com/post/raytodd.blog/40077>

<sup>29</sup> <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a617466.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> There had been a ship, the *Tatsuta Maru*, scheduled to dock at Balboa in late November and take away those Japanese who wished to leave the country. However, its scheduled departure from Balboa was 26 December, to arrive in Yokohama in January 1942. These dates being obviously after the date of the start of hostilities. Since July 1941, Japanese shipping was banned from using the Canal, so that any voyage would have been via Cape Horn or the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

of those affected to other South American countries<sup>31</sup>. The Panamanian cabinet rejected the complaints.

The Panamanian Government had agreed in 1941 that, following any action by the US to intern its Japanese residents, Panama would arrest any Japanese on Panamanian territory and transfer them for internment on the island of Taboga. All expenses and costs of internment and guarding would be paid by the US Government, which would also indemnify Panama against any claims that might arise as a result<sup>32</sup>. Mass arrests of Japanese in the Continental US had been ruled out in November 1941, but the sensitivity of the Canal Zone and Hawaii meant that these were considered different, and “temporary” mass arrests were thought likely<sup>33</sup>.

In 1944, the Japanese Government lodged a formal complaint about the treatment of Japanese detainees in Panama, saying that –

*“The Japanese who were handed over to the United States Army by the Authorities of Panama at the outbreak of the war were subjected to cruel treatment, being obliged to perform the work of transporting square timber, sharpening and repairing saws, digging holes in the ground for water closets, mixing gravel with cement and so forth. The internment Authorities let the Japanese dig a hole and then fill it again immediately, or let them load a truck with mud with their bare hands using no tools. Neither drinking water nor any rest was allowed. The Japanese who were exhausted and worn were beaten or kicked and all this lasted over a month”.*

and

*“One [detainee named] Ouchi was gravely ill when he was handed over to the American Authorities in Panama, but the Authorities gave him neither medical treatment, nor liquid nourishment which was all he could take. His wife requested*

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<sup>31</sup> <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a617466.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2018/4/26/japanese-internment-panama/>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

*that he be taken into Panama hospital but the request was not heeded, and he was sent on to Fort Sill in April 1942 together with other Japanese internees. As no nurse was provided at the new camp, his fellow internees looked after him, but no medical treatment having been given, he finally died on May 1”.*<sup>34</sup>

Grace Shimizu, daughter of a Japanese Peruvian detained in the Canal Zone camp (there is more on the tragic story of the Peruvian Japanese below), later shared the testimony of another internee about being put to work clearing the jungle around the camp -

*“One humid day the internees, many of whom were elderly, were told to dig a pit. He thought he was digging his own grave. When they were told to fill the pit with buckets of human waste from the guards' latrines, then the older men were so tired that they could not run fast enough to please the guards, they were poked and shoved by guards with bayonets”.*<sup>35</sup>

As already explained, in 1942, the interned Panamanian Japanese in the Canal Zone were deported to internment camps in the US (in total, around 2,000 Japanese were deported from Latin American for internment in the US). The Associated Press circulated a photograph depicting the removals with the caption claiming (based on undisclosed information) that one of the men was a “Japanese naval officer,” while two others were “Japanese Army reservists”.

After the Japanese held in the camps in the Canal Zone were evacuated to the US, the camps were reused to house Peruvian Japanese internees<sup>36</sup>, who had been detained and summarily deported (see below), with the first ship of civilian deportees leaving Callao,

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2018/4/26/japanese-internment-panama/>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> There had been Japanese immigrants in Peru since 1899, welcomed as labour in the expanding cotton and sugar plantations. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-31295270>

near Lima, in April 1942, also carrying German and Italian deportees<sup>37</sup>. Like the Panamanian Japanese, those from Peru would also be removed to the US.

A restricted War Department communication dated 14 October 1943 addressed the question of permitting some Japanese to remain in Panama. Although acknowledging the need for maximum use of all available manpower in the war effort (there had been a severe labour shortage in Panama, as defence sites' expansion was undertaken), it said that –

“No person of Japanese ancestry will be employed in a plant or facility important to the war effort” without approval from either the Japanese-American Joint Board (which had been established in the US) or the Army's Provost Marshall General (whose office was responsible for all aspects of law enforcement in the US Army)”.  
Likewise, it also said that no person of Japanese descent would be “permitted to attend or be employed by an educational institution important to the war effort” without similar approval<sup>38</sup>.

