

Japan-bashing has familiar ring to it

IN CASE YOU haven't noticed, World War II is on again. It's running right alongside us, fifty grooves over in its 50-years-ago parallel time slot.

We plugged into the war last Dec. 7 on the 50th anniversary of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, and it looks like we'll be linked together for the duration — which is, for us, until September 1995.

It's going to be a long war. For a historian, this parallel-time reliving of World War II is both exciting and troubling. On the positive side, the various television specials and news magazine features on the war are a great assistance when discussing the period with my students. Like it or not, they have all had glimpses of the war's early years as they flick around the television dial, and those glimpses can be the beginning of a discussion about the war.

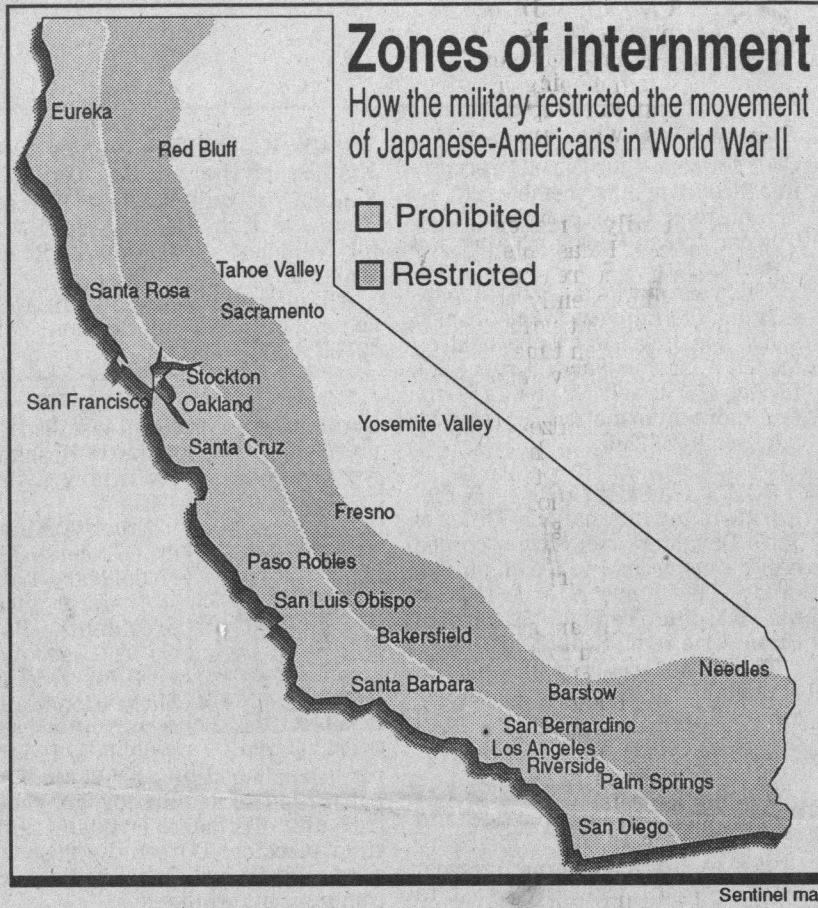
WHAT is troublesome, however, is the anti-Japanese sentiment that has crept into our contemporary consciousness. Against the backdrop of our economic troubles, the racial insults that helped mobilize the country in 1942 have a distinctively familiar — and unwelcome ring. American corporate leaders, bigots, and simple-minded shade-tree economists are mining the World War II Mother Lode of anti-Japanese rhetoric to find epithets to hurl across the Pacific at Japan. With the Russian beastly prostrate and dismembered (their athletes don't even have an anthem to sing at the Winter Olympics) the Japanese are now No. 1 on the Hate Parade. Even Saddam Hussein's position of Universal Villain has fallen to the Japanese.

Japan-bashing is everywhere — from the ritual destruction of a Japanese automobile with sledge hammers, to the thinly-veiled anti-Japanese racism flying around on the AM radio air waves (Rush Limbaugh and Ronn Owens are beginning to sound a lot alike) — everyone has an opinion about Japan and it is overwhelmingly negative. Just like 1942.

Let me tell you what happened when the anti-Japanese stuff got out of hand 50 years ago. I think there's something much more instructive there than just ready-made racial slurs.

THERE WERE ABOUT 1,300 people of Japanese ancestry living in Santa Cruz County in 1940, and the majority of them were America-born. They were United States citizens. Many of the older immigrant Japanese would have liked to have been American citizens, but they were prohibited from becoming naturalized citizens. (The prohibition was finally lifted in 1952.)