Likewise, it also said that no person of Japanese descent would be “permitted to attend or be employed by an educational institution important to the war effort” without similar approval<sup>38</sup>.

Despite the coordinated round-up in 1941, in 1945, US intelligence officers arrested a Japanese man, Jakuji Ochy, who had lived for 15 years in the remoteness of the Darien province that bordered Colombia. He had there a large family and a thriving lumber business, as well as a fleet of shrimp boats. He was said to be connected to the Japanese royal family as well as being a colonel in Japanese military intelligence, and was found to have operated a radio station on the top of a hill, Cerro Pirre, for passing on details of US activity in Panama<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> In May 1940, about 600 Japanese homes and businesses in Lima and Callao were attacked and looted. Despite such tensions most Japanese Peruvians were, by this time, deeply rooted in Peru, and the 1940 census reported 17,598 Japanese immigrants and 8,790 Peruvians citizens of Japanese descent, at least 40% of whom were women and children:  
<https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1186&context=twl>

<sup>38</sup> <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3672&context=etd>

<sup>39</sup> *Security and Defense of the Panama Canal 1903-2000* by Charles Morris, Panama Canal Commission:  
<https://original-ufdc.uflib.ufl.edu/AA00047733/00001/6j>

## YOSHITARO AMANO, CANAL ZONE RESIDENT AND PRISONER 203<sup>40</sup>

Probably the best-known Japanese internee in Panama was Yoshitaro Amano. He kept a diary and wrote a book about his experiences in 1943<sup>41</sup>, and his story has been used to illustrate the treatment of Japanese Latin Americans<sup>42</sup>.

He had been born in 1898 in Ojika, Akita, Japan. He graduated from Akita Industrial High School's division of mechanics, and attended Kurumae College of Industry, leaving shortly before graduation, working as a ship engineer, and honing the entrepreneurial skills that would later finance his Latin American business ventures.

By 1930, he had established the Amano Trading Company, an import/export venture located in Panama City. He also helped organise the Ikawa Trading Company based in Japan expressly for the shipment of manufactured goods to Panama and Peru, and he travelled regularly between Panama and Peru. As his businesses flourished, he built a small business empire that also included a ranch in Chile, a lumber business in Bolivia, a quinine farm in Ecuador and two department stores called *Casa Japonesa* in Panama. He also established the Pacific Fishing Company based in Puente Arenas, Costa Rica and had a tuna clipper, the *Amano Maru*, commissioned from a shipbuilder in Japan in 1933.

The latter boat was the subject of a pair of sensationalist books in 1939 called *Secret Agents Against America* and *Secret Armies: The New Technique of Nazi Warfare*. These contained allegations that Amano was a secret agent who had been arrested in Colombia

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.discovernikkei.org/es/journal/2010/7/7/yoshitaro-amano/?fbclid=IwAR3LPqimW160GZrdsgmrsRwnza1yvWC78w4ctgYfyCuGnAF107Fep1CpAhl#.WKTKNak9DL E.facebook>

<sup>41</sup> *Waga Toraware No Ki* ("The Journal of my Incarceration"): <http://www.discovernikkei.org/es/journal/2010/7/7/yoshitaro-amano/?fbclid=IwAR3LPqimW160GZrdsgmrsRwnza1yvWC78w4ctgYfyCuGnAF107Fep1CpAhl#.WKTKNak9DL E.facebook>

<sup>42</sup> In June 2022, the story of "*El Prisionero 203*" was told in a presentation at the Museo del Canal in Panama City. A 44-minute radio documentary telling Amano's story (with English subtitles) is available on YouTube: <https://www.indomables.org/episodios/el-prisionero-203>

and imprisoned in Nicaragua following an espionage charge by an unspecified country but he “was enough of a Chilean millionaire to talk his way out of a Nicaraguan jail”. The book also speculated how the *Amano Maru* could be used to transport mines (or, alternatively, that it was equipped to detect and locate mines).

On 7 December 1941, 15 armed Panamanian policemen burst into one of his properties, which served as a dormitory for the department store employees. Two of the several dozen workers present were women: the manager’s wife and a governess/housekeeper. The police loaded everyone, which include two women - women: the manager’s wife and a governess/housekeeper - some wearing only their underwear, into police vans and thoroughly searched the building for Amano. He actually turned himself in to Police Headquarters, and said that he had telephoned a colleague to call off the search for him and then walked with him to the jail, a block away.

Amano was one of about 100 men taken to Balboa Harbour and thence to the island of Taboga. The men would not know where the women were being detained until the following April. On Taboga there was a makeshift camp of unassembled tents, with boxes of canned goods piled in an open field, and no latrines. Barbed wire surrounded the area, and soldiers patrolled with machine guns. US soldiers had the prisoners set up 20 tents and placed eight cots in each tent. Within a few days, Italian and German prisoners also arrived.

In April 1942, he was placed on a ship called the *Florida*, where Germans and Italians were already on board. After a number of prisoners fell ill from being confined in a carbon monoxide-filled hold, they were allowed on deck to revive under the surveillance of soldiers with bayonets stationed at 10-foot intervals. The ship left Cristóbal Harbour to Limón Bay where it picked up another 50 Germans, who had been detained by the Costa Rican Government. It then picked up 20 more Germans in Guatemala before reaching New Orleans.

## THE ECKHARDT FAMILY STORY<sup>43</sup>

Another example of the effects of the internments in Panama is provided by the experience of the Eckhardt family.

Albert Eckardt had emigrated from Germany to the US, arriving at Ellis Island in 1894. He became a naturalised US citizen and lived in Brooklyn. Working on ships, he eventually found himself in Panama, where he met his wife, Ruth Jankwitz. They lived in Limón, then a rather remote village area that adjoined Lake Gatun in Panama, the lake being the largest part of the Panama Canal. The village was a place with dirt roads, and muddy roads when it rained. The couple's children went to the nearby town of Gatun by boat for schooling, and Gatun was where they did most of the family's shopping. Meanwhile, Albert Eckardt was employed dredging channels in Gatun Lake, but he died in 1938.

On 16 June 1942, the family was summoned to Panama City and subsequently arrested. Mrs Eckhardt was allowed to go back for a few belongings before being turned over to the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and interned in Balboa.

The family was subsequently removed to the US, to be interned with thousands of German Americans, and ending up in the Crystal City camp in Texas. In Spring 1944, the two children were placed in the Lutheran Orphan's and Old Folks Home in Toledo, Ohio.

Mrs Eckhardt and the children never returned to Panama.

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<sup>43</sup> <https://gaic.info/eckardt-story/>

## THE LATIN AMERICAN INTERNMENT PROGRAM FOR ENEMY ALIENS<sup>44</sup>

As well as seeing its own enemy aliens detained, Panama also played a part as a transit point for those interned in, and deported from, their homes in other Latin American states (including the Peruvian Japanese, see below).

During World War 2, the US had three separate programmes for the identification, detention and repatriation of civilians, such as enemy aliens, considered a potential threat. Of these the best-known is probably that which resulted in the harsh treatment of people of Japanese descent in the US, and their wholesale removal from the West Coast. The least-known is probably that of the State Department's Special War Problems Division in Latin America.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the US Government, hoping to use Japanese Latin Americans as exchange prisoners for US prisoners of war, collaborated with Peru and other Central and South American countries to round them up and ship them to the US. In fact, during the war only an estimated 550 Latin American Japanese were sent to Japan in exchange for US prisoners. However, when the war was over another 900 more were deported to Japan, even though they did not want to go. Neither the administration of President Roosevelt nor later administrations provided an official explanation for the removals and internments<sup>45</sup>.

In the US, the Alien Enemy Act of 1798 provided that, in the event of war, all enemy aliens over 14 years of age within the US could be "apprehended, restrained, secured, and removed", following a Presidential proclamation. The US Government relied on this

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<sup>44</sup> <https://gaic.info/history/the-world-war-ii-latin-american-internment-program/>

<sup>45</sup> *Justice Held Hostage: US Disregard for International Law in the World War II Internment of Japanese Peruvians - A Case Study* by Natsu Taylor Saito (Boston College Third World Law Journal, Vol.19, September 1998): <https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1186&context=twlj>

authority in holding Japanese Latin Americans<sup>46</sup>, although its application to those foreign nationals brought to the US by the Government was questionable.<sup>47</sup>