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Japanese Association hosted a dinner for local officials, and the association's president, Tommy Kadotani, vowed the Japanese community's support in the war effort. Mr. Motoki of Watsonville's Japanese Association issued a similar statement.

During January and early February, 1942, all enemy aliens came under the scrutiny of the United States Army, which had responsibility for the defense of California's coast. German, Italian and Japanese aliens were required to register with the government, and in February, the Army announced its plan to move all enemy aliens living between Laguna Creek north of Santa Cruz and the Carmel River on the south to the inland side of Highway 1.

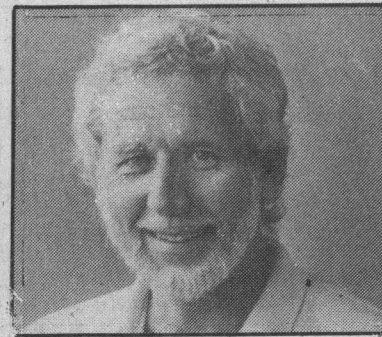
Rumors of sabotage and spying by the local Japanese community ran rampant. Investigations by both the state Attorney General's office (lead by Earl Warren) and the FBI turned up nothing. No evidence of anything. This lead Warren to conclude (a conclusion he would later regret and apologize for) that since there was no evidence, control was being exerted somewhere. Put simply, Warren

ON the other hand, J. Edgar Hoover suggested that the FBI could find disloyal Japanese (were there any) and remove them individually. In February the FBI began to pluck individual Japanese from their homes in Santa Cruz and Watsonville, including Tommy Kadotani and George Nakamura. Nakamura had a collection of fireworks in his home, a fact which proved, at least to local officials, that he was planning to guide a Japanese attack into Santa Cruz.

(No charges were ever filed, nor were any of the Japanese removed from Santa Cruz or Monterey counties ever convicted of anything.)

The cry for removal of all Japanese residents, regardless of whether they were American citizens or aliens, steadily increased. Organizations including the California League of Cities (unanimous), the California Native Sons of the Golden West (unanimous), and the Santa Cruz chapter of the Native Sons (unanimous), voted to publicly support Japanese removal. The Santa Cruz Sentinel-News editorialized that, because of their "diabolical efficiency" the Japanese should be moved off the coast. The newspaper also noted that the

Hindsight



Sandy Lydon

BY the end of February 1942, all Italian, German and Japanese aliens had moved inland of Highway 1, and for a time, the Italian fishermen were not able to get at their boats. (For an excellent analysis of the impact of this period on the local Italian community, see Geoffrey Dunn's article in the February 1992 issue of Santa Cruz Magazine.)

President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on Feb. 19. The order gave the Army the right to remove "any and all persons" from the California coast, and in March, 1942 a map was issued that showed the "Prohibited Zone." By this time the Army was ready to remove all persons of Japanese ancestry from the coast, and by the end of April, all the Japanese residents of Santa Cruz County were gone.

Taking the longer view, the events of Spring 1942 were the culmination of cultural misunderstanding and fear going back to the 1890s. And, once again, it is fear (this time economic) and misunderstanding which have put the Japanese in the spotlight again.

I agree with recent comments by Japanese officials about Americans not working very hard, but not in the context of the workplace. Americans are much too lazy when it comes to the mental effort necessary to understand other cultures, particularly those originating in Asia. It is so much easier to use the broadest brush and not make the effort to distinguish between Japanese citizens, American citizens of Japanese ancestry, or other immigrants from Asia. The attack on a Korean business owner up at the summit last December is a perfect example of the blind, hate-all-people-who-look-Japanese temper of the times.

FIFTY years ago the United States failed its cultural understanding and tolerance test. Unable and unwilling to make the ef-

fort to seek out disloyal individuals within the Japanese community, we tossed the entire community out into prisons in the desert.

Today's California, with its Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Burmese, Chinese, Lao, Thai and Hmong communities (all of whom are represented in Santa Cruz County's 1990 census) requires that we all work harder at knowing and understanding each other. Broad brushes aren't useful in California any more.

The combined Japanese-American Citizens League chapters of the Monterey Bay Region will be holding a Day of Remembrance commemorating the signing of Executive Order 9066 at 1 p.m. Feb. 3 at the Salinas Rodeo grounds, the site of the preliminary assembly center which housed the Japanese communities in the spring and early summer of 1942.

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Most of the Japanese in this county were involved in agriculture, living in the Pajaro Valley, the Soquel Valley, and up the North Coast. In the scary days following Dec. 7, the Japanese community quickly and publicly expressed its loyalty to the United States. On Dec. 8, the Santa Cruz

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