While the internment of genuine enemy aliens who were known or suspected sympathisers was understandable, the State Department Program also resulted, with US connivance, arrangements and financial support, in thousands of innocent civilians who were legal residents in Central and South American states, as well as the Caribbean, being interned and housed in detention centres, without legal hearings or recourse – in conditions that varied, but were often poor. Some of the detention centres were run by the US military, or were funded by the US. In some places prisons were utilised, while others countries used hotels (usually where those interned had money or influence). However, in the case of Ecuador those involved were simply asked to move away from the coast<sup>48</sup>, and Chile did not intern any of its roughly 1,000 Japanese.<sup>49</sup>

According to a 1998 law review article by Natsu Taylor Saito<sup>50</sup>, a professor of law at Georgia State College of Law, the US had proposed to repatriate all Axis officials who were in Latin America in early 1942 — but Peru was to take this plan a step further by also compiling lists of civilians it wished to expel (for reasons explained below).<sup>51</sup>

The motivation for the US program are said to have been –

- national and hemispheric security concerns;
- economic rivalry over Latin American markets; and
- gathering captives for potential barter for Americans held by the Axis states.

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<sup>46</sup> Only in 2022 was the first full record of all US-based Japanese-Americans completed:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/oct/11/japanese-americans-incarceration-second-world-war>

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Britain would adopt a similar policy for “low-risk” categories of Germans.

<sup>49</sup> [https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Japanese\\_Latin\\_Americans/](https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Japanese_Latin_Americans/)

<sup>50</sup> <https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1186&context=twlj>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/12/05/japanese-latinos-us-war-hostages-history-523711>

The programmes had been preceded by secret schemes run by the FBI in the US and the intelligence services in Latin America during the 1930s, supposedly to identify potential Nazi and other threats.<sup>52</sup>

US officials were instructed to pressure countries to arrest and intern their Axis nationals. In a more overt move, at a conference of countries from the Americas in Rio de Janeiro in January 1942<sup>53</sup>, at the insistence of the US, an Emergency Advisory Committee for Political Defense was set up to monitor what were termed “enemy aliens” in Latin America, with registration, surveillance and various restrictions to be imposed<sup>54</sup> – in the same way as in the US. At this time, some – but not all – Latin American states had severed ties with the Axis countries and/or entered the war on the side of the Allies.

To give some sense of the impact of Japanese communities in some Latin American states, one can take Brazil as an illustration. According to a 1940 census, Brazil had some 250,000 of Japanese residents, and many were critical to the country’s agricultural economy. Consequently, it opted for “monitoring” rather than internment, but also banned use of the Japanese language and texts. However, in July 1943, the government relocated approximately 4,000 Japanese from the coastal region of Santos-São Paulo area, and others from the northern coastal state of Pará were relocated inland to Tomé-Açu in the state<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> A State Department document of February 1941 labelled many German groups in Latin America as subversive and claimed that they were “indispensable media for the operation of the Nazi system” and that “...virtually all the *Reichsdeutschen* (Germans born in Germany): *The Shadow War: German Espionage and United States Counterespionage in Latin America during World War II* by Leslie B Rout Jr and John F Bratzel (University Publications of America Inc)

<https://gaic.info/history/the-world-war-ii-latin-american-internment-program/>

<sup>53</sup> The Third Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the American Republics, which also saw an agreement to break off diplomatic relations with the Axis – although Chile did not do so until 1943. Chile feared a Japanese attack and did not break relations with Japan until 1943, and did not intern its Japanese population of approximately 1,000: [https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Japanese\\_Latin\\_Americans/](https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Japanese_Latin_Americans/)

<sup>54</sup> Such as registration, increasing surveillance, limiting internal travel, and forbidding aliens to have guns and transmitters, (though radios without transmitting capacities were also seized). In addition, naturalisation processes were slowed or stopped, and cancellation of citizenship should any naturalised citizen exhibit support for the Axis powers.

<sup>55</sup> [https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Japanese\\_Latin\\_Americans/](https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Japanese_Latin_Americans/)

18 Central and South American and Caribbean states accepted US funds<sup>56</sup> to implement and subsidise detention and deportation programs<sup>57</sup>. 13 Latin American countries — Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and Peru — are said to have cooperated with the US by apprehending, detaining and deporting to the US a total of 2,264 Japanese Latin American citizens and permanent residents of Japanese ancestry, being held in internment camps run by the INS<sup>58</sup> in the US. Most of these internees - approximately 1,800 - came from Peru (whose government's attitude was perhaps the most hostile). An additional 250 were from Panama, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.

Although originally only males were deported to the US, from November 1942, a new recommendation was that whole families should be deported. This followed situations, such as in Panama, where wives and children left behind found themselves impoverished and a source of anti-American propaganda and resentment. However, other injustices also existed, such as when refugees produced documents to show that they had been in concentration camps or had otherwise been persecuted, it was not considered proof of innocence<sup>59</sup>. Altogether, 81 Jews from Latin America were interned in the US during World War 2.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> The US agreed to pay for transportation and detention and promised to include nationals of the participating countries in any exchanges made with Axis governments:  
<https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1186&context=twlj>

<sup>57</sup> Notably, Argentina, being more pro-fascist, allowed its German community to remain largely unaffected. It did not intern the approximately 6,000 Japanese there.

<sup>58</sup> Immigration and Naturalization Service, then part of the Department of Justice.

<sup>59</sup> It is reported that 81 Jews were noted to have been brought to the US from Latin America (*Undue Process: the Untold Story of American's German Alien Internees* by Arnold Krammer; Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc, 1997).

<sup>60</sup> *Jewish Internees in the American South 1942-1945* by Harvey Strum (American Jewish Archives Journal), 1990: [http://americanjewisharchives.org/publications/journal/PDF/1990\\_42\\_01\\_00\\_strum.pdf](http://americanjewisharchives.org/publications/journal/PDF/1990_42_01_00_strum.pdf)  
They would have remained in internment until the end of the war, but the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the National Refugee Service learned of their plight and pleaded their case to American military and civilian authorities. By the middle of 1943, the US Government reclassified most of the 28 American Jewish Archives Jews as internees-at-large who could live outside the camps for the duration.

While there were obvious and genuine security concerns that could justify the internment and deportations, as already touched upon, security concerns were not the only driver. Both for the US, to remove potential commercial or economic rivals, and for the Latin American states involved, it could be quite convenient to remove or acquire business interests that those interned had owned or controlled. For example, as already mentioned, in Panama in the 1930s the offshore fishing industry had been largely dominated by the Japanese<sup>61</sup>. However, in many cases in Latin America, US companies and interests stepped in to fill gaps.

In 1945, delegates to the Mexico City Conference on the Problems of War and Peace agreed that "any person whose deportation was necessary for reasons of security of the continent" should be prevented from "further residing in this hemisphere if such residence should be prejudicial to the future security or welfare of the Americas". This was followed by the US Presidential Proclamation in September that authorised the removal from the Western Hemisphere of enemy aliens "who are within the territory of the United States without admission under the immigration laws".<sup>62</sup>

The September 1945 proclamation by President Truman authorised the (forced) repatriation of "dangerous" alien enemies deported to the US during the war. Those who had been deported to the US, including the around 1,800 Peruvian Japanese<sup>63</sup>, who were now to be treated as illegal aliens. However, there were some internees who managed to win court cases against the US Government, which was embarrassing for it, as was the

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<sup>61</sup> And it was not just the peoples of the Axis states that were affected by restrictions imposed during the war. In 1941, under President Arias, businesses of Chinese residents who were not naturalised were detained. Many Chinese married transferred their businesses to their wives or children who were Panamanian nationals: <https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/book/chinese-panam%C3%A1-also-have-story-tell%E2%80%A6>

<sup>62</sup> [https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Japanese\\_Latin\\_Americans/](https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Japanese_Latin_Americans/)

<sup>63</sup> There were also substantial numbers from Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Venezuela: [http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Japanese\\_Latin\\_Americans/](http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Japanese_Latin_Americans/)

fierce criticism of the judge in one particular case<sup>64</sup>. Furthermore, some Latin American states wanted their German residents (or at least some of them) back.

It would be September 1947, over two years after the end of the war, that the last of the Latin American German internees were ordered to be released.

## THE PERUVIAN JAPANESE

Also interned in Panama were Japanese from Peru<sup>65</sup>. This was despite Peru not declaring war on Japan until 1945<sup>66</sup>. The anti-Japanese movement had begun during the 1930s Depression as a movement to “Peruvianize” the country, and this had included the establishment of quotas requiring that 80% of any work force be native Peruvian; the suspension of naturalisations and the annulment of birth registrations of Japanese Peruvians<sup>67</sup>. President Prado had also frozen all assets held by those with Japanese citizenship and prohibited the assembly of more than three people of Japanese descent.

Originally migrating to Peru in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as farm labourers, rural contract labourers eventually leased land or moved to the cities, where they became household servants, accumulated some capital and many eventually opened barber shops, grocery stores, restaurants and other commercial ventures. However, their success generated resentment that was intensified by the Depression of the 1930s. The official programme to 'Peruvianize' economic activity was in fact aimed principally at eliminating Japanese interests and enterprises.

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<sup>64</sup> For example, Helmuth Sapper, who had been removed from Guatemala, won his case in December 1945: <https://gaic.info/sapper-story/>

<sup>65</sup> Immigration from Japan had risen throughout Latin America after the US prohibited Japanese immigration in 1924. However, in 1936, Peru had prohibited Japanese immigration (the US had banned Japanese immigration in 1924). Ill-feeling resulted in a three-day race riot targeting Japanese Peruvian individuals, homes and businesses in May 1940: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-31295270>

<sup>66</sup> The Peruvian Government severed diplomatic relations with Japan in January 1942, but did not declare war until 1945 when Allied victory was imminent.

<sup>67</sup> <https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1186&context=twlj>

The US Embassy in Lima reported that by the early 1940s Japanese entrepreneurs controlled large percentages of the barber shops, bakeries, poultry farms, machine shops and glass dealers in the country. They made most of the buses in Lima, were "prominent" in the manufacture of rubber products, hosiery and hats, and were known as the best plumbers, carpenters and florists and produced 12.5% of Peru's cotton.<sup>68</sup>

Having briefly considered developing an internment program of its own, the Peruvian Government took advantage of the US State Department program mentioned above to rid the country of unwanted, but innocent, residents of Japanese origin. While proposing in early 1942 that all Axis government officials from the Latin American republics be repatriated through the US, it did ignore Peru's request at the time to also take "Axis non-official women and children and men not of military age or known to have engaged in subversive activities".<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, Peruvian police arrested Japanese men without warning, often in pre-dawn raids on their homes. In many cases the men were given no time to gather personal items or notify their families and were generally held in local jails, then turned over to US authorities. No charges were filed and no hearings held.<sup>70</sup>

The first ship of 141 Japanese male civilian deportees left Callao<sup>71</sup>, near Lima, in April 1942, aboard the *Etolin*, it also carrying German and Italian deportees<sup>72</sup>. Nearly all of the

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<sup>68</sup> *Justice Held Hostage: US Disregard for International Law in the World War II Internment of Japanese Peruvians - A Case Study* by Natsu Taylor Saito (Boston College Third World Law Journal, Vol.19, September 1998): <https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1186&context=twlj>

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ironically, the port where, in 1899, the *Sakura Maru* had brought the first 790 Japanese immigrants to Peru. Peru then then welcomed Japanese labour, especially for its expanding cotton and sugar plantations. By 1923, when the labour contracts were abolished, emigration companies had brought 17,764 Japanese workers to Peru and the following years saw Japanese workers continue to migrate independently.

<sup>72</sup> In May 1940, about 600 Japanese homes and businesses in Lima and Callao were attacked and looted. Despite such tensions most Japanese Peruvians were, by this time, deeply rooted in Peru, and the 1940 census reported 17,598 Japanese immigrants and 8,790 Peruvians citizens of Japanese descent, at least 40%

deportees were either unmarried or had spouses in Japan and only one was a Peruvian citizen. The ship picked up additional Japanese deportees from Colombia before heading for San Francisco. Only a few of these deported had been on a FBI "Proclaimed List" of suspects. It is said that the Japanese on this first trip likely believed that they had signed up for repatriation to Japan, not for internment in the US.

Subsequent trips were made by three other ships, these taking the Japanese Peruvians to Panama. The last ship transporting Japanese Peruvians landed in New Orleans on 21 October 1944.<sup>73</sup> This final transport carried twice as many women and children as adult men, a stark contrast first group in April 1942. These "voluntary internees", as the women were called, had hoped to reunite with their families in the US. Some of these had seen "volunteering" to be repatriated to Japan because conditions had become so difficult in Peru.<sup>74</sup>

When the deportees disembarked in New Orleans, members of the US military led them off the ship at gunpoint and forced the internees to strip naked and be sprayed with the insecticide DDT (now classified as a carcinogen), before taking by train to detention camps in Texas<sup>75</sup>.

Like the Panama-based Japanese before them, it is said that these new occupants spent several days or months in confinement, and when in Panama were forced to work without pay to clear jungle and construct living quarters amid the heat and the pouring rains<sup>76</sup>.

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of whom were women and children:

<https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1186&context=twl>

<sup>73</sup><https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1186&context=twl>

<sup>74</sup> *Justice Held Hostage: US Disregard for International Law in the World War II Internment of Japanese Peruvians - A Case Study* by Natsu Taylor Saito (Boston College Third World Law Journal, Vol.19, September 1998): <https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1186&context=twl>

<sup>75</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/12/05/japanese-latinos-us-war-hostages-history-523711>

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

Many who were Japanese citizens had lived in Peru for decades, some for over 40 years, and a number had wives and children who were Peruvian citizens. In 1943, President Prado sought US help in permanently removing all Peruvians of Japanese descent. Indeed, In July 1942, the US Ambassador told Washington that President Manuel Prado remained “very much interested [in] the possibility of getting rid of the Japanese in Peru”, and asked about “additional shipping facilities from the United States”.<sup>77</sup>

After the war, only around 80 of the more than 900 individuals detained in Texas (this being around half of the Japanese from Peru interned in the US) were allowed back to Peru<sup>78</sup>.

On arrival in the US the internees were informed by INS officials that their entry into the US was "illegal", and thus their detention was necessary. This sleight of hand foreshadowed the problems that the internees would face both at the end of the war and much later when applying for reparations under the Civil Liberties Act of 1988<sup>79</sup>. They were being held by the INS, under Justice Department jurisdiction, rather than by the War Relocation Authority (WRA) that had been established to oversee the incarceration of Japanese Americans.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Many more relocated to war torn Japan, where many had to restart their lives in a land and speaking a language that was foreign to them. However, lawyers in the US won a court order blocking the removal of 364 Japanese Peruvians, then secured temporary permission for them to remain as labourers in Texas. Peru would only countenance the return of those with Peruvian citizenship: <https://www.pri.org/stories/2018-10-01/us-imprisoned-japanese-peruvians-texas-then-said-they-entered-illegally>

<sup>79</sup> *Justice Held Hostage: US Disregard for International Law in the World War II Internment of Japanese Peruvians - A Case Study* by Natsu Taylor Saito (Boston College Third World Law Journal, Vol.19, September 1998): <https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1186&context=twlj>  
In 1988, the Civil Liberties Act awarded US citizens and permanent residents who were of Japanese origin \$20,000 each, together with a formal apology. However, those from Latin America were not eligible for this compensation scheme. They later received some compensation through a court settlement in 1998, but the sum was so much lower (\$5,000) and the apology seen as being so formulaic that some decided not to accept.

<sup>80</sup> *Justice Held Hostage: US Disregard for International Law in the World War II Internment of Japanese Peruvians - A Case Study* by Natsu Taylor Saito (Boston College Third World Law Journal, Vol.19, September 1998): <https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1186&context=twlj>

By January 1943, the Department of Justice could no longer ignore the fact that the US was interning people who neither posed a security threat nor, as Peruvian citizens, were even enemy aliens. A July 1943 report noted that conditions in most of the camps were significantly worse than those at a US prisoner of war camp in Europe.<sup>81</sup> Japanese Latin Americans had lodged complaints with the Spanish Embassy in the US, the designated "protecting power" for the Japanese<sup>82</sup>.

Many of the Japanese deported, via Panama, from Peru could not return and a number ended up in a defeated, impoverished Japan – despite not knowing the country or perhaps even able to speak the language<sup>83</sup>. It is said that many Japanese tried to return to Peru, only to have their attempts rejected by Peru and, between November 1945 and June 1946, more than 900 were deported from the US to war-torn Japan, but about 300 individuals remained to fight their case in the US<sup>84</sup>.

It has been asked why did the US go to so much trouble and expense to detain, transport and incarcerate nearly 2,000 Japanese Peruvians when these were known to be of no danger to hemispheric security?<sup>85</sup> It has been suggested that –

- US officials may have thought that catering to anti-Japanese sentiment was an easy way to obtain Peru's cooperation in the war effort; and
- US authorities wanted to have Japanese Latin American civilians in their possession and control not because these civilians posed any threat but because the US

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Many of the requests, especially later in the war, concerned the reunification of families, as the US Justice Department had originally sent males and females to different camps, although Crystal City in Texas was known as the "family internment camp" and in 1948, was the last of the camps to close.

<sup>83</sup> It is claimed that, of the Latin American Japanese deported to the US, only around 100 were able to return to Latin America, whereas around 900 were sent to postwar Japan:

<http://www.campaignforjusticejla.org/history/>

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/12/05/japanese-latinos-us-war-hostages-history-523711>

<sup>85</sup> In the early days of the war the Japanese Government has made a proposal to exchange non-officials "without limit as to their number and without question of their usefulness for the prosecution of the war":  
<https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1186&context=twlj>

wanted hostages to barter for American citizens held in Japanese-occupied territories.<sup>86</sup>

Despite not actually declaring war until 1945, President Prado nevertheless fostered a lucrative wartime relationship with the US. Peru secured US loans to finance its first steel processing plant during World War 2, and was among the leading recipients of Lend-Lease aid in South America. In exchange, Peru permitted the US to operate an air base at Talara, a strategic location and the westernmost city in all of mainland South America.<sup>87</sup>

Postwar, Peru refused to accept responsibility for its participation in the deportation-internment program and, in fact, it continued to prohibit Japanese immigration well into the 1950s. The first few Japanese Peruvians to return in November 1945 faced a hostile environment and, as we have seen, no more than 80 of those deported were able and willing to return and only those with Peruvian citizenship were permitted to enter - being those who were born in Peru (the Nisei), naturalised citizens and those who were married to Peruvians.<sup>88</sup>

## **POSTSCRIPT: INTERNMENT OF A SHIP AND ITALIAN ENTERTAINERS**

The *Conte Biancamano*<sup>89</sup> was a 23,225-ton luxury liner that had set out in 1940 on a voyage from Genoa, with calls planned for Naples, Panama, Valparaiso and Panama again. She was docked at Cristobal in December 1941, seized by the US and subsequently

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<sup>86</sup> *Justice Held Hostage: US Disregard for International Law in the World War II Internment of Japanese Peruvians - A Case Study* by Natsu Taylor Saito (Boston College Third World Law Journal, Vol.19, September 1998): <https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1186&context=twlj>

<sup>87</sup> One of the "advance bases" intended to assist in protecting the Pacific approaches to the Panama Canal.

<sup>88</sup> *Justice Held Hostage: US Disregard for International Law in the World War II Internment of Japanese Peruvians - A Case Study* by Natsu Taylor Saito (Boston College Third World Law Journal, Vol.19, September 1998): <https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1186&context=twlj>

<sup>89</sup> Launched in Glasgow in 1925, she carried 180 passengers in first class, 220 in second class, 390 in economic class and 2,660 in third class.

converted in Philadelphia into a troop transport, accommodating up to 7,000 men, and commissioned into the US Navy in March 1942 as USS *Hermitage* (AP-54)<sup>90</sup>.

The ship had already been impounded in the Canal Zone by the Neutrality Patrol, and the crew were confined on board for 18 months before the crew (sources say they numbered around 500) were transferred to Ellis Island in New York in early 1941. The Italian crew joined a large group of German seamen, as well as a group of Italian Pavilion employees from the 1939 New York World's Fair. In all, nearly 1,700 Axis non-combatants were confined on Ellis Island, this in a country not yet at war<sup>91</sup>.

Eventually about 100 entertainers from the ship ended up in an internment camp in Missoula, Montana, where they put on shows such as operas and comedies about once a week<sup>92</sup>.

Ray Todd

Panama City

Republic of Panama

13 November 2022

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<sup>90</sup> In 1947, the ship was returned to Italy and underwent a refit and modernisation in Italy in 1948<sup>90</sup>, continuing to serve until broken up in 1960:

<https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/danfs/AP/ap54.html> <https://www.italianliners.com/contenuto/la-biancamano-en>

<sup>91</sup> <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2001/spring/mail-censorship-in-world-war-two-1.html>

<sup>92</sup> <https://digitalcommons.pace.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1207&context=pilr>